

S4.2 FABLES, LEGENDS AND HISTORY



S4.2.3

We will look at a historical text based on evidence.

A. The following extract is about a historical event, that is, an event that really happened.

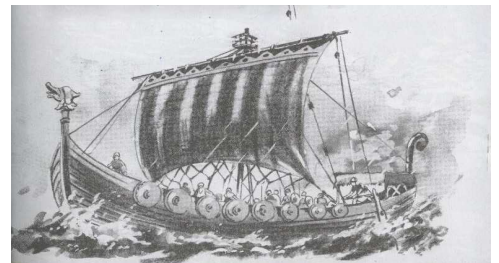
The Arrival of Count Roger

Text adapted from Denfil - The Fourth Book

In the year 1091 a small fleet of ships set sail from Sicily on their way to Malta. On the ships there was Count Roger and a large army of Norman soldiers. They were thinking of taking over our islands.

In Malta at the time there were a lot of Arabs. They had been here for a considerable amount of time. When the Normans came ashore, the Arabs realised that the Normans had a very powerful army. In no time at all they entered the city of Mdina.

When the "Qadi" or "Hakem" (the ruler or governor of the island) saw this, he quickly went to meet the Count and they agreed to stop the fighting. The Count accepted and became Malta's new ruler. This meant that our ancestors and the Arabs who lived here had to pay the Count taxes.

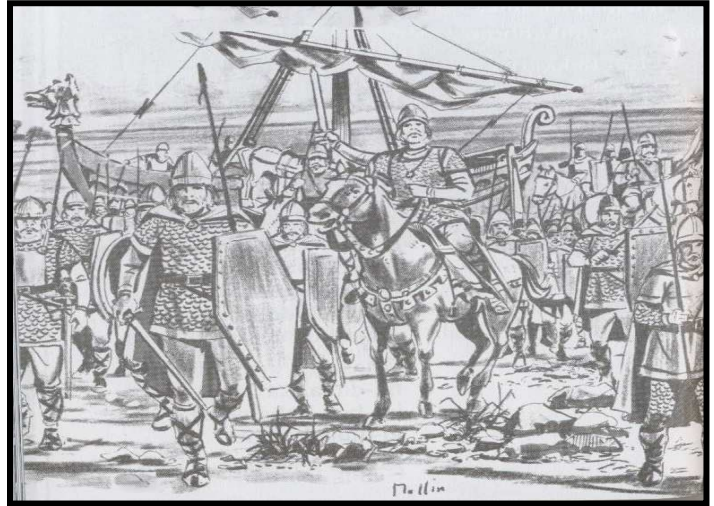


A Norman ship approaching Malta

Count Roger and his soldiers also took over the island of Gozo. Then they loaded their ships with food, weapons and horses and went back to Sicily.

B. Drawings to embellish a historical text.

This is a drawing and not a photo. Through this drawing, Ġorġ Mallia tried to recreate the scene, as he imagined it, of Count Roger and his Norman soldiers arriving in Malta to claim the island from the Arabs. At that time there were no photo cameras. What does the artist do before drawing such a picture?



- ❖ he researches the history of the Normans, especially their arrival in the Maltese islands
- ❖ he looks up Norman clothing, which nowadays, is found in museums.
- ❖ he looks for information about the ships the Normans had.

When he finishes the research, he can start drawing. **Therefore we can say that a picture like this one by Ġorġ Mallia, is very useful because it helps us to understand the history of the Normans better.**

This is another drawing by Ġorġ Mallia. It shows us the clothing during the time of the Arabs and the cotton plant, which was very common in our islands up to some time ago. A picture like this also



makes it easier for us to imagine what life in Malta was like in the time of the Arabs and the arrival of the Normans.

