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The naval battles of Roger of Lauria

John H. Pryor

Roger of Lauria's family was exiled from the kingdom of Sicily by Charles I of Anjou for its support of the Hohenstaufen cause but in the service of Aragon he became the most feared and renowned warrior of his generation. His six great naval victories during the War of the Sicilian Vespers closely determined the outcome of that struggle.

Lauria's fame has been diminished by the minor place awarded to the War of the Vespers by modern medievalists and by its overshadowing by the Hundred Years War. But in fact it was an extremely important war in medieval history, witnessing the decline of the papacy and the kingdom of Sicily and the rise for a brief time of a new power in the Mediterranean: Aragon. Moreover, it was in this war that medieval warfare first began to acquire attributes characteristic of the later middle ages: supremacy of archers and infantry over mounted and mailed knights, appearance of disciplined and professional companies of mercenaries led by professional war leaders, and decline from chivalric warfare into nationalistic hatred and ferocity.

Lauria's success lay in the superior qualities of his crews and in his own genius. Handling galley fleets successfully required mastery of the difficult nexus between land and sea for Mediterranean galley warfare was more amphibious than naval in the modern sense of the word. Lauria proved to be the greatest master of the science in the middle ages; a war leader deserving to be ranked with Richard Coeur de Lion, the Black Prince, and Nelson.

Malta: 8 July 1283

Shortly after midnight on 8 July 1283 an Aragonese-Sicilian fleet of some twenty galleys under the command of Admiral Roger of Lauria moved onto station off the entrance to the Grand Harbour of Malta. Inside the heads, beached beneath the town and the Castle of the Sea, lay its prey: a Provençal fleet of about the same size under the command of William Cornut and Bartholomew Bonvin in the service of Charles I of Anjou, king of Sicily. Once inside the harbour mouth, Lauria bridled his galleys together with their oars lashed across from one to another so as to form an impenetrable line abreast across the exit from the harbour. Then, at dawn, or slightly before, he ordered his trumpeters to sound the challenge. Wakened from their sleep, the Provençals, whose guard boats had been silenced and who were taken by surprise, rushed to their galleys. Once launched they moved out in a disorganized fashion to give battle. The fight raged all morning, first at a distance with Lauria's Catalan crossbowmen making wide swathes among the Provençals massed on their galleys' prows, and then later in close hand-to-hand fighting when Lauria ordered his crews to cut the bridles and close.

By midday the battle was over. Bonvin had broken through the Aragonese line and fled with a number of galleys. Cornut was dead, killed by Lauria in single combat when in desperation he had boarded the Aragonese admiral's flagship. Over half the Provençal fleet had been captured. The prisoners would be sent to Messina to labour in the royal arsenal. Later those who had not been ransomed would be repatriated after their right hands had been amputated. The



Figure 1. Late thirteenth-century Catalan galley. Painting on wood from a church in the province of Teruel, Aragon.

career of arguably the greatest naval genius of the middle ages had taken its brilliant first step.

From 1283 until his death in 1305 Roger of Lauria was to be the victor of six successive major fleet engagements and of countless minor skirmishes both by land and sea across the reaches of the Mediterranean from the coast of Spain to the Tyrrhenian Sea, the Gulf of Gabes, and the Aegean. Only on one occasion, when on land and hopelessly outnumbered, was he ever bested. He became the foremost professional war leader of his generation, feared and respected by friend and enemy alike. His reputation for military, and particularly naval, prowess and noble conduct earned him honourable roles in tales of *The Decameron*. Yet amongst modern historians of the middle ages Lauria is little known. His fame, rather than being in the order of that of Richard Coeur de Lion or the Black Prince, is less than that of minor company leaders of the Hundred Years War or condottieri of later medieval Italy. Two possible reasons suggest themselves to explain this.

Firstly, the War of the Vespers, in which Lauria's career was played out, has been overshadowed by the subsequent Hundred Years War. In the fourteenth century the main stage of history moved to Atlantic Europe and the War of the Vespers is consequently often seen as the last struggle of Mediterranean powers who were soon to lose their importance: the papacy, the kingdom of Sicily or Regno, and Aragon. Apart from historians in Italy and Catalonia, and with one or two notable exceptions such as Stephen Runciman and Daniel Waley (Runciman 1958; Waley 1975), modern historians have underestimated the importance of the War of the Vespers in medieval history and have consequently overlooked those who fought in it. Secondly, the War of the Vespers at sea was fought between galley fleets and there has often been an implicit, if not explicit, belief that galley warfare required little skill by comparison to naval warfare under sail. Too often it has been assumed that all one had to do was to close with the enemy and board, at which point galley warfare simply became an ex-

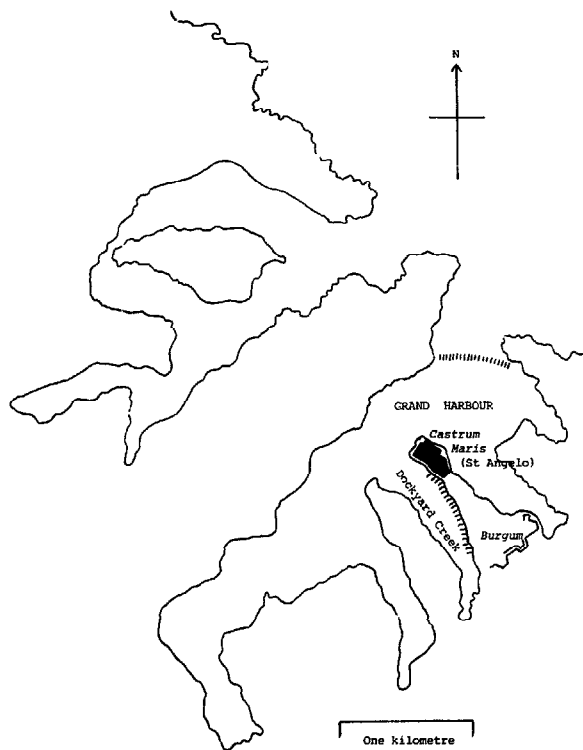


Figure 2. Malta: 8 July 1283.

tension of land warfare. The timely appearance of Guilmartin's classic study of galley warfare in the early modern period has done something to dispel this belief (Guilmartin

1974) but a major study of a similar kind for the medieval period before the appearance of firearms is still urgently needed. This article attempts to demonstrate the com-

plexities of handling galley fleets in war and the many skills that were demanded of admirals. In doing so it analyses Roger of Lauria's mastery of the science of galley warfare and justifies his claim to fame as the greatest fighting admiral of the middle ages.

Roger of Lauria was born to an illustrious south Italian family, named for its ancestral castle in Calabria, which supported the cause of the Hohenstaufen against the papally-backed Charles of Anjou in the struggle for the throne of Sicily. When Manfred's daughter Constance was betrothed to the Infante Peter of Aragon, Roger accompanied his mother, one of her ladies, into exile as a child. He grew up in Peter's court. When the revolt of the Sicilian Vespers broke out against Charles's rule in Sicily in April 1282 and Peter, now King Peter III of Aragon, intervened, the situation was made for Italian exiles at his court such as Lauria and his great friend Conrad Lancia. Peter's fleet sailed from Catalonia in June 1282, ostensibly for a crusade against North Africa but, as all the world knew, actually to intervene in Sicily. The exiles' moment had come. But strangely enough neither Roger of Lauria nor Conrad Lancia seem to have held commands in the fleet at this time. Strangely, because both had been prominent in Aragonese naval and diplomatic service prior to 1282. Peter III succeeded to the throne in 1276 and amongst his first naval appointments were commands for the two young exiles who had graced his court as infante. Conrad Lancia was in fact the first admiral appointed by him after his accession (Carini 1884:3). Some time before 1279 he was in charge of a squadron of four galleys which defeated a larger Muslim force off the coast of Tunisia and in 1279 he

was in command of a squadron of ten galleys which installed Ibrahim Abu Ishak on the throne of Tunis (Muntaner 1920: 49-52, 74-9). In October 1278 Roger of Lauria was made provisional governor of Valencia and in 1279 he was sent on a diplomatic mission to Tunis. In the same year he is found in command of a ship trading at Tlemcen (Dufourcq 1966:245). Although Muntaner says that Lauria was aboard Peter's fleet when it sailed in 1282, in all probability he was not. The admiralty was given to Peter's illegitimate son James Perez with Raymond de Cortada and Peter de Queralt as vice admirals. Raymond Marquet and Berengar Mallol also held commands (Muntaner 1920:115; Manfroni 1902:80). And, according to a diploma of the vicar of Aragon of 7 August 1282, Lauria was deputed at that time to visit the fortresses of the kingdom of Valencia. He could not have gone to Sicily before that time and Conrad Lancia was also still in Catalonia when the fleet sailed (Manfroni 1902:80, referring to Visalli 1900:439 n.2, not available to me). The series of chronicles of the group of the *Rebellamentu di Sicilia*, which report Lauria in command of the Aragonese fleet both before its arrival in Sicily and during the struggle up to the taking of Messina on 2 October 1282, and which report Lauria's fame as an admiral, are all undoubtedly anachronistic in this matter (Sicardi 1917 (*Lu rebellamentu*): 19 and 27-9; (*Liber Jani de Procida*): 57 and 62; (*Leggenda di meser Gianni di Procida*): 72 and 77; (*Capitoli della cronica fiorentina*):88-90; (*Capitoli del 'Tesoro' di Brunetto Latini*): 115-16 and 123-4; (*Capitoli della 'Nuova cronica' di Giovanni Villani*): 137-40).

Lauria arrived in Sicily some time before

5 October 1282 because on that day Peter wrote to the populace of Augusta announcing his appointment as captain of the town and ordering obedience to him. He also wrote to the treasurer of the *Terra Auguste* ordering payment of Lauria's expenses as captain (Silvestri 1882:nos. 42 and 43). In late December 1282 Lauria appeared amongst the witnesses to the terms of the duel between champions of the two kings arranged at that time (Rymer 1745:213-15). It is clear that in the latter part of 1282 and early in 1283 Lauria was one of Peter's trusted administrators and confidants but what exactly he did during this period to warrant his appointment on 20 April 1283 to replace James Perez as admiral is unknown (La Mantia 1918:no. 222 gives a text of Lauria's appointment). Perez himself probably aroused Peter's lack of confidence in him by allowing one of the Aragonese attacks on Angevin forces to run out of control. In January 1283 a body of almugavars was ferried by the fleet under Perez across the Straits of Messina to attack forces of the count of Alençon in the naval arsenal at Catona on the outskirts of Reggio (Silvestri 1882:no. 395). The attack was highly successful, the count's forces being taken by surprise at night and slaughtered and he himself being butchered in his bedchamber. Exactly why the operation displeased Peter is unclear. The sources are ambiguous. But perhaps Peter's confidence in Perez was shaken by the fact that he allowed the pursuit to run out of hand and was unable to control the almugavars, who cut the count down after his bodyguard had offered his surrender (Speciale 1727:col 937; Muntaner 1920:153-7). In any event, he was relieved of his command in April. But even

then Lauria seems to have been anything but an obvious choice for the post. It is true that after the occupation of Reggio on 13 February he had been sent with the count of Paglacia to take possession of the town (Neocastro 1921:c. 59), but in the war at sea others, including Conrad Lancia and Peter de Queralt, had been more prominent up to that point. By the time of Lauria's appointment the Aragonese and Sicilian fleet had already achieved mastery of the seas around Sicily and Charles's numerically powerful south Italian fleets were in disarray. In early October 1282 the Angevin fleet under the Genoese admiral Henry de Mari had retreated from Messina at the approach of James Perez. Then on 11 and 14 October Peter de Queralt had twice defeated the Angevins off Reggio and Nicotera, capturing considerable numbers of galleys from them and from their Pisan allies (La Mantia 1918:no. 22). During the winter of 1282-3 the Aragonese-Sicilian fleet had roamed at will while the Angevins lay quiescent in the ports of Calabria and Campania. Obviously the latter already had serious problems with the quality of their crews. Charles's surviving correspondence from the winter of 1282-3 records feverish attempts to gather from the Regno what on paper were enormous numbers of ships and crews, although how many of these ever actually materialized is subject to serious doubt. It was obviously lack of confidence in the quality of the fleets of the Regno which induced him to prepare a Provençal fleet as his main battle fleet. Preparations had begun as early as October 1282 and they continued until the arrival of the fleet of eighteen galleys, nine barques, and a *panfilus*, under the command of Bartholomew Bonvin, at Naples on 21 March

1283 (Minieri Riccio 1876:95, 99-100, 273; Boiard 1926:nos. 1122, 1123 and 1125; Mazzoleni 1939:nos. 117, 133, 137-9, 141, 182, 378, 451-2, 512, 514, 517, 519, 521-4, 531-2 and 629-30).

