

King Henry III and the Sicilian affair

When surveying the fine rolls, it is always important to remember the wider international context. This is never more so than in the 1250s, when the rolls are swamped by the fines of gold called forth by Henry's projected crusade and by his attempt to put Edmund, his second son, on the throne of Sicily.¹ Henry wanted gold because the currencies in the East and in Sicily were in that metal. Consequently he insisted that a wide variety of concessions and favours be paid for in gold. The resulting fines were recorded on the fine rolls. The rolls, therefore, show how the crusade and the Sicilian affair impacted on lay society in England; the burdens born by the church form another story, documented by W.E. Lunt in a classic book.² In a later fine of the month, I hope to analyse the fines of gold and consider their consequences. Here, as a prelude, it may be helpful to say something about the Sicilian enterprise itself, lying as it did behind the gold treasure collected between 1255 and 1258. Attention will be drawn, in particular, to an extraordinary and apparently unnoticed conversation between Henry III and the papal diplomat, Master Albert of Parma. This revealed that Henry was without resources of his own to prosecute the affair and was quite unable to raise the powerful military force which the pope wanted. Since there was never a time when Henry was able to raise such a force, and since without it, as things turned out, Edmund's kingship could not become a reality, there was never the slightest chance of the Sicilian project succeeding.³ This does not mean it had nothing to recommend it. At its start, in 1254, a plausible case could be made in its favour, and probably was made by Henry III's Savoyard kinsmen. Their leader was Thomas of Savoy, uncle of Henry's queen, and about his role too this 'fine of the month' will reveal some hitherto unnoticed information. If, however, the project could be justified when it began, it had very little to recommend it on the papal terms which Henry III eventually accepted in 1255.

Pope Innocent IV offered Henry III the throne of Sicily, on Edmund's behalf, in December 1253. In February 1254, the king, then at Bazas in Gascony, accepted the offer. In March, at Vendome in France, the papal diplomat charged with the negotiations, Master Albert of Parma, formally conceded the kingdom to Edmund.⁴ In May, at Assisi, Innocent confirmed the gift.⁵ The kingdom of Sicily, which comprised both the island and much of southern Italy, was actually occupied by Conrad, the son of the late Emperor Frederick II. Innocent made no bones about the fact that a major military effort would be necessary to oust him, although he also affirmed that if one was made, resistance would crumble away. In a series of letters written in May, he explained that Henry must prosecute the affair 'vigorously, speedily and powerfully', sending Edmund 'with a strong force...in soldiers, money and other

¹ See D. Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III* (London, 1996), ch.6 'The gold treasure of King Henry III'

² W. E. Lunt, *Financial Relations of the Papacy with England to 1327* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), 255-289.

³ The attractions of the Sicilian business and the possibilities of its realisation are well brought out in S. Lloyd, *English Society and the Crusade* (Oxford, 1988), 219-32 and B. K. U. Weiler, *Henry III of England and the Staufen Empire 1216-1272* (Woodbridge, 2006), ch.7 'The Sicilian business'. This chapter is an expanded version, with a different emphasis, of Weiler's earlier 'Henry III and the Sicilian business: a reinterpretation', *Historical Research*, 74 (2001), 127-50.

⁴ *Les Registres d'Alexandre IV*, ed. C. Bourel de la Roncière and others, 3 vols. (Paris, 1895-1953), iii, no.3036, pp.89-92

⁵ *Registres d'Alexandre IV*, iii, no.3036, p.92; *Foedera*, I, i, 297, 302.

things...'.⁶ 'A powerful *adventus*', he promised, 'will strike thunder in these parts, as though a voice from heaven, giving courage to your supporters and terrifying your adversaries'.⁷

The need for such an *adventus* remained even after Conrad's sudden death, which was known at the papal court by the end of May. Innocent certainly thought this removed a great obstacle in the way of obtaining Sicily, but the situation was uncertain. Frederick's illegitimate son, Manfred, had a strong position in the kingdom and might well aspire to take Conrad's place. Innocent, therefore, in a letter of 9 June, still urged Henry to hasten Edmund's arrival 'with a powerful force'. From the English point of view, this was vital for another reason. Without a significant military presence in the kingdom, it was always possible that the pope might dispense with Edmund's services altogether. Already in the letter of 9 June, Innocent observed that he was being urged to withdraw the offer.⁸

