

**The Imperial Legacy in Limbo,
Scholarly debates on the origins of modernity with Frederick II Hohenstaufen**

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Abstract

The enclosed study will entail a detailed exploration into the modern historiography behind the Hohenstaufen emperor and king of Sicily, Frederick II (r. 1198-1250). Three main texts will be examined from across the German and English-speaking worlds of scholarship and ranging widely in their times of publication—that of Kantorowicz (1927), Van Cleve (1972), and lastly Abulafia (1988). In addition, several supplementary texts on the subject from both cultural-linguistic traditions have been included. Prior to the heart of the textual analysis, a comprehensive summary of the dominant Western philosophical views that forged the twentieth-century scholarship on the matter is given in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the intellectual climate in which these historians participated.

The primary argument around which the scholarship centers is the position of the emperor and his reforms in the history of Western civilization. While it has been found that in the German scholarship historians tend to adhere to an often idealized image of the emperor as proto-modern state-builder and forward-thinking monarch, the Anglophone academic circles have maintained suspicion from the start. Further claims that Frederick was the progenitor or even single catalyst for the cultural and political rebirth of the Italian Renaissance (some, as will be seen, going as far as to place him in anticipation of Protestantism) appear to have driven English-speaking scholars in Britain and North America to hone and refine their arguments over the years until a suitable critical alternative to the German-speaking world's Romantic-ideal could be offered.

The debates surrounding Frederick II rarely enter into any rudimentary collegiate discourse on the Middle Ages or Early Modernity. With an identification and delineation of these tendencies and arguments among the world's foremost scholars regarding Frederick's role in inspiring both the political developments as well as the cultural interests of the Italian Renaissance one can hope to stimulate further interest in whether or not the Hohenstaufen emperor exemplifies the germs of modernity or is simply an unconscious and insignificant continuation of the medieval world.

Preface

It is clear from the outset to most students and scholars of history and cultural studies that the Mediterranean has occupied a vast trans-cultural space of interaction from Greco-Roman antiquity on through the modern era. The medieval period is no exception to this reality. The medieval Mediterranean was a zone of seemingly extraordinary interactions and events in a period which, rather unfairly, receives the broad brush of bleakness and gloom all too much. That is not to say that there was no decline or that Voltaire was completely incorrect in labeling the post-Roman centuries as darker than the golden age of the Caesars. However, it was in the Mediterranean territories, the heart of the old Empire, that the fantastic cross-cultural melding of Latin, German, Greek, and Arabic traditions was able to transpire—that varying degrees of expediency and cooperation were often able to triumph over the obstinate dogmatism that characterized much of a society concerned primarily with the salvation of the soul in the afterlife. From this multi-colored patchwork emerged Frederick II Hohenstaufen, *imperator romanorum*. According to the papal monarchy he was the agent of Satan, the Antichrist, friend of the Saracens, and protector of infidels. Much of this owed more to the political circumstances and the times that bore him, as regular interaction with Muslims in the region was nothing new in the *Mezzogiorno*. A quick glimpse at the early medieval period in the region proves this beyond any doubt. The fall of Spain to the Muslims in 710/11 is the first example. Julian, the last *comes* of Ceuta and probably also a Byzantine governor in alliance with the Visigothic court at Toledo, experienced a falling out with King Roderic, perhaps even sheltering the sons to a former claimant of the throne. This led Julian to consider an alliance with the approaching armies of Islam, convincing them to cross between the Pillars of Hercules and remove Roderic from power, with ships, men, and reconnaissance all abundantly provided by the Byzantine *comes*.