Malta had been in Angevin hands since 1268 but after the revolt of the Vespers the populace had followed the Sicilian lead and had gone over to the Aragonese. Angevin rule was rarely popular anywhere. By December 1282 the Angevin garrison was besieged in the Castle of the Sea, the *Castrum maris*, in the Grand Harbour. Now, Malta was critical to the Aragonese logistical position because in Angevin hands it would have presented a serious threat to Peter III's supply and communications networks (Luttrell 1975:43). He had therefore appointed Manfred Lancia as captain of Malta and sent him to complete the subjugation of the island. With Charles I absent in Provence, his son, Charles of Salerno decided to send the Provençal fleet to relieve Malta. Lauria learnt of its mission and pursued it with the main Aragonese-Sicilian battle fleet of about twenty galleys westward from Messina along the north coast of Sicily and then south and east back along the south coast of the island, reaching Malta only a couple of days after the arrival of the Provençal fleet. Muntaner, who was an eyewitness but who was writing in extreme old age over forty years after the events, and who for that reason is often unreliable, says that Lauria intercepted three Provençal galleys scouting for the Aragonese-Sicilian fleet in the Boca del Faro at the northern entrance to the Straits of Messina. From then he learned of the passage of the Provençal fleet to Malta and then, according to Muntaner, cruised down the east coast of Sicily to intercept it at Malta (Muntaner

1920:188). Since Lauria's fleet controlled the Straits of Messina and since the Provençal mission was to relieve Malta without drawing his attention, it is most unlikely that Bonvin and Cornut took their fleet through the straits against the notorious current and under the noses of his fleet and watchers at Messina. Neocastro and Desclot both declare specifically that they sailed from Nicotera through the Lipari Islands along the north coast of Sicily past Palermo, Trapani, and Marsala, obviously in an attempt to elude the Aragonese-Sicilian fleet. But as it happened their route was discovered in any case. Possibly Muntaner is right and Bonvin and Cornut did send the three scouting galleys to watch over the Boca del Faro while the main fleet made its dash from Nicotera to Lipari and Lauria did get his information from capturing them. But more probably, as Neocastro reports, its passage was spotted by watchers at Ustica who then reported to Lauria at Messina (Neocastro 1921 :c. 76 and also Desclot 1934 :c. 40). The size of Lauria's fleet is variously reported by the chronicles at from eighteen to twenty-seven galleys. However, Desclot, Muntaner, Jacopod'Oria and Niccolò Speciale are all agreed on from eighteen to twenty-two galleys. Confirmation of a figure of about twenty galleys is found in Lauria's accounts of his administration of the Aragonese fleet from April to September 1283, which list twenty-two galleys, four *ligna*, one *tarida*, and one *vassellus* in his service (La Mantia 1918:no. 222).

The various sources are in disagreement about the preliminaries to the battle. What is clear, however, is that Lauria arrived at Gozo at night unobserved and succeeded in making contact with Manfred Lancia, who was besieging the Angevin garrison in the

Castle of the Sea from the town, the *burgum*, and who was himself under attack from crews of the Provençal fleet beached below the walls of the castle and the town, probably in the arm of the harbour known today as Dockyard Creek. Lauria contacted Lancia either through a local fisherman or more probably by sending a small barque into the harbour to reconnoitre. This boat was able to avoid the Provençal guard patrol at the harbour mouth and to report back that the enemy fleet was beached. Some time after midnight Lauria then moved his galleys into line abreast across the harbour mouth, silencing the guard patrol boats in the process, and then bridled his line together into battle formation. Shortly before dawn he ordered his trumpeters to sound the challenge. All the chronicles are agreed that this action of deliberately waking an enemy taken by surprise in his sleep called for some explanation. Mutaner writes (1920:191; see also Speciale 1727:c.26):

And then the admiral did a thing which should be counted to him more for madness than for sense; he said, God forbid that he should attack them in their sleep, rather did he wish the trumpets and makers to be sounded in the galleys to wake them up, and he would let them prepare. He did not wish that any man could say to him that he would not have defeated them if he had not found them asleep. And all cried: "The admiral says well." And this the admiral did more especially as it was his first battle since he had been made admiral, and thus he wished to show his boldness and the prowess of the worthy people with him.

Without casting unnecessary aspersions on Lauria's courage and chivalry, other motives also suggest themselves. Lauria's subsequent career shows that he rarely did anything without thinking it through and he was certainly not averse to attacking enemies caught off guard in their sleep. A glance at

Figure 2 will indicate just how difficult it would have been for him to manoeuvre his fleet into position to attack in the narrow confines of Dockyard Creek. He would almost certainly have been despatched doing so and would have lost his advantage of surprise in any case. Moreover, the Provençal galleys would have been beached stern-to-the-shore in a close line along the beach. The two steering oars by which all thirteenth-century galleys, and also sailing ships, were manoeuvred were pivoted at a *luctatorium* to allow them to be raised from the water when being beached.¹ Galleys were always beached stern first.

To attack a fleet beached in such a way was extremely difficult since fleet actions normally resolved themselves eventually into hand-to-hand combat between marines attempting to board opposing ships across the forecastles and beaks, *calcares*. Fleets with their sterns to the beach had all the advantages. As we shall see later when discussing the battle of Cape Orlando, Niccolo Speciale affirms that fleets in such defensive positions were virtually unassailable. In the heat of battle they could more easily transfer soldiers from one galley to another to reinforce depleted numbers. Individual galleys could be reinforced from the land and could alternately move out to attack and then retire if under pressure. Fleets attacking from the sea, on the other hand, unless they had a marked superiority in numbers allowing them to hold a squadron in reserve to reinforce galleys in the front line, were largely compelled to leave each galley to fight virtually as a self-contained unit. Defending fleets with the beaches at their backs could be more easily managed as integral forces. This consideration was

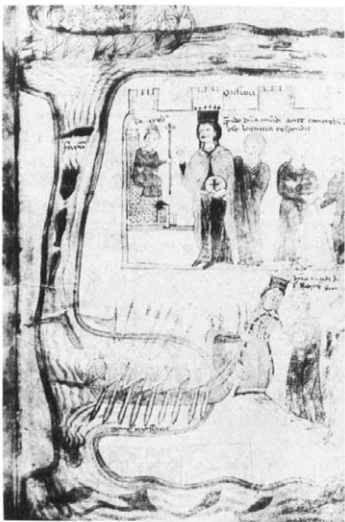


Figure 3. Late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century Sicilian galley beached stern to the shore with its embarkation ramp lowered to permit the empress Constance to land at Messina.

merely a particular application of the general rule of Mediterranean galley warfare that it was not naval warfare in the modern sense but rather amphibious warfare, in which skilful use of coastal geography and the nexus of the fleet to the land was equally important as mastery of the sea itself (Guilmartin 1974:57, 76). Consequently, both at Malta and later at Naples, Lauria had good reason when he deliberately lured his enemies out to sea where they would not have such an advantage. At Cape Orlando

the position would be reversed and there Lauria would use his beached position to great advantage against a suicidal attack from the sea.

He also had other very good motives for his apparently chivalrous act. Before fleets attempted to grapple and board it was normal to engage in artillery duels for some time in attempts to clear the enemies' decks of a major part of their marine forces. Now, the archers in the Aragonese-Sicilian fleet were all Catalan crossbowmen. After appointing Lauria as admiral, Peter had specified that in the composition of the crews there should be one Sicilian and one Catalan boatswain, four Sicilian and four Catalan helmsmen, and equal numbers of Sicilian and Catalan sailors. However, the oarsmen were all to be Sicilian and the crossbowmen all Catalan (Muntaner 1920:173). By the late thirteenth century Catalan crossbowmen had acquired a fearsome reputation equal to, if not greater than, that of the famed Genoese. With reference to both the battle of Malta and also to a later battle between a Catalan fleet under Raymond Marquet and Berengar Malloj and a French one under William Lodève, Muntaner made much of the professional ability of the specialized Catalan crossbowmen (Muntaner 1920:192 and 330). Trained in the art since childhood, they knew, we are told, how to make crossbows and bolts from scratch. They carried portable tool boxes for maintenance of their weapons and kept up their skills through the practice that having no other tasks assigned to them permitted them. In Aragonese fleets they were enlisted as professional archers. In other fleets, however, it was considered that mastering the crossbow was a comparatively

simple matter requiring neither long training nor incessant practice (Guilmartin 1974: 141) and it was common practice to use oarsmen doubling as archers. These were known as *tersols*. At the time of the War of the Vespers, the most common type of galley in service with all the Mediterranean powers shipped two oars with two separate oarsmen per rowing bench (Bragadin 1955:39; Manfredi 1899:452-3; Rodgers 1939:110-11; Anderson 1976:52-4). But for extra speed a third oar manned by a *tersol* could be shipped on each bench. In his *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis super Terrae Sanctae recuperatione* Marino Sanudo Torsello recommends the use of *tersols*,² but Muntaner twice declares that the advantages which they gave in terms of speed were far outweighed by those that were given by professional crossbowmen in battle. The course of events justifies his opinion. Except in a small number of a fleet's galleys, perhaps one in ten to be used for fast reconnoitering, *tersols* should not be used and the enlisted crossbowmen should not be used for rowing except temporarily to rest exhausted oarsmen, he declares (Muntaner 1920:192 and 330-1. Compare Jal 1848:739 and 1444-5).

Muntaner's description of the swathes cut through the massed ranks of knights and marines on board the Provençal galleys by the Catalan crossbowmen can well be believed. Assuming that Lauria was fully conscious of the superior quality of the firepower which his archers would be able to direct against the Provençals, who were not especially regarded for their skill with the weapon and who almost certainly used *tersols* as archers, his decision to lure them out away from the beaches and into open water where they could not take refuge



Figure 4. Late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century Sicilian galley showing the organization of two oarsmen with separate oars per rowing bench. The empress Constance carried by galley from Salerno to Messina.

from the hail of crossbow bolts made very good sense.

Finally, Lauria had one further motive. A large component of the marines aboard the Provençal fleet were French and Provençal mailed knights. Muntaner refers to the bolts of the Catalans being able to penetrate breastplates and to a hundred "men of rank" who had joined the Provençal fleet from the garrison of the Castle of the Sea. In all Lauria's subsequent battles against the

Angevins and the French, the core of the enemy marines was armoured knights. To oppose them, when it finally came to hand-to-hand combat, Lauria had mainly almugavars. These were non-nobles, foot soldiers descended from frontier fighters on the Christian-Muslim frontiers of Aragon and Castile. They had a reputation for ferocity, did not wear armour, and carried as weapons only two javelins, a lance, and a dagger. These weapons they could wield to great effect but their main advantage over most of the opponents they met lay in their great agility and speed of reflexes (Muntaner 1920:27 n. 1; Hillgarth 1975:10-11). On the rolling and pitching decks of galleys their superiority over armoured knights was to be demonstrated over and over again. Because of their lack of armour and heavy weapons, their footing must have been much surer at sea than that of mailed knights. Had Lauria attacked the Provençal fleet while it was still beached, or had he attacked its camp, his almugavars' superior agility and speed would have been somewhat negated by the armour and swords of the knights. At sea, even if only in the middle of Malta's Grand Harbour, the armoured knights so lost their footing and balance through wave motion that the advantage given by the almugavars' agility, speed, and sure footing was greatly increased. Since they were unarmoured, however, they had little protection from the missiles and arrows of the Provençals during the first phase of the battle and Lauria therefore kept them under cover until the enemy began to exhaust his ammunition (Desclot 1934:c.41; Manfroni 1902:92). At this juncture, when the Catalan crossbows had already decimated the Provençal ranks, the javelins of the almugavars

completed the slaughter as Lauria's fleet closed in. The last phase of hand-to-hand fighting seems to have been over very quickly (Muntaner 1920:192-3; Speciale 1727.col.942; Neocastro 1921:c.76).