Edmund's *adventus*, however, was never going to be easy. He was only nine years old so the expedition needed to be led, if not by Henry himself, then by some great and impressive noble. There was also the logistical problem of how to get to Sicily in the first place. However much Edmund's army might be recruited in Italy from supporters and mercenaries, it would always be necessary for him to come himself and in some array; that being so, he and his forces could hardly creep across Europe in disguise. Henry III's uncle, Richard I, had been to Sicily on his way to the crusade, and indeed had intervened strenuously in the kingdom's affairs. He had travelled through France and embarked from the great port of Marseilles in Provence.⁹ But it was one thing to get permission to do that when the kings of France and England were allies, involved in a common crusade. It was quite another, when the relations between the two countries were governed by uneasy truces, and the actual ruler of Provence was the king of France's brother, Charles of Anjou. Charles had come close to accepting a papal offer of Sicily for himself back in 1253, and would scarcely welcome an English prince being put in his place.¹⁰

Logistical issues aside, there was another and more fundamental problem. Did Henry have the financial firepower to muster a powerful force in Italy, whether sent from England or recruited locally? It was this question which concerned Master Albert of Parma, the pope's chief negotiator, when he arrived in Gascony to see Henry. We know of the mission from Albert's report, made in October 1256, which set out his dealings with Henry III over the Sicilian business.¹¹ No date is given for the meeting but since it was related to the letters Innocent wrote in May 1254, one of them to Albert himself, it probably took place that June or July. Albert was instructed to urge Henry to send Edmund 'as soon as possible with a strong force to prosecute the affair vigorously and powerfully as befits so great a prince'. According to his account, Albert followed his instructions to the letter.¹² Henry's reply was hardly encouraging. He declared 'viva voce' that 'he did not have money, nor could he hope

⁶ *Registres d'Alexandre IV*, iii, no.3036, pp.92-3; *Foedera* I, i, 297, 302-4 with the specific quotation at p.302.

⁷ *Foedera*, I, i, 303.

⁸ *Foedera*, I, i, 304.

⁹ J. Gillingham, *Richard I* (New Haven and London, 1999), 127-9.

¹⁰ The county of Toulouse was now also in the hands of a brother of Louis IX, Alphonse of Poitiers.

¹¹ *Registres d'Alexandre IV*, iii, no.3036.

¹² *Registres d'Alexandre IV*, iii, no.3036, pp.92-3; *Foedera*, I, i, 301.

to prosecute an affair of this kind, unless first, by aid of the Roman church, he was given the tenth conceded him in English parts'. Here Henry was referring to the tenth of ecclesiastical revenues over three years which had been conceded for his crusade to the Holy Land and whose assessment was just beginning in England.¹³ Henry then went on to ask Albert 'both politely and impolitely' to renew 'the foresaid concession'. This referred to a clause in Albert's instructions which empowered him to re-issue his grant of the kingdom to Edmund in the same terms as the pope's confirmation. Albert, however, refused. 'Seeing the weakness and impotence of the king, which publicly he alleged, and understanding that the affair needed speed, I did not make the renewal and proceeded no further in the business'. As a result, Albert concluded, 'the king took back the letters which he had caused before to be presented to me'. What these letters were does not appear. Henry certainly did not resign his claim to the kingdom at this point, but perhaps he took back letters in which he had entered into commitments in relation to the offer.

Henry had been devastatingly frank in his confession of weakness, and Albert had drawn devastating conclusions from it. Can the conversation be taken at face value? Henry, of course, was using his weakness to get hold of the crusading tax. Albert, in his record, which was made for Innocent's successor, Alexander IV, was showing that he had made no compromising concessions. Alexander, in April 1255, had renewed the gift of the kingdom to Edmund, but by October 1256, at the time of Albert's record, he was having second thoughts. He wanted to know what exactly had been agreed under his predecessor before considering his options.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the whole conversation has the ring of truth. Certainly Henry himself was telling it. At this time in 1254, he had still to establish peace in Gascony and was living from hand to mouth on loans and subventions from England, frequently crying out about his poverty.¹⁵ His first gold treasure, the one saved for his crusade between 1250 and 1253, was now spent.¹⁶ He was quite without the resources needed to send Edmund to Sicily 'vigorously, speedily and powerfully'. True, the pope had offered help to the tune of some £25,000, of which half was to be delivered to Henry's representatives at Lyon. The other half was to be sent either there, or elsewhere as Henry wanted, but was contingent on the pope not needing it for the defence of the land.¹⁷ These sums were, however, much smaller sum than those dangled before Charles of Anjou back in 1253, when the latter was considering taking on the kingdom. Charles was promised £50,000 up front before he started, another £50,000 when he arrived in the kingdom, and then £100,000 a year until the kingdom was conquered, figures which give some indication of the scale of the enterprise.¹⁸ In these circumstances, Master Albert's conclusion seems absolutely right. Henry would be quite unable to send a powerful force to Sicily in any kind of immediate future.