In 827, civil war broke out in the autonomous Byzantine province of Sicily, leading the rebel *tourmarches* Euphemius to flee overseas to the Aghlabids on the African shore in order to request military assistance on the island. Euphemius himself was treacherously murdered by his enemies at Enna the following year, but his incitement enticed the Muslims to invade, the campaigns to conquer the island dragging on until the last Byzantine stronghold fell in 902. Around 860, Sawdan, the last ruler of the short-lived Emirate of Bari, was on diplomatic terms with neighboring Lombard states and maintained good relations with those *dhimmi* (Christians and Jews living under Islamic rule) who lived under him and were respectful of his right to rule. On the other coast of the *Mezzogiorno* Landulf II, prince-bishop of Capua, twice (863 and 875) employed Muslim mercenaries in his efforts to win the upper hand in the incessant warfare which ravaged southern Italy at the time. Some objections from the clergy notwithstanding, the prince-bishop was never formally reprimanded for such actions.

Associations with Saracens and Oriental styles were not all that characterized Frederick's reputation. Modern historians have praised him as a polyglot, rationalist, philosopher, patron of the arts, Renaissance precursor, and a major progenitor of the modern secular state. He was not alone during his own time in earning such characterizations—whether they are deserved or not is a matter of debate. Similarly, James I of Aragon (r. 1213-76) was known as a lawgiver in terms of maritime trade, patron of the Catalan vernacular, and a lover of wisdom. The Aragonese monarch, like Frederick, composed his own written works such as the first royal autobiography of its kind as well as a compendium of cross-cultural maxims and proverbs, many from the leading minds of the medieval period. Roger of Lauria, the successful Italo-Sicilian admiral under king Manfred, and other supporters of the imperial cause fled to James' court in Catalan country after the Angevin takeover of southern Italy in 1268. Of course, the king's son Peter III

would lead the re-conquest of Sicily from the Angevins in the War of Sicilian Vespers for which he would, like Frederick, be excommunicated. By comparison to Frederick and James, strong rulers struggling if not succeeding to rule in their own right, Henry III Plantagenet appears decidedly weaker, owing mainly to his position as both papal vassal and Frederick's brother-in-law.

In the course of the twentieth-century, three lengthy academic treatises have arisen to judge the course of Frederick's reign and its exact legacy for Western civilization. The first originates in the German-speaking world in 1927, the product of the colorful and controversial Ernst H. Kantorowicz. Our second chronological example is the work of a meticulous Midwesterner, Thomas C. Van Cleve, published in 1972.¹ The third and final textual perspective also comes out of Anglophone scholarly circles, but this time from Oxford instead of the U.S. David Abulafia's critical look at Frederick's reign, partially in relation to past scholarship, is his best known piece, being printed in 1988. The following sections will attempt to recount each of these three perspectives with as much clarity as possible. If more attention is given here and there to Kantorowicz and his work, it is due to the fact that as an author he is fundamental to understanding the narrative of evolving scholarship on the subject, his critics and supporters alike reading sometimes more like satellites in harmony with or in response to the orbit of his influence. First though one must understand the scholarly and philosophical traditions that fostered these historical perspectives as well as how these traditions interplay with earlier views on Frederick II Hohenstaufen, *rex Siciliae*.

¹ The gap shows the breadth of time during which Kantorowicz's interpretation was accepted as gold, his lengthy biography of the emperor being renewed for publication into the late 1950s.

Opposing traditions

If one is to understand the historical study of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries then one must inevitably begin with Hegel and the philosophical dichotomy he held with the British utilitarianism of the same age. Although the historians may not entirely belong to one camp or another, the major point to hold in mind is the gulf that existed philosophically and academically between the English-speaking world and the German one. In his highly influential work on the philosophy and purpose of history, Hegel proposes a rational worldview of historical events guided by Reason which is equated with the *Weltgeist*,² the actualization of the basic *telos* behind world history. “The world of intelligence and self-conscious will is not subject to chance, but rather [it] must demonstrate itself in the light of the self-conscious Idea.” Thus, for the first time since Classical Antiquity, a Western thinker was espousing the doctrine that there existed reason in nature as well as in history as a component of a natural cosmos. Reason is “the activation of that goal in world history—bringing it forth from the inner source to external manifestation.”³