Roger of Lauria handled his fleet brilliantly at Malta, maximizing its strengths and minimizing its weaknesses, out-thinking and outmanoeuvring Bonvin and Cornut, who played into his hands. The battle was really won before it was ever engaged. Once the Provençals had committed themselves to battle they were trapped and had to fight it out with an enemy whose missile fire power and marine forces had superior qualities to their own. They could not retreat back to the land because the castle had been stripped of its defenders to reinforce the fleet and Manfred Lancia's Aragonese and Maltese forces must have controlled the shore. Nor could they break through to the open sea and flee before the final phase of the battle because Lauria's bridled line of galleys formed an impenetrable line across the harbour mouth. This tactic, which may originally have been a Genoese innovation of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, had become common by the time of the War of the Vespers. Cables, *frenella*, were passed from bow to bow and stern to stern of adjacent galleys and then the oars were reversed and the looms passed across from one to the other and lashed fast (Manfroni 1899:475; Manfroni 1902:92; Rodgers 1939:116; Jal 1848:720-1; Muntaner 1920:330; Sanudo 1611:84). Bridled together in such a fashion, the galleys formed not so much a floating platform, for each galley could move independently with the waves, as rather an impenetrable floating barrier which pre-

vented the enemy breaking the line at any point. This tactic would normally be used when adopting a defensive position or when trying to prevent the escape of an enemy, as at Malta. After the artillery phase of the battle was over and either one of the opposing fleets moved in to grapple, or else one attempted to flee and the other to pursue, the cables were cut loose and the oars freed. At Malta, when Lauria saw that the condition of the Provençal fleet had been sufficiently weakened, he ordered the cables cut and his galleys to move in individually to grapple (Desclot 1934:c. 41; Manfroni 1902: 92). Once that had happened, of course, it became possible for the Provençal galleys to break Lauria's line and at least some of them under Bartholomew Bonvin did so and escaped. The sources differ in the numbers which they say escaped in this way, from Muntaner's one to the continuator of Saba Malaspina's fifteen. In all probability about half the Provençal fleet broke through and fled.

Nevertheless, Lauria's victory was a very great one. He had killed one of the Provençal admirals in hand-to-hand combat and Charles I's prized battle fleet was *hors de combat*. Peter III could add about ten captured galleys to his fleet and Lauria's own losses were undoubtedly light. His accounts for the administration of the fleet from April to September 1283 contain a reference to the enrolment of 288 sailors to replace crews lost at the battle of Malta (La Mantia 1918:no.222). This probably represents a loss rate of less than ten per cent, which is remarkably low for galley warfare in the Mediterranean in the middle ages. On 26 August 1283 Peter wrote to Lauria in the most fullsome tones expressing his

gratitude for the victory and his confidence in him (Silvestri 1882:no. 739).

The Gulf of Naples: 5 June 1284

Negotiations between the two antagonists in the war led to the outmodedly chivalric and not-very-serious decision to submit the claims of the rival kings to the judgement of God in a duel between them and a hundred champions each, to be held at Bordeaux on 1 June 1283. The duel never took place but the arrangement did have the positive result of removing the two kings from the Mediterranean battle ground for the best part of 1283 and 1284. Charles of Anjou left the conduct of the Angevin cause in the hands of his son Charles of Salerno, the future Charles II, whom he appointed regent. Peter left Sicily in the hands of his wife Constance and foreshadowed that in the event of his death his second son James would inherit Sicily while Aragon would go to his eldest son Alfonso. Charles was not to return to Italy until 8 June 1284 and Peter would never return. He would die in Aragon in 1285 shortly after a heroic and successful defence of his kingdom against Philip III's French crusaders; of which more later.

After the abortive duel at Bordeaux, Charles I journeyed to Provence to raise more troops and another fleet for his cause. Meanwhile, acting under his instructions, his son Charles of Salerno was feverishly engaged in collecting and equipping further forces in south Italy, particularly naval forces. Surviving documents from the Angevin archives testify to attempts to amass fleets of very great size. Repeated orders to officials concerning the same detachments also testify to difficulties in trans-

lating desires into reality. But even if a considerable proportion of the forces referred to in the Angevin archives remained merely paper forces, Charles and his son had nevertheless succeeded by the spring of 1284 in creating fleets large enough to have outnumbered Lauria's small Aragonese-Sicilian fleet by several times, had they been allowed to combine. Apart from some ninety-five to one hundred and five galleys from Venice, Genoa, and Florence which Charles of Salerno tried to obtain in accordance with negotiations opened with those cities by his father and few of which, if any, were probably ever supplied, Charles and his father certainly built or obtained thirty-four galleys in Provence, sixty-eight galleys and about fifty *taride*, oared transports, in Apulia and the Abruzzi, thirty galleys at Naples and perhaps up to thirty at Gaeta, and an indeterminate number of some dozens of galleys and transports in Calabria, the Basilicata, the Terra di Lavoro, and the Capitanata (Minieri Riccio 1876:277, 278, 282, 283, 286, 291, 296, 297, 304, 309, 500, 504, 507, 509, 510, 514; Minieri Riccio 1882:207-8; Mazzoleni 1939:nos. 630, 654, 656-9, 664, 666). Even if a good proportion of the crews of the ships from the Regno were not really combat ready and even if none of them were battle hardened, nevertheless, had they been allowed to combine with the new Provençal fleet, Roger of Lauria's small fleet would have been hopelessly outnumbered. No matter how great Lauria's genius, the Angevins would have controlled the seas. Anxiety on this score in the Aragonese camp is clearly reflected in the sources. During the spring of 1284 Lauria and the queen regent were feverishly engaged in repairing and arming as many galleys as

they could lay their hands on in Sicily (Muntaner 1920:277; Desclot 1934:c.48; Manfroni 1902:95). Lauria also wrote to Peter in Aragon asking him to arm a further ten galleys for Sicily as a matter of urgency (Carini 1884:71).

The obvious Aragonese strategy was to destroy either the Provençal fleet or the Neapolitan fleet before the two could join together or before either or both of them could be joined by the large Apulian fleet. The fleet which Lauria led north from Messina in late May 1284 is variously numbered at from eleven to forty galleys plus some supporting transports and small craft. Most probably the figure of twenty-nine galleys given by the usually reliable Jacopo d'Oria in his Genoese annals is about right (Auria 1929:59-60). It also accords with the figures of about twenty galleys at Malta plus the ten or so captured there. As at Malta, Lauria's main problem was to lure his enemy out to fight, but in this case the problem was greater since he could not attack at all if the Neapolitan fleet remained in its haven at Naples. Moreover, Charles of Salerno had orders from his father to keep the Neapolitan fleet in port (William of Nangis 1649:543; Giachetto Malaspina 1726:cols. 1040-1) and his advisor, the papal legate Cardinal Gerard, was constantly exhorting him to do so (Milioli 1903:c.1304; Ptolemy of Lucca 1727a:col. 1189; Memoriale 1726:col. 1157; Speciale 1727:col.943; Malaspina 1792:406; Villani 1857:149). Lauria had to attempt to draw Charles of Salerno out and destroy the Neapolitan fleet, the weakest of the three main Angevin forces, and at the same time to maintain a position whereby, if the Neapolitan fleet did not come out,

he could still intercept the tougher Provençal fleet under Charles I as it came down from the north and hope to destroy it instead. His strategic task was by no means easy.

He cruised up the coast of Calabria and the Principato as far as Salerno, landing periodically to ravage, burn, and install almugavar garrisons in some places; his purpose clearly being to alarm the populace and government of the Regno in the hope that Charles of Salerno would be pressured by them into bringing the Neapolitan fleet out to remove the menace to terrestrial security posed by Lauria's fleet. From Salerno on we are given an indication of

Lauria's movements only by the chronicles of Bernard Desclot and the continuator of Saba Malaspina. In the afternoon of 3 June he seems to have rounded Point Campanella and headed for Capri where he passed the night (Desclot 1934:c.51). On 4 June he moved into the Gulf of Naples and demonstrated before Baia, west of Naples, hoping to draw Charles of Salerno out. But in this he was unsuccessful. Desclot reports that his prior plan, in the event of this very thing happening, had been to withdraw out to sea in the evening as if to make for Sicily but then to double back after dark to Ponza to lie in wait for Charles I as the Provençal fleet passed through the channel between the island and the mainland (1934:c.51). Accordingly, the fleet did stand out to sea for

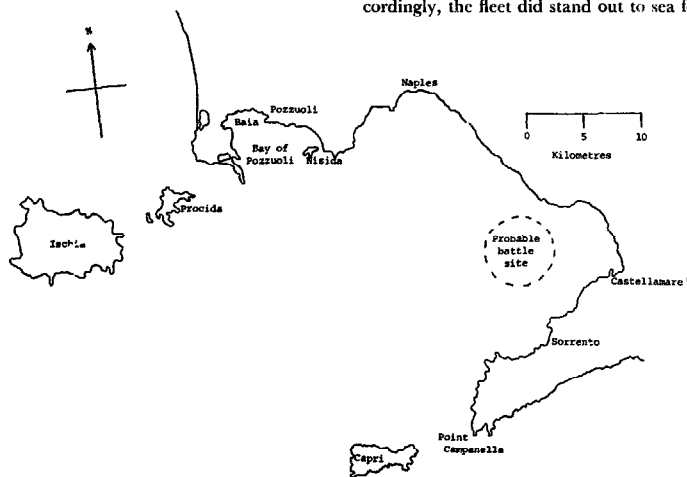


Figure 5. The Gulf of Naples: 5 June 1284.

Sicily on the evening of the fourth but at a council of captains it was decided to make a further attempt to lure Charles of Salerno out. During the night the Aragonese fleet moved back to Nisida in the Bay of Pozzuoli and then across the Gulf of Naples to Castellamare, where Lauria left some of his galleys sheltered from Neapolitan sight behind a headland. During this night voyage he succeeded in intercepting near Nisida two of Charles I's Provençal galleys bearing news of Charles's imminent arrival and renewed orders to Charles of Salerno to stay in port (Desclot 1934:c.52; Malaspina 1792:404). Lauria seems to have had good purpose in moving across the bay to Castellamare by night before returning to Naples at dawn. Assuming that he had thought through his plan of battle in advance, and everything about his career and the conduct of the subsequent battle suggests that that assumption is more than reasonable, then his purpose was twofold. After taking his fleet across to Castellamare, he left some ten galleys there protected from Neapolitan sight. In the morning he returned to Naples with the rising sun at his back shielding any movement of his reserve squadron at Castellamare. In the event of battle being offered, he intended to feign flight back to Castellamare, luring the Angevins sufficiently far away from their base to make retreat to it out of the question, and then, when they were irrevocably committed to battle, to bring out the reserve squadron and turn to give battle with the sun at his back and in the Angevins' eyes (Desclot 1934:c.52). Manoeuvring to put the sun behind one's back and in the enemy's eyes was a favourite tactic. The Genoese used it to good effect in their victories over the Pisans at Meloria in

1284 and over the Venetians at Curzola in 1298 (Sanudo 1611:129).