¹³ Lunt, *Financial Relations*, 255-89.

¹⁴ The original deadline set by Alexander expired at Michaelmas 1256. I suspect this is what prompted Alexander to take stock, although the actual record of Albert's dealings was made after Alexander had decided to extend the deadline: *Foedera*, I, i, 350.

¹⁵ For example, *Rôles Gascons*, i, nos.3748-50, 3754 (*CPR 1247-58*, pp.301-2).

¹⁶ Carpenter, *Reign of Henry III*, 108-9.

¹⁷ *Foedera*, I, i, 303.

¹⁸ *Les Registres d'Innocent IV*, ed. E. Berger, 4 vols. (Paris, 1884-1919), iii, 280.

Behind this conclusion there was another factor, of which Albert must have been reminded on meeting the king for the first time since January 1253.¹⁹ Henry was no Richard the Lion Heart. He completely lacked the qualities of energy, leadership, and military expertise to mobilize and captain a great military campaign. ‘What hope could there be of this petty king, untaught in military discipline, who has never galloped a horse in battle, wielded a sword and brandished a spear?’ wrote Matthew Paris reporting reaction in 1252 to Henry III’s crusading plans.²⁰ The same could equally have been said of his plans for Sicily. Henry hardly did much to reverse the common opinion. In Gascony, he was largely sedentary and, apart from besieging one castle, never took the fight to his enemies. When it came to the Sicilian project, at no time did he stand up and say boldly that he would command the expedition himself.

When Innocent heard Master Albert’s report, it must have confirmed what he already suspected. Even in May 1254, when he ratified the gift to Edmund, he was beginning to doubt whether Henry would really come up with the military goods. In his letters of that month, he begged the queen and Peter of Savoy to see that Henry did indeed prosecute the project ‘powerfully and vigorously’. Observing that a great deal of money was needed for the enterprise, he made Henry’s readiness to save, by reducing his ‘pious expenses’, a test of his good faith.²¹ The reason why Innocent promised Henry so much less than Charles was probably because he realised it might just be throwing good money after bad.

This perception also helps to explain Innocent’s refusal to let Henry have the crusading tax. Henry, as we have seen from his conversation with Master Albert, knew that the tax *would* give him the resources to prosecute the affair, at least as a start. The tax’s assessment and collection were only just commencing, but loans could be taken out on its strength, the more especially as it promised really substantial sums of money. In the event, down to 1258 the sums raised were around £40,000.²² In May 1254 Henry’s envoys at the papal court accordingly asked Innocent to commute his vow to crusade in the Holy Land into one for the prosecution of the Sicilian project.²³ The point, of course, was that Innocent should also transfer to Henry the crusading tax. This, however, he declined to do, hence the way Henry had to renew the demand when talking to Master Albert.²⁴ In Innocent’s best case scenario, Henry might be able to accomplish the project from his own resources without needing the tax. This was the sub-text to Innocent’s letter of 31 May, in which he wondered whether Henry’s vow needed to be commuted at all, given Conrad’s death. Although he went on to say that he would issue the commutation if Henry wished, he said nothing at all about the tax,

¹⁹ Albert had been in England to offer Sicily to Richard of Cornwall: *Foedera* I, i, 284; Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, v, 346-6, 361; *Close Rolls 1251-3*, 448; *Cal. Liberate Rolls 1251-60*, 102, 109.

²⁰ Paris, *Chronica Majora*, v, 335.

²¹ *Foedera*, I, i, 302-3.

²² Lunt, *Financial Relations*, 262-3, 289-90.

²³ *Foedera*, I, i, 304.

²⁴ See Lunt, *Financial Relations*, 265. In September 1254 Henry assigned 872 marks from the crusading tenth in the dioceses of Hereford and Worcester to repay loans the bishop of Herford had obtained from Florentine merchants to further the king’s affairs at the papal court. He seems to have acted on his own authority although since the pope’s nephew, Cardinal Ottobon, was involved in the transaction, perhaps he was acting with papal consent. See *Rôles Gascons*, i, no.4305 (*CPR, 1247-58*, p.358). There is little other evidence of the king getting hold of the tax.

thus skilfully decoupling tax and vow and robbing the commutation of any point.²⁵ The one thing Innocent was not prepared to do was to pay all the expenses himself and hand Edmund the Sicilian kingdom on a plate. If the project was reduced to that, what was the point of having him in the first place? It also remained very possible that the best case scenario would evaporate, and a really substantial military effort would be necessary to get the kingdom. In that case, Henry would certainly need to put his own resources into the balance alongside anything he got from the church. If he failed to do that, the church's money would be wasted.