C. More readings about the arrival of the Normans in Malta.

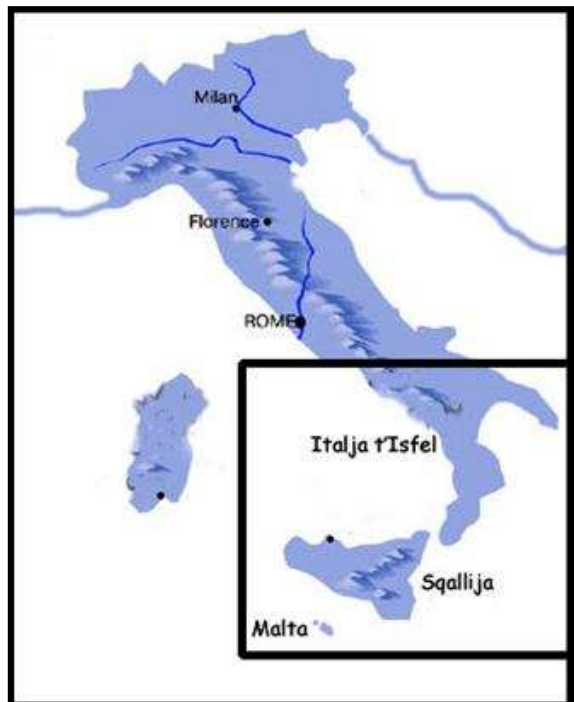
N.B. The following is all historical knowledge based on evidence.

Count Roger was a Norman and he came to Malta in 1091. He set sail from Sicily and came to try and conquer Malta.

Why did the Normans come to take over the Maltese islands?

Look at the map - the square shows us the Norman Kingdom in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea. In Sicily, Count Roger and the Normans were at the end of a war with the Arabs; Sicily was almost entirely in the hands of the Normans.

Since Malta is in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, it is of strategic importance, because from it, one can reach many other places, both in North Africa and also in Southern Europe.



At that time, the Maltese islands were ruled by the Arabs too, so to eliminate any threats to the Norman Kingdom, Count Roger came to attack Malta and to overthrow the Arabs.

How did Count Roger defeat the Arabs who were in the Maltese islands?

At first the Arabs were going to fight and resist, but the Normans were very good warriors and well trained in warfare.

The Normans won because they happened to be armed and well trained.

The Count had spent his life fighting



the enemies of the Christians. He tricked the Arabs and when the latter saw the strength of the Normans, they quickly surrendered. An agreement was made between Count Roger and the Arabic ruler of Malta who was called the "Qadi". Thanks to this agreement, the fighting stopped. The agreement was made under a tent.

The Arabs surrendered Malta to the Normans. Since the Count was now the new ruler of Malta, our ancestors and the Arabs made an agreement with him that every year, they would go to Sicily and pay the "ħarag" (taxes). These were paid in silver. After this agreement the Normans took over Malta and entered Mdina without wasting any time. Later on, the Normans also took over Gozo, from where they took many things that they felt would be useful.

What did Count Roger's victory over the Arabs mean? What effect did the Normans' victory have?

It is important to understand that Malta was always under foreign rule. These are some nations which ruled over us:

Before the Normans: the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians, the Romans, the Arabs

After the Normans: the Knights, the French and the British

The arrival of the Normans in Malta was another phase of foreign rule in our country - the Normans were just one of a number of foreign rulers.

With this victory, Christian religion began to take firm root in Malta. Our culture and customs gradually became more and more similar to European ones.

How do you think the Maltese people felt when Count Roger defeated the Arabs who were in Malta at the time?

Can you imagine how the arrival of Count Roger would make you feel? For a long time the Maltese people had had a language and traditions similar to those of the Arabs - then suddenly the Normans arrive most probably, many people who lived here were confused and didn't know what to do. The Normans boosted commerce with Sicily and the lower part of Italy which were also under their rule.

It is important to understand that for a long time after the arrival of Count Roger in Malta, the Arabs were not sent away from the Maltese islands but continued to live here. However, after a reign of more than 200 years, the Arab influence started decreasing and was replaced by many European customs. As time passed, more Maltese people became Christians.

A FINAL NOTE:

- ❖ The story of the arrival of Count Roger in Malta is a historical event.
- ❖ It is a **true story** - Count Roger came to Malta and defeated the Arabs in 1091. This story really happened.