As the battle eventuated these tactics were brilliantly successful. Exactly why Charles of Salerno chose to ignore Cardinal Gerard's exhortations and his father's earlier instructions is unclear. The Neapolitan crews, we are told, were extremely reluctant and were eventually persuaded to man the galleys only by Charles's personal example (Desclot 1934:c.52). The continuator of Saba Malaspina attributes his action to the urging of James of Burson, vice-admiral of the Regno and count of Acerra (1792:405). Albert Milioli, followed by the *Memoriale potestatum regensium*, merely puts it down to Charles's self-confidence and bellicose nature (Milioli 1903:c.304; *Memoriale* 1726:col. 1157). Ferretto Vicentino adds the ardour of youth to the list (Vicentino 1726:col. 955). He also, no doubt, had a burning desire to prove himself both to his father and also to the inhabitants of the Regno and may have been deceived into believing that he had a superiority of numbers. The lowest figure given by any of the chroniclers for the Angevin fleet is twenty-eight galleys and this figure accords well with that of the thirty which he had been constructing at Naples.

Details of the battle are highly obscure because of the conflicting nature of the chronicles. All that is clear is that once Charles of Salerno brought his fleet out, Lauria did feign flight back towards Castellamare. He turned to fight only when the Angevins were sufficiently far from the haven of Naples to be irrevocably committed. Neocastro and Muntaner make this point specifically and the continuator of Saba Malaspina and the anonymous author of the

Kitab tasrif 'al 'ayam say that the battle was engaged at four and three miles from the land respectively (Muntaner 1920:279; Neocastro 1921:c.76; Malaspina 1792:406; Anonymous 1880:457). The Gulf of Naples is about twenty-five kilometres across from Naples to Castellamare and Sorrento is some twelve kilometres out along the Point Campanella peninsula. Reconstruction places the battle about seven kilometres offshore from Sorrento on a line between Naples and Sorrento.

The three most detailed chronicles of the battle, those of Neocastro, Desclot, and Speciale, all indicate that Lauria was somehow able to surround the Angevin fleet. Now, since he had left about a third of his fleet concealed in reserve at Castellamare, he could not easily have done so without bringing it into play. Desclot says that when he turned to engage he had a front line of twenty galleys with the others in the rear (1934:c.53). This is consistent with a tactical manoeuvre in which the concealed squadron at Castellamare came out to form a rear line at the same time as Lauria's front line turned into a battle front in line abreast. Because of the rising sun behind them and Lauria's front line, which Muntaner and Desclot say was either bridled or in close array, screening them, this reserve squadron was probably not described by the Angevins until it was too late. Neocastro reports that Lauria suddenly surrounded the Angevins (*ponens eas in circuito repentino*) while Speciale says that he attacked the enemy from right and left (*Sicilorum clasia a dextris atque sinistris vallata hostibus impugnatur*) (Neocastro 1921:c.77; Speciale 1727:c.27).

Mediterranean galleys of the middle ages were designed and built to fight from the

prow. Their basic hull structure consisted of a raked beak (*calcar*) at the prow, projecting from a forecastle, with a sterncastle or poop at the stern and the rowing benches amidships, down the middle of which ran an access gangway only a few feet wide, the *corsia*, and along each side of which at the gunwale was a narrow fighting bulwark. Such ships were strongest at their prows, where archers and catapults could be massed, and weakest amidships where because of the oarsmen few defenders could be stationed. The midships were also vulnerable because an enemy galley crashing into the line of oars would create chaos in moments. Desclot reports that at Las Hormigas Lauria created havoc all along one side of a Provençal galley when he drove his own into it amidships at full speed (1934:c.94). The purpose of the raked *calcar* at the prow, which had replaced the old Ptolemaean ram (*rostrum*), was to enable a galley to manoeuvre to attack from the enemy's beam, running the *calcar* up over the *apostis*, the outrigger on which the oars rested, and giving marines massed on the forecastle access across it to the weakly defended *corsia* and rowing benches. To achieve this, from the later Roman period through to the fourteenth century, fleets attempted to go into battle in a crescent moon formation (Vegetius 1885:163-4; Leo VI 1556:c.xix.44; Sanudo 1611:83). The wings then tried to overreach or crush those of the enemy and to turn on to the exposed flanks of the enemy fleet from the beam. Meanwhile the centre had to hold firm and prevent the enemy penetrating the line, splitting it into sections, and pouring into the gaps to attack galleys either side of the gaps from the beam. This need gave rise to the custom of bridling galleys together in

the line.

Ferretto Vicentino and Giachetto Malaspini add an interesting perspective to the other major accounts of the battle. They say that Charles of Salerno, in his rashness and fury, failed to draw up his forces in proper battle order but rather led a headlong assault on Lauria's fleet. It was as a consequence of this that Lauria, the "wary leader" *cautus dux* of the enemy fleet, was able to overwhelm him (Vicentino 1726:col.955; Giachetto Malaspini 1726: cols. 1040-1). In any case, the Angevin fleet would have had to leave port in line ahead and whether or not Charles subsequently attempted to draw it up in battle order, in its precipitate pursuit of Lauria across the Gulf of Naples, it undoubtedly became disordered. No fleet could row at top speed and maintain a proper battle front, much less a poorly trained and disciplined one like the Angevin. Everything indicates that Lauria turned and feigned flight as soon as the Angevin fleet left port and that its galleys then simply raced after him individually. When he turned into a battle front according to his preconceived plan, the Angevin galleys probably simply piled up against the centre of his line, leaving the wings free to overreach them and attack from the beam on both sides. His centre was reinforced by the reserve squadron astern.

Faced by Lauria's sudden manoeuvre, whatever its exact nature, there is no doubt that those galleys of the Regno which were not commanded by Frenchmen fled back to Naples leaving Charles of Salerno with about ten galleys in a hopeless position. Excluding Muntaner and Speciale, whose reports of the numbers involved are not credible, the various sources report that

fifteen to eighteen galleys fled and nine to thirteen were captured. Giachetto Malaspini adds that Lauria issued orders to his crews to let those who wished to flee do so without pursuit, and to strike at the prince's flagship (1726:cols. 1040-1). This seems somewhat strange given that Lauria's whole purpose was to eliminate the Neapolitan fleet from the war, not to let it escape to fight another day, but nevertheless all the chroniclers are agreed that the Regnicolae displayed cowardice and treachery on the day and fled, leaving the French to fight alone. And fight they apparently did. According to the continuator of Saba Malaspina, in order to give his nimble almugavars an additional advantage over the clumsy French mailed knights, Lauria had cooking pots filled with soap hurled on to the French decks to make them slippery (Malaspina 1792:407). The French were also subjected to the normal barrage of arrows, fire bombs, and sulphur. At length all of the French galleys were taken, with the exception of the prince's flagship where he and his mailed nobles, standing side by side, resisted all Aragonese attempts to overcome them. He was persuaded to surrender only when Lauria sent a diver overboard to hole the galley and sink it (Neocastro 1921:c.77; Desclot 1934:c.55; Speciale 1727:c.27; Milioli 1903:c.304).

The battle of the Gulf of Naples was another triumph for Lauria's tactics and handling of his fleet as a controlled unit, for the discipline of his fleet, and for the fighting qualities of his crossbowmen and almugavars. However, from the point of view of the strategic struggle at sea it achieved little. The Regnicolae were undoubtedly more terrified of Lauria than ever before, but

when Charles I arrived at Naples three days later he still had the eighteen or so Neapolitan galleys which had fled the battle, his new Provençal fleet, what ships had been built at Gaeta and elsewhere, and the untouched large Apulian fleet. In a letter to the pope of 9 June he claimed that his strength had been only slightly affected and that he still had nineteen galleys, one *tarida*, and three galleons at Naples plus the thirty-four galleys and four galleons of the Provençal fleet. Five days later, in a letter to Pisa, he added mention of twenty-five galleys and seventy *taride* at Brindisi and seven more *taride* at Nicotera. On 11 June he ordered nineteen galleys and two *taride* from the Principato and the Terra di Lavoro provisioned (Minieri Riccio 1876:512-16). Lauria was in fact forced to beat a hasty retreat back to Messina after the battle of the Gulf and it was not so much that victory, brilliant though it was, as Charles's defeat before Reggio in August 1284 which decisively altered the balance of the struggle.

Las Hormigas: 4 September 1285

Some fifteen months later Lauria and his Aragonese-Sicilian fleet were off the coast of Catalonia. In June 1285 King Philip III of France had led an army of about 8,000 French crusaders over the Pyrenees passes into Aragon in support of his uncle Charles I's cause (Strayer 1971:116). On 27 June he encamped before Gerona and settled down to lay siege to the town throughout the summer. Peter III was incapable of meeting the French in open battle but his forces were able to cut the French supply lines by land back over the Pyrenees to France. Except for what he could forage, Philip became dependent on supplies brought in by sea and

accordingly, on 27 July, he established a supply base at Rosas, twenty miles to the north east of Gerona. He had obviously anticipated such a situation and being well aware of the combat ability of the Aragonese-Sicilian fleet, had expended a great deal of money in amassing a large transport fleet and a powerful combat fleet to protect it and the maritime supply routes to Narbonne and Marseilles. Almost a quarter of the total cost of the crusade to the king, £260,465.74 *tournois*, was spent on the fleet (Abrégement 1885:517). Reports of the size of Philip's fleet vary but it was clearly very large, indeed surprisingly large to support an army of only about 8,000 men. Muntaner reports a fleet of one hundred and fifty galleys and more than one hundred and fifty supply ships. Giovanni Villani reports a fleet of one hundred and twenty galleys and other ships and Jacopo d'Oria a fleet of one hundred galleys (Muntaner 1920:298; Villani 1857:152; Auria 1929:69). However, all three of these chroniclers are hopelessly exaggerated in their assessment of Philip's land forces (Muntaner: 18,000 cavalry and "innumerable" foot; Villani: 20,000 cavalry and 80,000 foot; d'Oria: 20,000 cavalry and an "infinite" number of foot) and we may assume, therefore, that their figures for the numbers of ships are also inflated considerably. Nevertheless, a number of sources are agreed that the French fleet was dispersed into various squadrons with different functions and yet that which Lauria engaged at Las Hormigas was certainly equal in numbers to his own, while Raymond Marquet and Berengar Millo had earlier destroyed a squadron of some twenty-five galleys and Lauria was to destroy a further large squadron at Rosas

after the victory at Las Hormigas. Although no precise figure can be given, a fleet of up to one hundred galleys seems probable in the light of all the evidence, including the enormous sum expended on the fleet.

At the time of the French invasion of Aragon, Lauria and the Aragonese-Sicilian fleet were engaged besieging Taranto and raiding the Basilicata and southern Apulia (Neocastro 1921:c.92). In desperate need of the fleet to cut the French maritime supply lines, Peter wrote on 29 May from the pass of Col de Panissars in the Pyrenees, where he was engaged in opposing the French crossing of the mountains, to James in Sicily informing him that he had also written to Lauria directly summoning him to Catalan waters with twelve *taride* and thirty galleys (La Mantia 1918:no.78). Lauria himself was devoted to his master Peter III above the Sicilian cause and before all other men and we may assume that he personally would have reacted to Peter's summons with all possible alacrity. But when the summons actually reached him on campaign we do not know. Neither do we know how difficult it was to break off the Italian operations and how long was required to make the fleet ready for the crossing to Catalonia and the forthcoming campaign. Nor do we know whether the Sicilian administration responded reluctantly to the call from Aragon, fearing that Sicily would be left defenceless before the still impressive Angevin fleets in southern Italy. For whatever reason, the fleet did not leave Sicily till very late and there is evidence that Peter was annoyed and anxious because of its tardiness (Neocastro 1921:c.92; Desclot 1934:c.86).