Master Albert, therefore, on his mission to Gascony, was charged with finding out the real colour of Henry's coin. He was able to offer some bait, for though Innocent refused to assign the tax to the Sicilian enterprise, he agreed that it should be levied for five years rather than the previous three. It was to be kept in a safe place and expended for the business of the Holy Land, as the pope decided.²⁶ This clearly left open the possibility that the pope might still divert the tax to Sicily, if it was needed, and Henry showed himself deserving by making a real effort of his own. When Master Albert saw Henry could make no effort, he concluded the whole enterprise was at an end.²⁷

For all practical purposes, Innocent drew the same conclusions. In the ebb and flow of his struggle against Manfred in the second half of 1254, he made inroads into the Hohenstaufen camp and built up a substantial body of supporters, or seeming supporters.²⁸ But none of his concessions made any reference to Edmund. Innocent was recruiting for himself.²⁹ Not surprisingly, the negotiations over the precise terms on which Edmund was to hold the kingdom, never took place or at least never reached a conclusion.³⁰ When Henry did at last make a move, it showed how right Innocent was. In November there arrived in Italy, to take possession of the kingdom on Henry and Edmund's behalf, the archbishop of Embrun and the bishop of Hereford. They were equipped not with a military force but simply with letters which told everyone to obey them. How this was to be achieved was not said, although the bishop of Hereford was allowed to borrow the princely sum of 300 marks.³¹ It is difficult to think of anything less like the thundering *adventus*, terrifying enemies and encouraging friends, which Innocent had envisaged. Innocent's response was vague in the extreme. In a letter of 17 November, he made no reference to Edmund at all, but said that if Henry hurried he would still be able to have 'the thing' (whatever that was) and 'we will be able to assign it to you' which, of course, implied it had not been assigned already. Innocent went on to warn Henry that unless he hurried he would have to concede 'the thing' to someone else.³²

²⁵ *Foedera*, I, i, 304.

²⁶ *Foedera*, I, i, 303.

²⁷ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, v, 458-9 asserts that Henry sent Innocent substantial sums of his own money in 1254 but there is no documentary evidence for that.

²⁸ See Weiler, *Henry III and the Staufien Empire*, 149-50.

²⁹ See, for example, *Foedera*, I, i, 311-12; *Registres d'Innocent IV*, iii, no. 8268.

³⁰ This is why no record survives of the terms and why in 1255 Henry III replaced his 1254 negotiating team with a new one, without any indication it had reached a conclusion: *Foedera*, I, i, 317-8.

³¹ *Rôles Gascons*, i, nos.4187, 4212, 4213, *CPR 1247-58*, 343, 344.

³² *Foedera*, I, i, 312.

Innocent died in December 1254 with his attempt to master Sicily already collapsing in the face of Manfred's power. His successor, Alexander IV, hoped at first to reach a settlement with Manfred. When this failed, he turned again to Henry. He had, however, learnt from Innocent's mistakes. The terms set out in April 1255, were totally different from those of the year before.³³ There was no question of the pope giving Henry money. Instead, Henry was to give money to the pope, lots of it, £90,000 to be precise, which amounted, so it was said, to the sum the pope had already spent prosecuting the affair. Henry was still to lead or send a military force to Sicily, but only after the money had been paid. The grant also came with a time limit and sanctions, as had not been the case at all in 1254. The money was to be paid and the army sent by Michaelmas 1256, failing which the pope would be free to withdraw the offer, excommunicate the king and place the kingdom under an interdict. These terms were the direct result of papal experiences in 1254. The time limit and the sanctions (horribly targeted at the pious Henry) were the result of his failure to do anything at all in response to papal pleas in 1254 for speedy action. The 'weakness and impotence' Henry had then admitted, and perhaps a growing awareness of the logistical problems, had also destroyed any faith in an English army. As a result, Alexander effectively decided that what he wanted was not Henry's army, but his money. Hence the stipulation not merely that Henry pay £90,000 but that he pay it *before* sending an army, which effectively ruled out an army ever being sent. To ram home the point, the pope declared that if the force arrived before the money, it would not be accepted.

