

**The Sicilian Vespers:
A History of the Mediterranean World in the Later Thirteenth Century
Steven Runciman**

Cambridge University Press 1992 [1958]

A book review by [Danny Yee](http://dannyreviews.com/) © 1993 <http://dannyreviews.com/>

A history of the Kingdom of Sicily in the 13th century, *The Sicilian Vespers* offers a readable, smoothly flowing narrative. While most of the events described occur in Sicily and southern Italy, the story naturally spans the whole Mediterranean world — Crusades against the Muslims, attacks on the Byzantine Empire, politics in Northern Italy and Spain — and happenings even further afield, in England and Germany and Central Asia. The main narrative traces the history of the conflict between the Papacy and the Empire in central and southern Italy, the papal selection of Charles of Anjou to supplant the Hohenstaufen rule in Sicily and southern Italy, and the attempts to restore the Hohenstaufens. It describes the planning by Charles of an attack on Constantinople and culminates in an account of the Sicilian Vespers, the bloody uprising of Sicily against the Angevins, and the conquest of the island by Aragon.

The Sicilian Vespers is pure political and military history, with no discussion of the social or economic background. It really needs complementing with a 13th century equivalent of Braudel's *The Mediterranean World*. Still, old-fashioned narrative history has its place, and a more annoying problem is the absence of a map of Sicily and southern and central Italy; the narrative makes frequent references to reasonably obscure places, and most readers will be left reaching for an atlas at regular intervals. (The two maps provided cover areas of France and northern Italy much more peripheral to the text.) These minor failings aside, *The Sicilian Vespers* is a lot of fun and should be a source of pleasure for all history fans.

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