When exactly the fleet reached Barcelona,

it is not possible to determine. Neocastro reports that Lauria arrived at Barcelona on 21 September and that the battle was fought on 1 October (Neocastro 1921: cc. 93 and 95). But since Philip began the French retreat from Gerona on 13 September, the battle was obviously fought before then. All the other sources say that Lauria arrived late in August and that the battle was fought early in September. The dates given by Desclot seem probable. Lauria arrived at Barcelona on or about 23 August and stayed there for a week or so. He left on Sunday 2 September and the battle was fought during the night of 3-4 September, probably during the small hours of the morning of the fourth before dawn (Desclot 1934:cc. 93-4).

The various reports are no more consistent with respect to the size of the fleets. The figures for Lauria's fleet range from Muntaner's sixty-six galleys of the Sicilian fleet and sixteen Catalan galleys to Desclot's thirty galleys of the Sicilian fleet and fourteen Catalan galleys. Those for the French fleet range from Neocastro's fifty-five galleys to the twenty-five of the *Annales de Terre Sainte*. What consensus may be reached would suggest that figures of about thirty Sicilian and ten Catalan galleys for Lauria's fleet and about thirty galleys for the French fleet are about right (Neocastro 1921:c.93; Muntaner 1920:344-5; Desclot 1934: cc.93-4; Rohricht and Raynaud 1884: 458-9; Manfroni 1902:152).

Of all Lauria's battles, that of Las Hormigas is by far the most difficult to reconstruct. The various chroniclers are in complete and utter disagreement concerning the participants, the preliminary manoeuvrings, the order of battle, and even where the battle

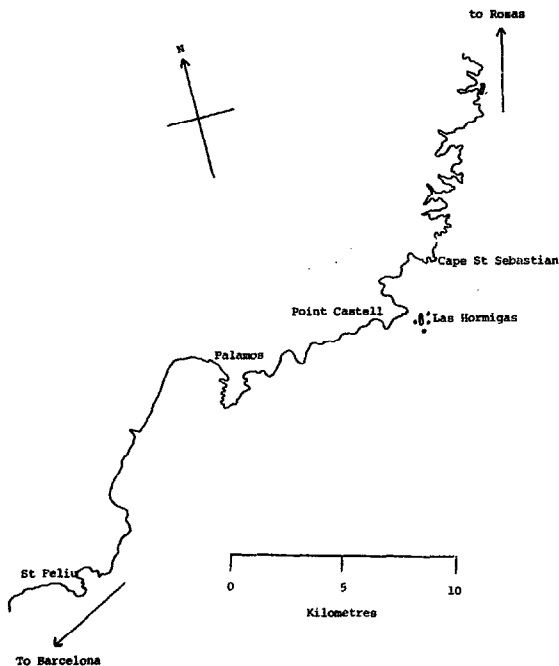


Figure 6. Las Hormigas: 4 September 1285.

took place. Of the three main chroniclers of the battle, Neocastro stands alone. According to him, King Philip had ordered his Genoese admirals, John de Orreo and Henry de Mari, to blockade Barcelona with forty galleys. On their way south from Rosas to Barcelona they beached for the night on the north side of Cape St Philip.

Lauria approached from the south, learnt of the presence of the French and reconnoitred their position undetected. He then took about two-thirds of his own fleet out to sea around the cape, leaving the remaining squadron to move in between the French and the land after the main part of the Aragonese fleet had challenged them

and lured them out to sea to attack (Neocastro 1921:cc.94-5). Muntaner, on the other hand, reports that the Aragonese fleet was the one that was beached. Lauria had beached it for the night inshore from the rocky islets of Las Hormigas, presumably in the bay between Point Castell and Cape St Sebastian. He was on his way north in search of the French fleet coming down from Rosas. Just before daybreak the French passed offshore and were discerned because of their night lanterns. Lauria then moved out to intercept them (Muntaner 1920:344-5). Desclot agrees with neither Neocastro nor Muntaner. According to him, neither fleet was beached. The French fleet was at St Feliu and was ordered by Philip to destroy a Catalan squadron under Raymond Marquet and Berengar Mallol at St Pol de Mar south of St Feliu towards Barcelona. On its way it encountered a second Catalan flotilla of four galleys to which it gave chase. Night fell with the pursuit still in progress and during the night the Catalan flotilla fell in with Lauria's main fleet. The attack was ordered even though it was night-time and the battle was joined at the end of the first night watch, presumably somewhere south of St Feliu towards Barcelona (Desclot 1934:cc. 93-4). The other chroniclers add little although Niccolo Speciale also reports with Muntaner that the battle was fought off Las Hormigas and Ptolomey of Lucca undoubtedly misplaces it near Narbonne (Speciale 1727: col. 949; Ptolomey of Lucca 1727a: col. 1193).

The chronicles are absolutely irreconcilable and it is necessary to opt for one of the three main accounts. Firstly, there is the question of the battle's location. All of the

major modern historians, Amari, Manfroni, de la Roncière, and Runciman, follow Muntaner and Speciale in locating the battle off Las Hormigas and I am inclined to do the same myself, though for no very good reason (La Roncière 1899:194-8; Manfroni 1902:149; Runciman 1958:282; Amari 1850:209). Secondly, there is the problem of whether or not one of the two fleets was beached for the night. If so, it seems extremely unlikely to have been the French. Neocastro's story of it being lured out to sea by Lauria seems improbable on several counts. To begin with, by this time the reputation of Lauria and his Sicilian and Catalan crews was already so great that it would seem very unlikely that the French would have rushed headlong out to meet their challenge in the middle of the night, particularly since a number of sources indicate that by the time of the battle the French crews had been seriously depleted by disease, the activities of Catalan privateers, and a battle lost earlier to Raymond Marquet and Berengar Mallol (Neocastro 1921:cc. 92 and 97; Desclot 1934:c.85; Muntaner 1920: 330; Speciale 1727: cols. 947-8; Ptolomey of Lucca 1727a: col. 1193). Moreover, virtually the one point concerning the battle that all the major sources are agreed upon is that before the attack Lauria hoisted lanterns to the mastheads of his ships. Muntaner, Jacopo d'Oria and Speciale report that he hoisted several lanterns on each ship in order to give a false impression of strength (Muntaner 1920:345; Neocastro 1921:c.95; Desclot 1934: c.94; Auria 1929: 69; Speciale 1727: col. 949). Such an action could hardly have been designed to lure an enemy out to the attack at night. To have done that one would expect some action

designed to give a false impression of weakness rather than strength. If, however, it was Lauria's fleet which was beached for the night, or if, as Desclot reports, it was not beached but merely came upon the French at sea during the night, events make much more sense. Having discerned the French fleet and ascertained its numbers, Lauria attempted to give a false impression of his own strength by hoisting lanterns to the mastsheads of his ships with the intent of inducing some of the enemy fleet to flee, leaving the remainder outnumbered. If this scenario is correct, then the plan seems to have worked. Neocastro, Speciale, Desclot, and Muntaner all agree that part of the French fleet fled. Neocastro and Speciale say that it was Henry de Mari who fled, Desclot merely that it was twelve French galleys, and Muntaner that it was sixteen Genoese galleys (Neocastro 1921:c. 95; Desclot 1934:c. 94; Speciale 1727: col. 949; Muntaner 1920:345). In a letter to King Sancho IV of Castile, Peter himself said that it was the Genoese admiral John de Orreo, known as *Escotus*, who escaped (Carini 1884:60-2, and La Roncière 1899:199 for the identification of *Escotus* with John de Orreo). It seems most probable that Lauria's fleet came out from the land to meet the French who were further out to sea. His fleet may have been beached for the night or it may merely have been cruising north hugging the coast.

Details of the engagement are completely lacking with the exception of the fact that it was fought at night and that both Neocastro and Desclot report that the French imitated the Catalan signals and battle cries in an effort to confuse the issue or to break through Lauria's line to escape. Desclot

reports that the battle was joined when Lauria drove his galley at the beam of a Provençal one, rolling it over and sweeping all the oarsmen and marines on that side of it into the sea. This would indicate that Lauria caught the French sailing in line ahead or at least that their dispositions were disorganized and not ordered in the normal battle formation of line abreast. Numbers of French galleys were either destroyed by fire or sunk and, apart from the ten or so which escaped, the rest were captured, probably to the number of about fifteen to twenty (Neocastro 1921:c. 95; Desclot 1934: 344-50).

In the middle ages, naval warfare at night was most unusual (Rodgers 1939:137; Dolley 1953:327). Yet Lauria seems to have had an uncanny facility to use the night to strategic advantage. At Malta and at Las Hormigas he actually attacked in the early hours of the morning, while at the Gulf of Naples he carried out his critical preliminary manoeuvres through the night. At Cape Orlando and Ponza in 1296 and 1300 he would again use the night for the same purpose. One possible explanation of this facility, which gave him a great tactical advantage over his enemies, lies in the qualities of his *almugavars*. As we have seen, they formed the main body of fighting marines in Lauria's fleets. They were renowned for their ability to fight and manoeuvre at night. In his *Liber de Jure* (Gotttron 1912:83), Ramon Lull wrote that:

... the *almugavars* ... are footsoldiers skilled in the use of lances, missiles, and shields and who range far and wide by day and night. Of these men there is a great number in Catalonia, Aragon, and Castile.

The continuator of Saba Malaspina also refers to this reputation of the *almugavars*

for night warfare, describing them as "ravishing wolves moving under the black darkness" (Malaspina 1792:390). Certainly, reading the various chronicles of the War of the Vespers, one can hardly but be struck by the number of attacks launched by the Aragonese and Sicilians both by land and sea, at night or at daybreak after they had manoeuvred into position through the night. At Las Hormigas, as at Malta, and probably at the Gulf of Naples, Lauria derived great advantage from this particular skill of his main combat marines.

After the battle he attacked and destroyed the remaining French ships at Rosas, cutting Philip's maritime supply lines completely and forcing him to abandon the siege of Gerona and retreat to France: a retreat which became a rout and at the end of which Philip himself died. Las Hormigas was the decisive battle of Philip's Aragonese crusade. Had Lauria lost it, the history of the crown of Aragon over the next fifty years might well have been very different.

The Battle of the Counts: Naples 23 June 1287

By the spring of 1287 the Angevin cause at sea had recovered greatly. Although Charles I was now dead and Charles of Salerno was still held prisoner in Aragon, the Angevin administration at Naples, acting with vigorous papal backing, had made major preparations for a new assault on Sicily. At Brindisi an Apulian fleet of about forty galleys had been readied, while at Sorrento the fleet of the Principato, numbering perhaps forty-three galleys plus support vessels, had also been put into battle condition. Meanwhile Lauria had been absent from Sicilian waters in Catalonia and Languedoc

harrying the French and Angevins there. In his absence the Sicilian fleet had been allowed to deteriorate. The only activities of which we hear are those of a squadron of twelve Sicilian galleys under Berengar de Sarriano which raided Capri and Procida on 8 June 1286 and of another of twenty galleys under Berengar de Villaragut which made a cruise to Brindisi and Corfu from June to October 1286 (Neocastro 1921: cc. 102 and 104; Muntaner 1921:372-3). When Lauria returned to Sicily in the spring of 1287, he had personally to galvanize the arsenal at Messina into frantic preparation of a combat fleet, labouring on the ships himself (Neocastro 1921: c. 110).