Behind all this lay another crucial decision, for the pope now gave his reply to Henry's request, made to Master Albert in 1254, for the crusading tax. Diverted it was, but diverted not to fund Henry's army, but to pay the money owed the pope.³⁴ Evidently Alexander thought he would put the money to far better use than would Henry, probably rightly. Whether, had he secured Sicily with its help, he would then have installed Edmund in the kingdom, we may wonder. All of this was very different from what happened when the candidature of Charles of Anjou was revived in the 1260s. This time the pope demanded nothing up-front, assigned Charles tenths from the churches of France, and poured other monies into the campaign.³⁵ But then the papacy saw there was a real chance of Charles defeating Manfred, as indeed he did. There was no chance of Henry ever doing that.

So much became even clearer in the course of events between 1255 and 1258. Henry realised that if he was to secure Sicily he would have to do so from his own resources. He made valiant efforts to find them as the fines of gold show. But even at its height in 1257, his gold treasure amounted to only some £3800. Henry then had to break into it to fund his campaign in Wales and other expenses, minting his elegant and impractical gold coinage in order to do so.³⁶ The only way Henry could have mounted a campaign in Sicily was through securing a general tax. Of that there was never the slightest chance, as Henry's bruising confrontations

³³ *Foedera*, I, i, 316-8.

³⁴ Lunt, *Financial Relations*, 266.

³⁵ J. Dunbabin, *Charles I of Anjou* (London, 1998), 132-3.

³⁶ Carpenter, *Reign of Henry III*, 121-2.

with a succession of parliaments were to show.³⁷ In the end, the folly of the Sicilian affair, and the way some £40,000 raised by the church were spent on it for nothing, brought Henry's government into disrepute and contributed to the revolution of 1258.

Matthew Paris, in recounting the start of the Sicilian affair, felt that Innocent IV had simply exploited Henry III's fabled simplicity. This he contrasted sharply with the sagacity of Henry's brother, Richard of Cornwall, who, failing to secure sufficient financial support from the pope, had turned down an earlier offer of the kingdom. 'It is as though someone said "I will sell or give you the moon, go up and take it"', Richard remarked.³⁸ Yet, in fact, there was more to it than the simplicity of a foolish king. Indeed, as his conversation with Master Albert shows, Henry was well aware of the problems and his own weakness. How then had he ever embarked on the enterprise? To understand that, we need to appreciate a fundamental point about the Sicilian affair, first and finely grasped by Margaret Howell. It was an enterprise of the Savoyards.³⁹ After his marriage to Eleanor of Provence in 1236, Henry had become closely connected with her uncles, Peter of Savoy, who became lord of Richmond in Yorkshire, Boniface of Savoy, who became archbishop of Canterbury, and Thomas of Savoy, who, in right of his wife, was count Flanders.⁴⁰ Peter of Savoy and the Savoyard bishop of Hereford, Peter de Aigueblanche, were both at court in February 1254 when the crucial decision to accept the offer of Sicily was made.⁴¹ The chief envoy who shuttled between Henry, Master Albert and the pope was the Savoyard clerk and papal chaplain, John de Ambléon.⁴² The committee Henry nominated to negotiate the precise terms included Philip of Savoy, archbishop elect of Lyon (where the pope promised to deliver half of his money), Philip's brothers, Peter and Thomas of Savoy and the bishop of Hereford.⁴³ The king's Poitevin half brothers, although at court in February 1254, were conspicuous by their absence. This was not their affair.

Amongst the Savoyards one name stands out, that of Thomas of Savoy. As count of Flanders, Thomas had already wielded a remarkable influence over Henry and profited from some extraordinary concessions.⁴⁴ After the death of his wife, and the consequent loss of Flanders, he carved out a new career for himself in Northern Italy. In 1248 he became the emperor Frederick II's vicar general in Upper Pavia, receiving extensive concessions, including the

³⁷ J. R. Maddicott, *The Origins of the English Parliament 924-1327* (Oxford, 2010), 159-60, 181-2, 228-9, 236-7.

³⁸ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, v, 361.

³⁹ M. Howell, *Eleanor of Provence* (Oxford, 1998), 131-5. E. L. Cox, *The Eagles of Savoy. The House of Savoy in Thirteenth-Century Europe*, 242-5 is less emphatic on the point, though detailing the Savoyard involvement.

⁴⁰ Cox, *The Eagles of Savoy* is the essential work of reference for the Savoyards in England and for all other of their activities.

