

**John Aspinwall, Heidelberg: *Fake Heimat*: The Jesuits of Palermo and the Invention of Norman Sicily**

This paper explores a little-known play produced by the Jesuits of Palermo in the late sixteenth century. The play retells the Norman capture of Palermo from the Muslims and has hitherto been largely ignored in historiographical research. Nonetheless, it appears significant for the way for what it can say concerning how ideas relating to a Sicilian *Heimat* were formed and engaged with in the pre-modern period.

The Norman conquest had long occupied a central place in histories of Sicily. From the conquest period onwards, narrative sources had presented it as the foundation of a new political and religious order. By the sixteenth century, Tommaso Fazello, stated that “we are obliged to the Normans that we live in our country, that we are free, and that all Sicilians today are Christians.” The conquest had thus become a way of explaining and expressing belonging on the island.

It was within this tradition that the Jesuit playwright reshaped such traditions for the stage: a long and uneven process of conquest was compressed into a drama of providential change. Here, Palermo’s surrender marks the beginning of a new order under structures of Latin-Christian rule. What is striking, however, is that the play presents the Norman period as the beginning of a shared Sicilian history which has been carefully curated, indeed invented. As will be seen, the playwright worked with a perilous past, one that exposed the tensions involved in imagining Sicily as a unified *Heimat*.

In this sense, the play’s interest lies less in what it says about the Norman conquest, but in how it makes that conquest usable by reforming a contested past into an imagined narrative through which an audience could understand *Heimat*.