Furthermore, for the Hegelian idealist it is Spirit, as opposed to matter, which forms the underlying substance of world-historical processes. Unlike physical nature, Spirit and its realization of the Idea are self-determining processes. The term *bei-sich-selbst-sein* employed here is illustrative of this fact. The final cause then of history or Idea entails Spirit’s self-awareness of its own autonomy and the realization of that autonomy. The material world therefore is subject to the spiritual one which Hegel describes as “the substantially real world.”⁴ The Idea itself, as mentioned before, can be anthropomorphized as God, the eternal driving force

² For which he interchangeably makes use of ‘God,’ ‘the Absolute,’ or ‘Idea.’

³ Georg W. F. Hegel, “Introduction to the Philosophy of History,” in *Modern Political Thought, from Machiavelli to Nietzsche*, ed. David Wooton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008), ch. 2.

⁴ Terms that Nietzsche would have scoffed at as will be seen below.

of the universe willing Himself in the realm of Spirit and manifesting Himself constantly in the world through the unfolding of history.⁵ Historical events in turn entail an unfolding of reason through multiple stages of consciousness, culminating in Absolute Spirit. This process occurs in each stage through a complex and sometimes convoluted method of synthesis of ‘theses’ and ‘antitheses.’ For example, sense-certainty and conceptual presuppositions combine to produce the consciousness of perception. These ideas on the synthesis of different modes of consciousness in order to formulate new ones were enumerated some years earlier in Hegel’s flagship endeavor *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807.

The *telos* of world history is thus achieved in the State, where particular individual wills experience freedom through moral accord with the laws of the government guided by universal Reason. These ideas mark a continuation of Hegel’s predecessor, Kant, who invoked the ‘categorical imperative’ as the binding moral law of rational beings who are deontological by nature, taking up roles which involve specific duties and obligations within well-ordered society. So for the Hegelians, passions and human actions alone are blind but manifest or actualize the reason inherent in world history—Napoleon was not fully aware of the sociopolitical ramifications of his actions, he only pursued the expansion of his empire through conquest. Similarly, though the campaigns of Alexander, Caesar, and Genghis Khan all caused the deaths and monumentally increased the suffering of bystanders or uninvolved victims, numbering in the millions for each, their actions contributed to the progress of history. History advances through the aforementioned stages of consciousness, all gravitating inexorably towards total freedom in Absolute Spirit. In this way “the State is the externally existing, genuinely ethical life. It is the union of the universal essential will with the subjective will—and this is ethics.” In another

⁵ Hegel, “Introduction to the Philosophy of History,” ch. 3 sec. I. One can sense here an obvious evolution of Aristotle’s Prime Mover of the cosmos.

passage Hegel claims that “the state is the Idea of Spirit in the externalized form of human will and its freedom. It is in the state, therefore, that historical change occurs essentially.”⁶

Hegel believed that geography and anthropological development allowed particular nations to utilize their natural endowments to advance world history (the geographical element being Aristotelian in origin while the anthropological element is indicative of the early scientific racism that was rapidly gaining ground in the nineteenth-century) and its essential spirit to the following stage of consciousness. For example, the Jews are propped up as the vehicle of World Spirit at the closing of Antiquity or what he refers to as the onset of ‘the Germanic World’ as a ‘world-historical realm,’ a clear influence on Spengler’s categorization of world-historical civilizations in his World War I-era opus *The Decline of the West*.⁷

To contrast, in the Anglophone world philosophical utilitarianism dominated the academic worldview. Bentham followed in the realist tradition of Scottish ‘common-sense’ empiricism typified by Reid, Berkeley, and Hume as well as in the tradition of Machiavelli who earlier decoupled the State from morality, rejecting legal theories which were grounded in ethics. However, concerning the latter, Bentham believed that laws should benefit society and its individuals as opposed to Machiavelli’s theories where the state serves the prince. Under the more stark utilitarianism of Mill, society was seen as a mere fabrication comprised of individuals who must guard against the tyranny of social authority suppressing their individuality. The entire complex and moving conversation of purpose behind history is thus averted or completely discarded in the English-speaking schools.