⁴¹ *Cal. Patent Rolls 1247-58*, 265-73. For a major concession to Peter at this time, see *Rôles Gascons*, i, no.2363 (*Cal. Patent Rolls 1247-58*, 268) ; see *Close Rolls 1256-9*, 27; *Calendar of Fine Rolls 1253-4*, no.263 where the king's order seems to have been misunderstood.

⁴² *Close Rolls 1253-4*, 213; *Rôles Gascons*, i, no.2367 (*Cal. Patent Rolls 1247-58*, 269); *Registres d'Alexandre IV*, iii, no.3036, pp.89-91; *Foedera*, I, i, 304. John was Dean of Saint-André, near Chambéry.

⁴³ *Registres d'Alexandre IV*, iii, no.3036, pp.89-90.

⁴⁴ See for example, *Foedera*, I, i, 268-9 (*Cal. Patent Rolls 1247-58*, 7, 9); Paris, *Chronica Majora*, v, 2-1. See also J. R. Maddicott, *Simon de Montfort* (Cambridge, 1994), 24-5. Cox, *Eagles of Savoy* gives full coverage of Thomas's career.

castle and town of Turin. Many of the grants were notional but Thomas was determined to make them a reality. In that cause, after Frederick II's death, he deftly changed sides, and married a niece of Innocent IV. 'From a son of wrath, he became a son of grace', as Matthew Paris put it.⁴⁵ His position was further enhanced by the death of his elder brother, in June 1253, which made him regent of Savoy.⁴⁶

Thomas, therefore, was ideally placed both to promote and profit from the Sicilian project. In May 1254, he was at the papal court when the pope confirmed the gift to Edmund. Indeed, it was he and John de Ambléon who asked Innocent to commute Henry's vow from the Holy Land to Sicily.⁴⁷ Some documents preserved in the archives of Turin give a further insight into his role. Although in print since 1939, their full significance has not been appreciated by historians. It has always been known that, in October 1254, Edmund granted Thomas the principality of Capua in the northern part of the Sicilian kingdom. In the archives at Turin, however, there are papal letters which show that Innocent had actually confirmed the gift in the previous May. In explaining his action, Innocent said that he had learnt of Henry's gift (on Edmund's behalf) through John de Ambléon.⁴⁸ John had left Gascony for the papal court in February 1254, going by way of Master Albert in Vendome to whom he relayed the news of Henry's acceptance of the kingdom. It would seem, therefore, that the gift of Capua to Thomas was also made in February 1254, at precisely the same time as the kingdom's acceptance. The two things were intimately linked. Capua was Thomas's reward for his labours in securing the offer. It might also of course give him the strength to make it a reality. This was not his only reward. The letter of February 1254 announcing John de Ambléon's mission to the papal court appears on the patent rolls immediately below an order to the exchequer settling up the arrears of Thomas's annual fee.⁴⁹

Another papal letter in Turin shows that Innocent was soon having further thoughts about the gift of Capua. Writing to Thomas on 9 June 1254, he declared that

'we daily receive better news of the [Sicilian] kingdom. Wherefore, it should be your concern to lead quickly that man, through whom and in whom your race is exalted. We ask that, as you love us, and as you do not wish to impede the desired affair, you do not show him the letters about the principality of Capua until he is in Savoy with an army'.⁵⁰

It is fairly clear what this is all about. The 'man' in question is Edmund, Thomas's great nephew, and thus one of his race ('genus'). The letter referred to is that which the pope had

⁴⁵ Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 255-6; Cox, *Eagles of Savoy*, 184-6, 206-17.

⁴⁶ Cox, *Eagles of Savoy*, 226, 229-30; Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 134.

⁴⁷ *Foedera*, I, i, 304; and see *Registres d' Innocent IV*, iii, nos. 7571, 7742.

⁴⁸ *Documenti sulle relazioni tra la casa di Savoia e la Santa Sede nel medio evo, 1066-1268*, ed. P. Fontana (Torino, 1939), nos. clix, clx. I owe knowledge of this volume to Cox, *Eagles of Savoy*, where it is cited extensively. Michael Ray kindly directed me to the copy in the British Library. The reference to Innocent's confirmation in the Archives of Turin, is *Principi del Sangue diversi Mazzo*, 1 no.3. I owe this to Nicholas Vincent who has inspected the original document. Cox (*Eagles of Savoy*, 243) knew of Innocent's confirmation but gives a misleading account of what happened.

