

Fa 18/118a

- Abbato alla Trinità,
Palermo, April 4th.
1878

My dear Müller,

(The above address is physi-
cally false, but practically true;
I am at this moment at Girgenti,
which I like rather to think of as
Akropolis; but Palermo is still my
deed: quarters and address for
some weeks to come).

I have been thinking of writing
to you ever since I came into this
island, that is, for three months
and more, to ask whether you have
ever given your mind to the ques-
tion of its language, which to me
is one of the greatest of puzzles.

(April 5th). Of course I look at it purely historically. I know they speak a dialect of Italian - if any body told me that that dialect consists many words borrowed from Greek and Arabic, it is only what I should expect; but the dialect is not Greek or Arabic with words borrowed from Latin, but Latin with - it may be - words borrowed from Greek or Arabic. Now why is this? Historically I should have expected Greek to be the language spoken, but with a large borrowing of Latin and Arabic words. It is a long time since I read Cicero in Verrem; but I remember dressing from the it the distinct correlation that Greek was then the language of the country, that Latin

existed only as it existed in Greece itself or any other Greek speaking country. My impression is that the dialect in which Σικελος and Σικελιστας, so strong in Thucydides, had died out, that Siculi taken in both, & that the Siculi are counted as Greeks. I shall look more into this when I get time; but this is my impression.

When the Norcross came, they clearly found Greek and Arabic the two languages of the island which had any public recognition. Throughout the twelfth century he paid no attention to the fact that it is very common to find the Latin Greek, and Arabic. One of the most singular is a well of the palace chapel, & commemorates King Rogers getting up at a clock. The fact is recorded in all three languages. But oddly enough the three inscriptions do not

fractate one choker. The Latin
simply records the fact; the Greek
and the Arabic both go off into
rhetoric, but do not fractate the
choker. (NB. I learned Hebrew when
I was a boy. I have not kept it up;
but I can read it, and I remember
enough words to hinder Senik's Kiyo
from being quite ~~the~~ strange to me. I
also learned the Arabic alphabet,
but I have quite forgotten it, and
cannot read a word. But, if ~~the~~ it
is written in Roman letters - as
you do Persian - I can tell a word
here and there. So I found pretty far
in the book about Palermo, give the
Arabic text with a Latin crib, but
hardly ever the Arabic word in Roman
letters, which I should like)

The Norrell of course, as they thought
it Latin as a kind of official language,

brought in French as a kind spoken
 language. Now where are Greek,
 Arabic, French, all gone? Why have
 they all given way to Italian?
 The change began early. There are
 Sicilian poets in Italian in 13th
 cent. & in Murice cathedral, about
 1180 some of the Latin inscriptions
 run off into something queer, which
 is said to be the local Italian.

I have heard too of three ex-
 :planations, none of which quite
 satisfy. One, which seems popular
 is the idea, or that the Sicilians
 spoke a tongue akin to Latin -
 of that I suppose there is no doubt,
 both on other grounds and for some
 words which crept into Sicilian
 - and that that tongue went on,
 & formed the basis of the present dia-
 lect.

lect. Of course the Roneer did not
commonly take much notice of native
dialects, but it would be odd, if
they did not find out when certain
of their subjects spoke a tongue next
door to their own, but set them
down as Greeks, because they used
- as I suppose they would in any
Greek as their high: polite tongue.

Again I have heard it suggested
that Greek died out under the
Roneer government, that Latin
became the ordinary tongue, & that
Greek came in again as an official
speech for Constantinople. Now
Greek certainly died out at Men-
gialia & such places shut by by
themselves, (they I don't know how
long it took at M.); but to die out

in a large country like Sicily - if Sicily was thoroughly
Greek - is a shabby thing. They remember that Sicily
was ruled for Constantinople only till the sixth cen-
tury, when the Byzantine power had hardly become
definitely Greek. Latin remained the official speech
of the ^{most part of Sicily} ~~whole~~ till a few centuries
ago, & left great traces of itself a Greek when
Greek became official. The ecclesiastical tongue was
~~mostly~~ always Greek.

Others say that Italian became the tongue through the
patronage of Italian literature by Frederick the
Second. Now this would account for Italian displacing
Greek as the court speech - would it account for its

displacing two national layers,
like Arctic and Greek? St Mark,
part of the Sicilian kind, I be-
lieve the tongue is Arctic, but
much corrupted with Italic
and other words.

The fact is clear. Italian
~~became~~^{was} a - I do not know
whether I should say the - po-
pular language in Sicily in the 13th
cent. - perhaps at the end of the
12th. How came it to be so?

That is my puzzle. But I/fools
and blind to mistake the tongue of
Tirolois for a corrupt form of the
tongue of Verres.

If you can give me as little I shall
be very thankful. I shall then be able to
say what you. Yours very truly

Edward Freeman