⁶ *ibid.*, ch. 3 sec. III.

⁷ Hegel, “Philosophy of Right,” in *Modern Political Thought*, 346-7, 358.

Beginnings of German scholarship

No one work is more integral to the entire debate around Frederick II than Jacob Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 1860. He was born to a prominent Swiss-German family from Basel in the wake of the Napoleonic wars and amidst the spirit of Hegelian Germany which was now a conglomeration of statelets serving as a military buffer against any perceived resurgence in France. Young Burckhardt was a passionate youth with an appreciation of the arts and an interest in cultural history, studying under the classical and Renaissance scholar Franz Kugler at Berlin. Within his time his lectures were widely heard and disseminated. Nietzsche at age twenty-four was captivated by a lecture of his at Basel.⁸ Burckhardt himself was a thorough anti-modernist, opposing Romantic nationalism, classical liberalism, democratic revolution, and the like. Though he also disavowed the convoluted philosophy of history offered by the Hegelians, he was equally distant from the British-style positivist stance or "historical empiricism."

While the positivistic utilitarians viewed historical study scientifically, Burckhardt regarded it as an art-form that need not be comprehensive, focusing instead on particular individuals and events relevant to the author's conception of history. By this method he could avoid the worn narrative approach and provide the 'sketch of the whole' (*Gesamt schilderung*), an interpretation conveying the essence of an age based around facts deemed germane to the idea or vision of the author (*Anschauung*). He would largely accomplish this through metaphors, employing his vast knowledge of art and architecture.⁹ His aforementioned *magnum opus* is verily a prime example of history based in the study of culture, taking the place of a raw

⁸ Peter Burke, "Introduction," in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 3

⁹ *ibid.*, 4-5.

recounting of political history. Despite his rejection of historical philosophy or history as a systematic study, the opinion that ages are defined by their collective spirit can be detected in his work, following Voltaire, Montesquieu, Hume, and others. This is also the basis for Hegel's emphasis on the *Zeitgeist* in identifying the driving factor behind different historical time periods.¹⁰

Now to turn to the content of Burckhardt's best-known text and the way in which it involved the figure of Frederick II. For Burckhardt, Italy's unique political situation afforded a complex patchwork of republican and autocratic states which fostered the birth of the modern political state. He labels Frederick along with his Italo-Norman legacy as the first truly modern "despot." In battling the papacy and asserting himself he also combatted feudalism, not in any small way due to his close connection to and imitation of Islamic forms of administration and governance. Centralization forged a people interconnected by nationhood. Frederick's punishment of religious heretics and political adversaries seems to contrast with his image of tolerance but in fact are befitting a monarch intent on the power of his central government. From the ranks of his retinue emerged Ezzelino da Romano, typifying, for Burckhardt at least, the Machiavellian prince of the following centuries. This is the general image of Frederick offered to the reader. "Bred amid treason and peril in the neighborhood of the Saracens, Frederick, the first ruler of the modern type who sat upon the throne, had early accustomed himself to a thoroughly objective treatment of affairs."¹¹ Burckhardt also suggests that Frederick mobilized the *regno* for total war unlike the commercial aims of Venetian military ventures which concerned only profit and industry. The emperor's political pragmatism had "outgrown" the old-fashioned worldview

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 10-1.