⁴⁹ *Rôles Gascons*, i, nos. 2366, 2367 (*Cal. Patent Rolls 1247-58*, 269).

⁵⁰ *Documenti sulle relazioni tra la casa di Savoia e la Santa Sede*, ed. Fontana, no. clxi. Cox, *Eagles of Savoy*, 243 refers to this letter, describing it simply as one in which Innocent 'wrote to Thomas about military arrangements for the conquest of his new dominions', referring apparently to Capua.

written to Henry III at the end of May, announcing his confirmation of the gift of Capua. The letter was actually given to Thomas, which is why it too survives in Turin.⁵¹ What Innocent had now realised was that if Henry heard of the gift of Capua before sending his son, he might conclude that everything was falling into his lap without him having to stir. Thomas was, therefore, to keep quiet about the gift until ‘the man’, Edmund, actually arrived in Savoy with an army. Edmund and Henry were left unnamed in the letter in order, of course, to avoid being too open about the deception which was being practiced.

Innocent’s letter thus testifies again to Innocent’s doubts about Henry’s power and intentions. It also reveals how Thomas of Savoy sought to allay them. It was Thomas himself who was to lead Edmund’s army. The army was to reach Italy not through the closed port of Marseilles but through Savoy and its Alpine passes. Before that it was probably to pass through Lyon, where, as we have seen, Philip of Savoy was archbishop elect and Innocent had offered to send half of his promised money. Just how Edmund was to reach Lyon does not appear but the idea must have been to get a safe conduct through France. Matthew Paris mentions this as the intention of both Henry and earlier his brother, Earl Richard.⁵² Perhaps Master Albert, based in France where he was legate, took an optimistic view of his diplomatic talents. Meanwhile, however, if Thomas himself took the papal money at Lyon, he could hire soldiers and uphold Edmund’s cause till his arrival. Thomas had also seen how to get more money, for it was he and John de Ambléon who urged the pope to commute Henry’s vow from the Holy Land to Sicily, which meant, of course, commuting the crusading taxation as well. Perhaps beyond that, out of touch with English affairs, Thomas thought money might be forthcoming from an English parliament.

Innocent was only half convinced, and refused to give the project lift off by assigning to Henry the crusading tax. There is also no evidence he sent any money to Lyon. The trouble was that the Savoyard strategy needed time, time to raise money from the tax, and time to negotiate a passage through France (if that ever was negotiable). Thomas was clearly unable or unwilling to put major resources of his own into the enterprise, if we may judge from the little he seems to have actually done in 1254.⁵³ The stop put by the pope on announcing the concession of Capua presumably hampered his taking possession of the principality, if he ever did. It was not till October 1254 that, ignoring the papal restriction, he secured charters from Edmund and Henry making and confirming the gift.⁵⁴ In December, far from carrying Edmund’s standard in Italy, he joined Henry in Paris.⁵⁵ Of course, the Savoyards knew from the start that this was a high risk project which might not succeed. But here there was another cardinal consideration. There was nothing to lose. Henry had to put no money up front and would be subject to no sanctions if he failed. And who could tell what would happen? At the top of the scale, the project might make Edmund king of Sicily, and Thomas his regent.

⁵¹ *Documenti sulle relazioni tra la casa di Savoia e la Santa Sede*, ed. Fontana, no.clix.

⁵² Paris, *Historia Anglorum*, iii, 126-7; *Chronica Majora*, v, 516, 547-8.

⁵³ Cox, *Eagles of Savoy*, 244, however, wonders if Thomas was in the papal army.

⁵⁴ *Rôles Gascons*, I, i, no.4210 (*Cal. Patent Rolls 1247-58*, 344); In the archives of Turin there is a copy of Edmund’s own grant dated 9 October 1254: *Principi del Sangue diversi*, *Mazzo* 1, no.6, a reference I owe to Nicholas Vincent. Henry’s confirmation is dated 12 October 1254.

⁵⁵ *Close Rolls 1253-4*, 284.