Despite his exertions, his absence and the lack of initiative shown by the Aragonese administration in Sicily had given the Angevins time in which to put their plans into full operation and this time Lauria was unable to prevent that which he had feared and successfully avoided in 1284: the conjunction of the Angevin Apulian and Principato fleets. Late in April 1287 the Apulian fleet under Reynald III Quarrel, count of Avella, sailed from Brindisi with orders to attack the city of Augusta on the east coast of Sicily. He arrived on 1 May and occupied the town and castle (Speciale 1727: col. 953). King James and Lauria responded to the landing at Augusta with a two-pronged thrust. James advanced overland from Messina while Lauria readied the fleet at Messina and then sailed for Augusta on the night of 12-13 May (Neocastro 1921: c. 110, p. 92). He arrived before James and in furious fighting drove the Angevins from the town, bottling them up in the castle. Following this initial success, he learned from two captured Dominican friars that

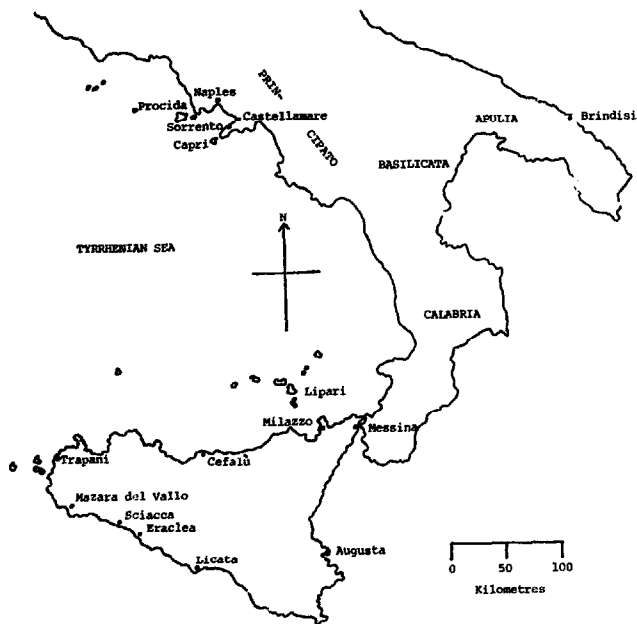


Figure 7. The Battle of the Counts: Naples 23 June 1287.

the attack on Augusta had merely been a feint and that the Apulian fleet had sailed from Augusta after disembarking its troops and had made a circuit of Sicily to the west before doubling back into the Tyrrhenian Sea (Neocastro 1921: c. 110, pp. 92-3). While Lauria had been occupied at Messina with the threat to Augusta, what he had always feared most had been quietly achieved. The Angevins had brought to-

gether an armada of over eighty galleys and *taride* at Castellammare, intending to launch an invasion of Sicily at Mazara del Vallo. Lauria, however, knew only that the Apulian fleet had sailed west around Sicily into the Tyrrhenian. His subsequent actions indicate that he did not know its destination or plans. When James arrived at Augusta, the two men discussed the position and, after some hesitation because James wanted to

retain Lauria's crews for the assault on Augusta castle, it was decided to send the fleet off to search for the Apulian fleet and attempt to destroy it. Late in May or early in June Lauria returned to Messina to reinforce the fleet and then spent some two weeks searching the Tyrrhenian for Quarrel, but not finding him until he arrived at Castellamare on 16 June (Neocastro 1921: c. 110, pp. 94-9; Speciale 1727: col. 954; Manfroni 1902:159-61).

With the two Angevin fleets combined, the Apulian under Quarrel and the Principato under Narjot de Toucy, Lauria was greatly outnumbered. The forthcoming 'Battle of the Counts' was in many ways his finest and most spectacular victory. We know that the combined Angevin fleets numbered over eighty ships. Niccolo Speciale reports that seventy of these came out to give battle against Lauria's forty (1727: col. 954). Neocastro reports that when Lauria left Messina for Augusta he had only forty galleys and that when he secretly reconnoitred the Angevin fleet at Castellamare he counted eighty-four galleys and *turde* (1921: c. 110). Jacopo d'Oria claims that the Angevin fleets numbered sixty galleys in the Principato and Apulia and that there were more at Naples while Lauria's fleet comprised only forty-two galleys (1929:80). Gérard de Monreal, the Templar of Tyre, numbers Lauria's fleet at forty-four galleys (1887:230). Giovanni Villani, following Jacopo d'Oria, numbers the Angevin fleet at sixty galleys and Lauria's at a mere forty-five (1857:157). Knowing that the two Angevin fleets numbered closer to eighty than to the sixty reported by d'Oria and Villani, the consensus is that Lauria was outnumbered by about two to one. These

figures make the most unusual Angevin tactics in the subsequent battle comprehensible.

As in 1284 Lauria enticed the Angevins out of their unassailable position in port by demonstration. According to Villani, he bombarded the coast with missiles and approached close enough to the Angevin positions to sting them with cries and rude insults. Neocastro and Jacopo d'Oria both agree that he sent heralds to the Angevin regent, Count Robert of Artois, formally challenging battle. Although Villani, Ptolomey of Lucca, d'Oria, and Speciale all place the Angevin fleet in port at Naples and Neocastro alone places it at Castellamare, the latter has by far the most complete description of the battle. Amari and Manfroni both follow Neocastro in this and, given the outlines which we have of the lead up to the battle, Castellamare seems most likely. In any event Lauria succeeded and on 23 June the Angevin fleet came out.

Unlike as in 1284, Lauria had now been in the Gulf of Naples for a week and could not hope to disguise his numbers. Probably Robert of Artois was enticed into battle by knowledge of his own superior numbers as much as by Lauria's insults and depredations. It is this which explains his very strange order of battle. Instead of drawing up his fleet in the conventional crescent moon battle front he surrounded his flagship with two galleys fore and aft and four on either side. The galleys of each of the squadron commanders, the count of Avella, the count of Brienne, the count of Montpellier, the count of Aquila, Count Jean de Joinville, and Count Guy of Montfort, were each surrounded in the same way, although perhaps without the two galleys in advance.

Two *taride* carried the Angevin and papal banners. Such a battle line would have made up a line of sixty-three galleys with some perhaps held in reserve or perhaps with another twelve in pairs in advance of the galleys of the squadron commanders. Neocastro's text is unclear (1921:c.110, p. 99). The Angevin line would have easily overreached the wings of Lauria's line and yet the intent seems to have been to let each squadron operate as an independent 'phalanx' capable of crashing through a section of Lauria's line and destroying it. Given their numerical superiority the plan seems to have been a good one. What went wrong it is difficult to say, although Villani reports that, as in 1284, Lauria feigned flight until he was six miles from land, by which time the Angevin battle front was disordered and dispersed (1857:157). On the one hand, Villani may have been confusing this battle with that of 1284, in which Lauria definitely did employ this tactic. But on the other hand, Niccolo Speciale also reports this feigned flight (1727:col. 954). Ptolomey of Lucca also seems to confuse the battle with that of 1284. He reports that Lauria gained the victory *quodam ingenio*, seizing a position to windward out to sea and with the sun at his back (1727a: col. 1195). Neocastro does not support this scenario at all, but he does have other information. Lauria assigned different functions to selected groups of *almugavars*: some to guard the Aragonese standards and others to strike for the enemy standards, to defend the forecastles and poops, to throw rocks, to shoot arrows, to grapple the enemy ships with iron chains, and to board. His fleet was to suffer patiently the first enemy attack and to absorb each Angevin thrust,

waiting until they were weary before counter-attacking. In this his tactics seem similar to those used at Malta in 1283. When they did counter-attack they were to strike at the Angevin galleys' oars and smash them (*Jussit itaque in remos percutere*) (1921: c. 111, p. 100). This again suggests a disordered Angevin line which made it possible for Lauria's galleys to attack from the beam. When the Aragonese approached, the Angevin fleet came out to meet them from the land. One of Lauria's captains, William Trara, moved ahead of the line and was surrounded by four Angevin galleys. Then the galleys of Milazzo, Lipari, and Trapani struck at the Angevin fleet followed by those of Cefalù, Eraclea, Licata, and Sciacca and William Trara was rescued. The Messinese poured stones and missiles into the Angevin fleet (Neocastro 1921:c. 111, p. 100). Villani says that Lauria's galleys struck specifically at the galleys of the French counts commanding the squadrons because, although the French knights were valiant and upright in arms, they were not used to battle at sea (1857:157). By all accounts the battle was hard, lasting most of the day, but eventually the Angevins were overcome. According to Speciale and Villani, the Genoese admiral Henry de Mari, who had previously fled from Lauria at Las Hormigas, again fled with a squadron of Genoese galleys. Approximately forty Angevin galleys were captured and amongst the 5,000 prisoners were the admiral Narjot de Toucy and many of the counts and barons; from which fact the battle gained its name (Neocastro 1921: c. 111, p. 101; Auria 1929:80; Speciale 1727: col. 954; Monreal 1887:230).

The Battle of the Cow its took the heart out of the Angevin cause. Charles of Salerno

was still a prisoner in Aragon. The fleets of the Regno had been decimated. The flower of the French nobility who had followed the Angevins to Italy had been killed or taken prisoner. The army at Augusta surrendered when news of the defeat reached it. The Regnicolae were more terrified than ever of Lauria and his forces and serious civil disaffection wracked the Regno. From the point of view of the Sicilians, Lauria should have gone on to capture Naples. But instead of doing so he concluded a truce with Robert of Artois and ransomed his prisoners for heavy sums which he used to pay his crews, whose wages were heavily in arrears. For this he was much blamed by the Sicilians and from this point on their chronicles became extremely antagonistic towards him. However, from documents extant in the archives of the *Corona de Aragon* in Barcelona, it seems most probable that Lauria was acting with the knowledge of the new king of Aragon, Alfonso I (Carini 1884:212-14; La Mantia 1908 no. 16; La Mantia 1918: nos. 161-3, 167 and 181). Alfonso had many problems at home in Aragon and Catalonia and may well have desired a truce. Lauria may have been Italian by birth but he was Aragonese by upbringing and his loyalties were to the royal house of Aragon. All his actions suggest that for him the Sicilian cause was very much a secondary consideration. When Aragonese and Sicilian interests began to diverge during the reigns of Alfonso and of James II of Sicily, the two sons of Peter III, Lauria began to abandon the Sicilian cause. In all probability in 1287 he was acting under directions from Alfonso. For him to have concluded a truce with the Angevins without reference to his royal masters is inconceiv-

able. To begin with his hatred of the Angevins was still undoubtedly intense, and secondly, he could not have hoped to have retained his command as admiral had he done so (Manfroni 1902:164).

Cape Orlando: 4 July 1299

In 1288 Charles of Salerno was released from captivity in Aragon and returned to the Regno, where he was crowned as King Charles II of Sicily in 1289. Alfonso died in 1289 and was succeeded by his brother James, who went to Aragon, leaving Sicily under the regency of his mother Constance and his younger brother Frederick. On 12 June 1295 James and Charles II concluded a peace under papal auspices by which Sicily was to be handed over to the papacy. Aragon and Angevin Naples became allies. The peace suited the current needs of both Aragon and Naples but predictably received a hostile reception in Sicily. The Sicilians hated the papal backers of the Angevin cause as much as they hated the Angevins themselves. When Frederick decided to maintain the Sicilian cause and his own ambitions against the desires of James and was crowned king of Sicily at Palermo on 12 December 1295, Roger of Lauria found himself in an invidious position. On the one hand his main loyalty had always been to the crown of Aragon and, as part of the general reconciliation between Aragon and the papacy, he had already been reconciled to the Church through James's negotiations and had accompanied him to Rome in June 1295. On that occasion, according to Niccolò Speciale, Boniface VIII had greeted him with the words: "Are you that enemy of the Church who has taken the

life of so many by the sword?" To which Lauria had replied: "Father, this was done because you and your predecessors gave cause" (*Speciale* 1727:col. 961). Bold words, but Boniface had not allowed them to sway him from his purpose of winning Lauria over. On 11 August 1295 he granted to him as a papal fief the islands of Djerba and Kerkema off the Tunisian coast which Lauria had previously seized for Peter III in 1284 (*Raynaldus* 1749: anno 1295 §37; *Thomas* 1884: nos. 810 and 811; *Delaville le Roulx* 1899: no. 4290; *Mas Latric* 1868: no. 20). Lauria's acceptance of the papal fief and his participation in James's negotiations reflected his primary loyalty to the house of Aragon and to his Catalan and Aragonese comrades in arms. On the other hand, he had not yet abandoned his loyalties to Frederick and to his old Sicilian allies. For over a year he wavered, fighting valiantly in the Sicilian cause and yet at the same time working to try to bring Frederick around to accept James's solutions. Only when all hope of doing so was lost, and when Frederick had become so estranged from him that his position had become untenable, did Lauria yield to James's blandishments. Already on 16 January 1296 James had offered him restoration of all his honours if he would return to Aragonese service (*Finke* 1908: no. 23). In January 1297 he left Sicily for good in the train of Queen Constance and accompanied her to Rome for the marriage of her daughter Violante to Robert of Calabria, Charles II's son and heir (*Speciale* 1727: cols. 991-2). She also had despaired of Frederick's cause by this time. In Rome Lauria changed sides. On 2 April 1297 James confirmed his appointment as admiral of Catalonia, Valencia, and Sicily. The

appointments were confirmed by Charles II in 1298 (*Fullana Mira* 1923; 87 n. 3; *Minieri Riccio* 1863:64, 67 and 70; *Anonymous* 1717: col. 50).