¹¹ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 20-2.

of a Latin Christendom locked in battle with its pagan arch-nemesis to the east. The author believes that the political climate in Italy, the advent of the Crusades, and trade with the Islamic world all fostered the development of “half-Muhammadan government” among the peninsular princes of lower and upper Italy.¹²

Burckhardt’s contemporary across the North Sea in Great Britain was the respected James Bryce, later a member of Parliament and the British peerage. Writing a substantial history on the Holy Roman Empire six years after the publication of Burckhardt’s *Civilization*, one can immediately sense the cold empirical outlook of the English-speaking academics. Speaking on the struggle against the papacy during Frederick’s tenure, he immediately blames the emperor for the fall of the Hohenstaufen house. However, he will not be so strict as Abulafia a century later in condemning Frederick as a typical medieval dynast, comparing Frederick with the liberal-minded Otto III. Overall, the reader is presented with a highly generalized sketch of the emperor beginning with “his education among the orange-groves of Palermo” and terminating with his historical legacy as found in Dante’s *Inferno*. Lucera, the emperor’s military colony in Apulia settled by Sicilian Muslims, is a subject wholly neglected, and the Sixth Crusade is reduced to an expedition which produced “an advantageous peace” with no mention of al-Kamil or Frederick’s mostly cordial relations with the Ayyubid court.¹³ That apparently sufficed for Bryce at the time, a mention of Frederick II almost in passing contained in an historical study covering the entire length of the medieval empire’s existence. Undoubtedly the German scholars possessed the impetus and the energy for an extensive enterprise studying Frederick II. After all it was Burckhardt’s students as well as his readers at other universities within the *Kaiserreich* that thenceforth produced the bulk of the labor and research on the subject. For the reasons above it is

¹² *ibid.*, 63, 76, 314-5.

¹³ James Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1895), 207-9.

easy to see how one of the most active minds of the era, the indispensable Nietzsche, held admiration for Burckhardt's work and expounded upon it in a philosophical light worth mentioning here. He lauds the Basel historian as the antithesis to the dry schoolteachers and professors of the German imperial state education system.¹⁴ Even Nietzsche of latter years remained in contact with his old intellectual companion, mailing him a letter just after the philosopher's breakdown in Turin during January of 1889.

Nietzsche himself is well known as a near-constant critic of the Church, Christian tenets and morality, as well as clergy in general as manipulative members of a priestly caste that have perverted Western civilization since the fall of Rome. In order to maintain his position effectively though, he had also to be familiar with the Christian religion and its concepts. In one of his last works, *The Antichrist*, he gives a broad historical account of the evolution of the Church as an institution interspersed with anecdotal and scriptural references of all kinds. Unsurprisingly, one of the shining individual examples he deems worthy of mention is Frederick. After suggesting that the crusaders should have "prostrated themselves in the dust" before the culture of the Islamic Orient (the Moors of Spain receive similar praise earlier in the same section), Nietzsche names Frederick as an exception amongst Germans, whom he feels have unnecessarily shielded the Church throughout history, as an enemy of the papacy who intended "peace and friendship with Islam."¹⁵ In the previous section, he laments over the extinguishing of free inquiry and the unabashed humanism of Greco-Roman culture through the coming of Christianity. Nietzsche concludes that Islam is the superior religion in that it extols what he considers to be manly virtues (that is, both virility and militancy) rather than blind faith in superstition, the guilty conscience of sinfulness, and the weakness of neighbor-love. "Islam is a

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, "What the Germans Lack" in *Twilight of the Idols*, 5.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 60.

thousand times right in despising Christianity.”¹⁶ Frederick and Burckhardt do not escape Nietzsche’s words in other places either. In a somewhat rare piece once intended to supplement his 1886 book, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Frederick “the Hohenstaufen” as well as Burckhardt are put up as antithetical to the typical German psychology, owing much to Frederick’s lifelong sojourn in his otherwise native Italy. Luther by contrast is mentioned as a typical German of “cloudy moods”—a reputation which Nietzsche effortlessly transfer to Kant and Hegel as well.¹⁷