At the bottom, it was at least a negotiating card to bargain for some lesser settlement. To that end the Savoyards continued to retain a foot in both camps. In February 1254, at the very moment when Henry was accepting the papal offer, Thomas was asking the pope to give Conrad more time in negotiations for a settlement.⁵⁶ Thomas's niece (daughter of his elder brother Amadeus, count of Savoy) was married to none other than Manfred, which might open the way to some other settlement from which the Savoyards, and indeed Henry could profit.⁵⁷

Had Henry III approached the Sicilian business in this calculating and cynical spirit all might have been well. Up to a point he did. As his conversation with Master Albert shows, he was well aware of his own impotence and his crying need for the crusading tax. Yet at some point, something fatal happened, for which the Savoyards themselves should not be blamed. Henry became obsessed with the project, in the same way as he had been obsessed earlier with his crusade. 'He was so exhilarated by the shady papal promise and his heart so filled with inane joy, that proclaiming his exultation in voice, gesture and laughter, he called his son openly king of Sicily, believing that he had already profited from the subjugation of the kingdom' declared Matthew Paris.⁵⁸ The Burton annalist speaks of the elation of both king and queen in similar terms.⁵⁹ It was in this unreasoning spirit that Henry accepted the offer of 1255 with its fatal terms. Neither Thomas nor Peter of Savoy were closely involved with this decision.⁶⁰ Henry was under no domestic pressure to act as he did; indeed absolutely the reverse. Had he turned his back on the project and renewed his commitment to a crusade to the Holy Land, he would also have increased rather than diminished his international prestige. The result might have been the pope turning to Charles of Anjou a few years earlier than he did, but that would have been a small price to pay for escaping the terrible humiliations which were to come.

Henry thought of the ultimate prize. Sicily was a kingdom which exceeded all others in the world in its wealth and delights, as the pope told him.⁶¹ Having failed to recover the old Angevin empire, he would put a Mediterranean empire in its place. From Sicily he would launch a crusade which would succeed where Louis IX's had failed. In November 1255, just after he formally accepted the papal terms, Henry offered a rich cope of samite at the altar of Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey 'for Edmund, son of the king, that God may give a happy outcome to his Sicilian enterprise'.⁶² Surely the Confessor and through him God would find a way. It was not to be. Indeed, given the likely fate of an English army in Italy one can only be thankful that it never got there. The terms Henry had accepted in so

⁵⁶ *Registres d' Innocent IV*, iii, no.7758.

⁵⁷ Cox, *Eagles of Savoy*, 158-9. For schemes for Edmund to marry Manfred's daughter, see Lloyd, *England and the Crusade*, 226-7, 230 and Weiler, *Henry III and the Staufien Empire*, 169-70.

⁵⁸ Paris, *Chronica Majora*, v, 458.

⁵⁹ *Annales Monastici*, i, 349. When the annalist (p.339) said Pope Alexander offered Henry the kingdom recognizing his power and astuteness, he was, one fears, being ironic.

⁶⁰ It is noticeable that Peter of Savoy does not attest a single royal charter during the course of 1255 when the decisions over Sicily were being made. He, Thomas and Philip of Savoy, having featured in the negotiating team of 1254, were removed from that of 1255, although Boniface of Savoy, archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of Hereford do appear on it: *Foedera*, i, i, 317-8,

⁶¹ *Foedera I*, i, 302.

⁶² *Close Rolls 1254-6*, 240.

unreasoning a spirit ensured that large sums of money flowed from the English church to the pope while at the same time depriving Henry of the only resources he was ever likely to have to pursue the project. At least a similar fate did not overtake the gold Henry was saving on the fine rolls. This he and his government were able to spend themselves between 1257 and 1260. The only trouble was that after the revolution of 1258 it was a government over which Henry had limited control.⁶³ Of Henry's gold treasure there remain today a handful of gold coins and the magnificent golden bulla made for Edmund as king of Sicily. Now preserved in the British Museum, on the one side Edmund sits crowned and enthroned, holding orb and sceptre. The legend around the rim proclaims 'EADMUNDUS DEI GRACIA SICILIE REX'. On the other side, there are the arms of England and the legend 'EADMUNDUS NATUS REGIS ANGLIE ILLUSTRIS'. Gazing at the bulla, and reflecting on all it symbolized, or was meant to symbolize, one can understand why Henry was attracted by the Sicilian project. The truth was, however, that he never had the resources to make the proud boasts on the bulla a reality. That did not matter so long as the project cost Henry and England nothing. It was a very different matter once it did. Then, instead of '*illustris*', Henry did indeed seem '*simplex*'.

The link to images of the bulla is as follows:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectId=44304&partid=1&output=Places%2F!!%2FOR%2F!!%2F42362%2F!%2F42362-1-3%2F!%2FEmblem+of+England%2F!%2F%2F!!%2F%2F!!!%2F&orig=%2Fresearch%2Fsearch_the_collection_database%2Fadvanced_search.aspx¤tPage=9&numpages=10

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⁶³ Carpenter, *Reign of Henry III*, 122, 129.