The war was to drag on inconclusively until brought to a temporary halt by the treaty of Caltabellotta of 31 August 1302. But in this final period of his life Lauria was to gain two more outstanding victories. Towards the end of June 1299 James attempted a landing in Sicily with a fleet consisting of twelve Angevin galleys, forty-six Aragonese galleys, and a number of supply ships. His intent seems to have been to land somewhere on the north coast of the island, perhaps at Patti. Now, after Lauria had moved over to the Aragonese-Angevin cause, Frederick had needed to replace him as admiral and had engaged the renowned Genoese sailor Conrad d'Oria. Frederick and d'Oria learnt of James's intentions and put to sea together from Messina with a fleet of forty Sicilian galleys in an attempt to smash the invasion at sea before it could ever land in Sicily. However, James and Lauria outpaced them and made landfall at St Marco di Val Demone near Cape Orlando before they could be intercepted. When Frederick arrived on 3 July, he found Lauria's fleet beached in a defensive position, stern to the shore, just as Lauria had himself found the Provençals at Malta seventeen years earlier. But Lauria was not to be so easily lured out of his superior tactical position as they had been. For the first time in his career he had all the advantages on his side. While James was technically in command of the fleet, it is clear that he did not interfere with the handling of it by his, by now famous, admiral. Frederick, on the other hand, in-

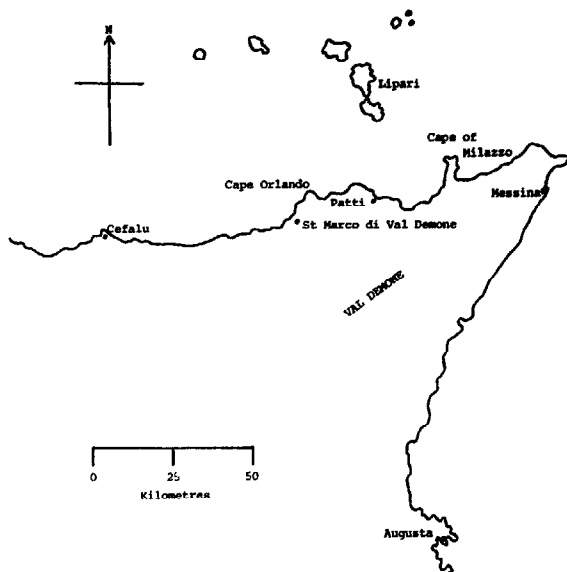


Figure 8. Cape Orlando: 4 July 1293.

experienced as he was, foolishly usurped the conduct of his Sicilian fleet from the experienced d'Oria. Moreover, he was caught in a difficult tactical situation, of which James and Lauria must have been only too well aware. In order to smash the invasion he had to attack. He could not allow the landing to be completed because if he did so he would then be forced to return to Messina to try to meet the invasion on land and would have to leave Lauria's fleet untouched. He had insufficient resources to

maintain his fleet on station off Cape Orlando and at the same time raise a land force large enough to attack the invaders from the land. Returning to Messina would have taken time and would have enabled the Aragonese and Angevins to consolidate their position on land before Frederick could collect forces and march to oppose them. The moment that he had decided to sail from Messina to oppose the invasion at sea, Frederick had committed himself to attacking. But now he found himself outnumbered

and with his enemy in a secure defensive position which, as was shown in the case of the Provençal position at Malta, gave the latter all the advantages. Moreover, having effected his landing and knowing that Frederick had either to attack or to allow the invasion to become consolidated, Lauria had no incentive at all to abandon his position of strength.

That Frederick's position was strategically weak is indicated by his manoeuvres as reported by Niccolo Speciale. On 3 July he launched a disorganized preliminary assault (*navigandi ordinem aspernantes*) on the Aragonese which was easily beaten off (1727: col. 1000). A report on the battle written by James afterwards says that at this stage the Aragonese-Angevin fleet could not move on: to attack the Sicilians because of contrary winds (Finke 1908: no. 43), but Lauria would hardly have wished to do so in any case. Frederick then stood off to wait for reinforcements: eight galleys from Mazara del Vallo which he knew to be on their way from the west and to have passed Cefalù. Lauria's position was impregnable, Speciale reports, enhanced by his galleys being connected to the shore (*cum ratibus illis religatis ad litora*) (1727: col. 1000). Manfroni interprets this as indicating that Lauria had built flying bridges from his galleys' sterns to the beaches although it may mean no more than that they were secured to the shore by cables or that they had their landing bridges lowered (see Fig. 3). Not even if Frederick had had the renowned Genoese and Venetians with him could he have hoped to prevail against such a position, says Speciale (1727: col. 1000).

These preliminaries occupied the afternoon of 3 July until nightfall. Frederick

was then forced to pass a stormy night at sea while Lauria and his crews spent it in relative comfort ashore. During the evening and the night James disembarked his horses, sick, non-combatants, and supplies and reinforced the galleys with garrisons brought in from castles in the Val Demone. By dawn they must have been stripped to the bare bones of maximum combat efficiency. On 4 July, after the arrival of the galleys from Cefalù, Frederick attacked. Lauria had his fleet still in the shallows in a defensive position drawn up in the traditional crescent moon formation with the galleys bridled together. The Sicilians also came in in a bridled crescent moon formation and the battle seems to have opened at a distance with a missile exchange which lasted for a considerable time and during which the oarsmen on their exposed benches suffered heavily on both sides. Since Lauria's fleet was still in the shallows and presumably could use its anchors as well as its oarsmen to maintain station, and therefore could have kept the latter under cover to some extent, and since Lauria as usual had the considerable advantage at this stage of the battle of his Catalan crossbowmen, we may assume that the Sicilians suffered more heavily in the missile exchange. Late in the day one of Frederick's captains, Gombaldus de Intenciis, cut his galley free from the bridles and attacked Lauria's line. Engaging one galley at the prow, he was immediately surrounded by the two on either side. The remaining Sicilian galleys then came in after him with Frederick himself unsuccessfully trying to board James's flagship. For about three hours a general mêlée raged until de Intenciis was killed and a reserve squadron of six fast galleys which Lauria

had stationed apart (perhaps out of sight around the cape) attacked the Sicilians from the rear. This tactic, also used by Lauria at the Gulf of Naples in 1284 and perhaps at Las Hormigas in 1285, broke the Sicilian resistance. Six galleys fled and then, when, according to Speciale, Frederick himself was knocked unconscious, his nobles decided to get him away and another twelve galleys escaped. The rest were surrounded and captured (1727: col. 1004). Ptolomey of Lucca, however, says that Frederick did not lose consciousness and that he himself gave the order to flee (1727b: col. 1303). This latter is more probable since in a letter to Messina announcing and explaining the defeat Frederick made no attempt to avoid responsibility for the flight. He did not mention being knocked unconscious and attributed his defeat to a disorganized attack which prevented all the Sicilian galleys engaging in the final mêlée (. . . *acciderat, quòd tam galea in qua eramus, quam multae galeae nostrae, . . . sic intra seipsas remis involutae et impeditae fuerunt, quòd aliqua ipsarum contra predictas galeas hostium pugnare non potuit.*) (Anonymous 1717: col. 53; Lunig 1735: cols. 451-4). This seems to fit better the scenario which ought to have resulted from de Intenciis's premature thrust at the Aragonese-Angevin line and from the disorganized assault of the galleys which followed him. Sixteen to eighteen of his galleys were captured, Frederick said. The rest escaped (Anonymous 1717: cols. 52-3; Speciale 1727: cols. 1000-4; Villani 1857: 179; Cantinelli 1902:91; Manfroni 1902: 179-82; Finke 1926).

It may well have been that James in fact allowed his brother to escape. Writing to James in 1301, Lauria reminded him that

before Cape Orlando James had wanted to avoid battle and leave Sicily but that he, Lauria, had persuaded him that to do so would be against the honour of his house (Finke 1908: no. 73). In the same year James's procurator at Rome, Gerald de Albalato, writing to James, reported it as Boniface VIII's belief that Lauria had made contact with Frederick at Cape Orlando, promising him much, and that he would only have done so with James's authority (Finke 1908: no. 71). James seems to have been reluctant to give battle to his own brother and when the moment of his defeat came, he apparently let him escape. A private letter written by Natalis Raynerius, a jurist, to one of James's scribes, dated 29 August 1299, reports a letter of Lauria's to the pope in which he claimed that Frederick could have been captured had James so wished (. . . *scripsit pape, quod si dominus rex voluisset, Fredericus fuisset captus.*) (Finke 1908: no. 47). This theory that Lauria would have captured Frederick but was prevented from doing so by James is also supported by Villani, Ptolomey of Lucca, and Ferretto Vicentino (Villani 1857:179; Ptolomey of Lucca 1727b: col. 1303; Vicentino 1726: cols. 959-60).

Ponza: 14 June 1300

During the following winter, Frederick managed to contain quite easily the Angevin invasions of Sicily. Although Lauria was involved in these campaigns by land and distinguished himself as usual, he did not have the overall command and was not able to prevent their collapse. On 1 November 1299, at Falconaria in western Sicily, Frederick's success was assured when he

annihilated an invasion force under Charles II's fourth son, Philip of Taranto, which had been landed at Cape Lilibeo from forty galleys. After this disaster Lauria returned to Naples to gather reinforcements. Meanwhile Frederick had entrusted the reconstitution of the Sicilian fleet to d'Oria who, by the following spring, had succeeded in collecting twenty-seven Sicilian galleys and five more Ghibelline ones from Genoa. After Cape Orlando James had returned to Aragon, taking with him the Aragonese army and presumably a considerable proportion of the Aragonese fleet to transport it. Although he left some galleys with Lauria, the latter must have been far more dependent on squadrons from the Regno than he had been to this point. There seems little doubt that the quality of the Angevin crews was no better now than it ever had been and although they now had a naval genius to lead and train them, Lauria probably reposed little confidence in them. Only this explains his subsequent timidity.

In late May or early June 1300 d'Oria took the offensive. He cruised up the coast of the Principato and into the Gulf of Naples where he found Lauria with a fleet of forty galleys safe in the haven of Naples harbour. For the first and only time in his career Lauria refused battle when challenged. Given that his fleet of forty already outnumbered d'Oria's thirty-two galleys, this decision can only be explained by lack of confidence in the crews. Although he had beaten the Sicilians at Cape Orlando, the battle had been long and hard and he had had the advantages of a marked superiority in numbers, Catalan crossbowmen, and his almugavars. His numerical superiority was now only slight and he almost certainly had

few Catalan crossbowmen and almugavars. He also had a very healthy respect for the bellicosity of his battle-hardened old Sicilian allies. Rather than accept the challenge, he chose to wait for the arrival of an expected squadron of twelve more galleys from Apulia (Speciale 1727: col. 1024). D'Oria withdrew to the islands offshore to ravage them, a tactic which Lauria himself had used successfully in 1284 and 1287 to excite Angevin passions and draw them out to battle. But on this occasion the tactic misfired for in the absence of the Sicilians the Apulian squadron was able to creep into Naples, probably coming into the gulf between Capri and Point Campanella and hugging the south shore around past Sorrento and Castellamare to Naples. After the arrival of a further seven galleys of the Genoese Gueff family of the Grimaldi, bitter enemies of the d'Orias, Lauria obviously considered that his fleet had been sufficiently stiffened to cope with the Sicilians (Speciale 1727: col. 1025). He came out to give battle, catching them off the island of Zannone in the Pontine group (Finke 1922: no. 88).

The Sicilians were now caught in a very difficult tactical position. They were badly outnumbered, and faced a fleet for whose commander, if not crews, they no doubt had very great respect. Wiser heads amongst them, headed by Palmerio Abbas, urged retreat to Sicily. But, as was so often the case in the middle ages in similar circumstances, the bellicose faction prevailed by attacking their opponents with stinging accusations, of cowardice no doubt. Once committed by the decision of his council of captains, d'Oria decided to chance all on an assault on Lauria's flagship and a quick capture of the Angevin standards; the same principle

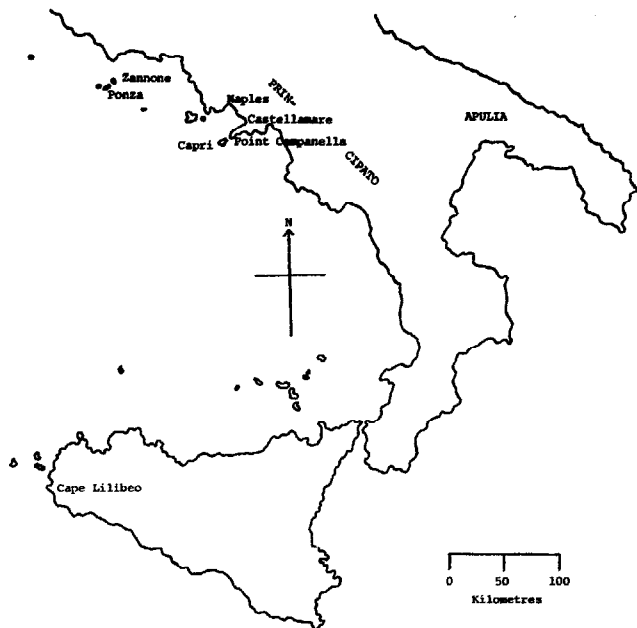


Figure 9. Ponza: 14 June 1300.

of attack that Lauria had used at the Battle of the Counts. Lauria, however, frustrated the plan by preventing d'Oria's galley grappling with his own. What Speciale's text seems to say is that he avoided meeting d'Oria's galley at the prow and let it slide past his own beam until its prow and beak were level with his own stern (. . . *ille quidem occursum contra venientis prorie astu devitans,*

per applustris gubernatorem Conradi puppim ab inferiori parte reliquit.) (1727: col. 1025). From high on his own poop Lauria could look down on the low forecastle and beak of d'Oria's galley where the marines were massed ready to board and could easily beat them off. Since for the moment at least it was not Lauria's intention to board d'Oria's flagship, it did not matter that his own prow

was similarly exposed to fire from d'Oria's poop. No doubt, however, his own crew would have suffered horribly from d'Oria's archers and events after the battle indicate that this was so, for Lauria cut off the hands of the Genoese crossbowmen on d'Oria's galley and then blinded them for good measure. With the latter's bold thrust frustrated, the Sicilians were quickly surrounded; perhaps the more easily since Speciale reports that the five Ghibelline Genoese galleys held back awaiting the turn of events. One of the Sicilian captains, Benincasa de Eustachio, was keen on keeping spoils and captives taken from one of Lauria's galleys captured in the first clash and fled, followed by six others. The rest of the Sicilians fought on until overcome. Eventually only d'Oria's flagship held out and he was then induced to surrender by a threat to set fire to it (Speciale 1727: col. 1025). According to various recensions of the Bolognese chronicles between eighteen and twenty-nine Sicilian galleys were captured (Chron. Bon. 1911:256-7). Ptolomey of Lucca and the anonymous Sicilian chronicle put it at twenty-eight (Ptolomey of Lucca 1727b: col. 1303; Anonymous 1717: col. 56). In a letter to James, Charles II said that Lauria had captured twenty Sicilian galleys (Finke 1922: no. 88). For all intents and purposes the Sicilian fleet was eliminated from the war.

Aftermath

The Sicilian fleet may have been *hors de combat* but the Sicilians themselves were not. The Angevin invasions of Sicily all failed in the teeth of determined resistance and on 31 August 1302 a peace was signed between

the exhausted combatants at Caltabellotta. Under the terms of the peace all vassals were to lose any fiefs they had held of either monarch against whom they had rebelled. Only two exceptions were made and one of these was Roger of Lauria. He was allowed to retain one of his Sicilian fiefs, Castel d'Aci, and at Catania in the royal palace he knelt and paid homage to Frederick for it. Shortly afterwards he returned to Aragon where he spent the rest of his life in the service of James II, mainly in command of expeditions against Muslim North Africa. He died on 17 January 1305 as prince of Djerba and Kerkema, count of Malta and Gozo, admiral of Valencia, Catalonia, and Naples, lord of many towns and castles in Valencia and Aragon, and baron of Acerno and lord of many places in Calabria. He was buried in the monastery of Santa Croce in Catalonia at the feet of his beloved master Peter III. In 1889, as a result of persistent rumours that the tomb was empty, it was opened and Lauria's remains were found in a broken coffin of exquisitely carved crystal or glass (Anonymous 1889:311-12; Vecchi 1876: 454; Mirrieri Riccio 1863:21; Dufourcq 1966:428-9; Laurenza 1934: no. 66).

Without a doubt the most successful, the most feared, and the most influential warrior of his generation, Roger of Lauria deserves to be ranked amongst the most outstanding war leaders of the middle ages. As a naval commander he has no rival in medieval history, not even amongst the Genoese and Venetians. His fame in his own time has been obscured by the undeservedly minor place accorded to the War of the Vespers by modern historians and by the implicit belief in modern naval history that galley warfare required little skill.

When one searches for the factors which lay behind Lauria's phenomenal success they seem to lie in two areas: on the one hand the superior qualities and bellicosity of his crews and marines, at least for the first four battles, and on the other his own genius as a fighting admiral. Personally brave, daring, and highly skilled in combat he undoubtedly shared those qualities with many other commanders of his day, both amongst his own forces and in the ranks of his enemies. What differentiated him from the rest was his grasp of strategy and tactics and a unique ability to handle galley fleets as integrated units, mastering the difficult logistical problems associated with Mediterranean galley warfare in the nexus between land and sea.

Lauria's fleets had no advantage as regards the galleys themselves. Both Provençals and Regnicolae could build galleys equally as seaworthy as those of Sicily and Catalonia. There is no evidence anywhere in the sources for naval warfare in the Mediterranean in the thirteenth century that any belligerent had an advantage in ship design. Where Lauria's strength lay was in his crews. At least until Cape Orlando, where for the first time he had to face Genoese crossbowmen, his own Catalan crossbowmen were undoubtedly superior to anything the Angevins possessed. At the same time his almugavars proved their superiority over mailed knights as marines in naval warfare time and time again. Their agility, skill, and ferocity more than compensated for the armour and swords of the knights. And, finally, the Sicilian crews who provided the oarsmen for the fleets in his first four battles were highly motivated by the struggle of Sicily for freedom from the hated Angevin

rule. Their counterparts, whether Regnicolae or Provençal, did not match their enthusiasm. When the galleys clashed in the final stages of battle and the oarsmen joined in the *mêlée*, the motivation of the Sicilians must have counted for much. All this was changed, of course, at Cape Orlando and Ponza. At Cape Orlando Lauria still had the almugavars and Catalan crossbowmen (although Frederick also had considerable numbers of them) but at Ponza he probably had few of either. That he was then able to extract sufficient from his Regnicolae crews to triumph over Sicilian motivation, the renowned Genoese crossbowmen, and the considerable abilities of Conrad d'Oría as an admiral is the measure of his genius.

If Lauria had good raw material in his crews to work with, nevertheless every indication is that what he was able to achieve with it was quite unusual. His tactics on every occasion can be shown to have been carefully designed to maximize his own strengths and minimize those of his enemy. At Malta and the Battle of the Counts in particular he manoeuvred to take greatest advantage from his crossbowmen and almugavars. At Malta, the Gulf of Naples, Las Hormigas, and Cape Orlando he made skilful use of the almugavars' ability to manoeuvre and fight at night. But because they wore no armour he kept them under cover during the preliminary missile exchanges. We know he did so at Malta and may presume also at the other battles. Whereas in other fleets it was common for oarsmen, sailors, and archers to perform different functions alternately, the use of *tersols* being the most obvious example of the practice, in Lauria's fleets the various functions were strictly delimited so that each became specialists

highly skilled and effective in their own task. At the Battle of the Counts the almogavars were even designated specific tasks, being singled out for each no doubt according to their individual abilities.

Where Lauria's greatest genius seems to have lain, however, was in handling his fleets as disciplined integrated units. All medieval commanders had trouble with bellicose subordinates wont to launch themselves prematurely into the fray in search of honour and glory and who, more often than not, reduced to naught the most carefully designed battle strategies. But, with the exception of William Trara at the Battle of the Counts, Lauria controlled this tendency. In all his battles, with the exception of Las Hormigas, he maintained his crescent moon formation throughout the preliminary stages of the battle and then when the time to engage did come, moved all his galleys into attack together. His discipline over his captains seems to have been quite remarkable for the middle ages. Moreover, he was able to handle his fleets as units in very difficult situations. Whereas their pursuit of Lauria at the Gulf of Naples and perhaps the Battle of the Counts threw the Angevin fleets into disarray, Lauria managed to have his whole fleet pretend to flee before them and then turn into an ordered battle front. No mean accomplishment! At the Gulf of Naples, Las Hormigas, and Cape Orlando he also practised deception to lure the enemy into thinking that he had either a superiority or an inferiority of numbers. Concealing a squadron in reserve to be thrown into the battle at a critical stage, so popular a tactic in Mediterranean galley warfare, was used to great effect at the Gulf of Naples and Cape Orlando. Finally, Lauria

made skilful use of the sea and land nexus, either denying its advantages to the enemy as at Malta, the Gulf of Naples, and the Battle of the Counts, or taking maximum advantage of it himself as at Cape Orlando and perhaps at Las Hormigas.

Lauria's victories all had major significance. Malta did not remove Charles I's Provençal subjects from the war but it did eliminate them as a major front-line strike force capable of contesting the seas with the Aragonese-Sicilian fleet. The Gulf of Naples took the heart out of the Regnicolac and from that point on their support for their Angevin masters was never enthusiastic. Las Hormigas smashed the crusade against Aragon. The Battle of the Counts destroyed the flower of the French chivalry which had come south to support the Angevin cause. Cape Orlando was inconclusive not in itself but because the Angevin forces were incapable of following it up by land. Ponza eliminated the Sicilian fleet from the war and meant that Frederick had to make peace eventually. It would not be unfair to conclude that by his own individual energies and abilities Roger of Lauria closely influenced the course and outcome of the War of the Sicilian Vespers.

Notes

¹ Fabbrica di galere. Biblioteca Nazionale. Firenze MS. Magliabecchiana, classe 19, palco 7. See also Guilmarin 1974:67 and Pryor 1983.

² Sanudo 1611:57: Sciendum quod in M.CCXC anno Domini, quasi in omnibus galeis que transfretabant per mare, duo in banco remiges remigabant: postmodum perspicaciores homines, cognoverunt quod tres possent remigare super quolibet praedictorum, quasi omnes ad praesens hoc utuntur.

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