This image of Frederick as a secular ruler and possible herald of Europe’s rebirth in the modern era persisted uninterrupted in the German-speaking world even until today, mostly owing to Kantorowicz’s famous biography of the emperor as will be seen later. Kantorowicz’s own mentor at Heidelberg, Karl Hampe, hailed Frederick as an emergence of early-modern absolutism at the head of a unified nation-state, the laws of which transcended familial bonds, cultural customs, and even the universal religion propagated by the Church. The middling class urbanites that formed the base of Frederick’s class of legal scholars by their very existence limited the influence of ambitious nobility, the Chancery under Piero della Vigna borrowing heavily from the administrative techniques laid out by the papal monarchy and its legal canonists. Thus, Hampe is comfortable placing Frederick on par with a Medici, Borgia, Louis XIV, and the Enlightenment-era Prussian king Frederick II Hohenzollern.¹⁸ Just two years after the initial publication of the Kantorowicz manuscript, the Munich professor and medievalist Franz Kampers produced a brief yet informative outline of Frederick’s reign (as yet untranslated into English) as the first modern ruler ushering in the age of the Renaissance. According to

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 59.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, “Twenty-Seven Fragments Intended to Form a Supplement to Chapter VIII of *Beyond Good & Evil*,” in *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. J.M. Kennedy (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1919), 5.

¹⁸ Karl Hampe, *Germany under the Salian and Hohenstaufen Emperors*, trans. Ralph Bennett (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), 272-3.

Kampers, the struggles between the Staufer and papacy beginning with Barbarossa as well as the Crusades in the Orient both sowed the seeds of doubt concerning the strict dogma and worldly ambitions of the popes. As his grandfather did, Frederick found it an unmanageable enterprise to maintain well-ordered rule on both sides of the Alps simultaneously. Only the kingdom of the Norman inheritance was ripe for an endeavor so significant as revitalizing the Roman *Kaiseridee*. The *Constitutiones*, Frederick's Sicilian law codex, is shown to be leading into a bureaucratic state in contrast to the feudal idea which lingered elsewhere and was gradually becoming obscure in political discourse and application. The *Mainzer Landfriede*, an attempt at applying reforms from the incompatible *Constitutiones* to the German lands, is held to influence later institutions. Various criminal law codices, princely rights, and other matters—particularly in the Duchy of Austria—are all traced to the promulgation of the *Landfriede* at Mainz in 1235. As Kampers notes and is well known by those familiar with the history, similar attempts were mostly ephemeral and fleeting in northern Italy. “[Der Kaiser] träumte den Traum ‘una Italia’ zu früh.”¹⁹

Even if the *Constitutiones*, built on the laws of Frederick's Norman forebears and the jurists, recognized the influence of canon law, Kampers believes that the emperor's Sicilian law-book must be understood in naturalistic terms. The law, enforced by the emperor and with divine sanction, was founded upon earthly relationships between certain individuals and was not spiritual (in the medieval sense) in origin. In other words, natural law is now trumping the superstitions of the Church in determining how society should be organized under lay rulers. The author also declares in favor of Arab origins for the imperial financial practices and tax system, the most stark being the state monopolies on essential commodities like grain and lucrative

¹⁹ Franz Kampers, *Friedrich II., der Wegbereiter der Renaissance* (Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1929), 13, 24-5, 29-30.

materials such as precious metals. His views on Frederick's tolerance of religious minorities is rather optimistic, advocating a tolerance in the absence of opposition to the state whereas later scholars will push for the converse viewpoint that Frederick's stately power employed tolerance intentionally to practical ends.²⁰

Lastly, Kampers will consider the oft-praised cultural achievements realized in Sicily at the time of Frederick's reign. He describes the Capuan school as a melding of north-Italian Lombard and Sicilian culture, paving the way for Renaissance humanism. Artistic and literary modes were being honed and developed here and at the court, the most prominent being vernacular poetry. The process by which these efforts transform into early modern humanism is explained in a vague fashion, the author alluding to, as in every section of his work, the *Wiedergeburt* of classical forms. What is well-traced is the refinement of the vernacular language into a literary tongue, including the influence of imported Provençal and Lombard lyricists. Indeed Dante attributes these developments to Frederick and Manfred. Kampers compares the process, which requires both emperor and court-philosopher to occur, to the Renaissance-era forerunner of German literary vernacular Johann von Neumarkt composing his work at the court of Charles IV in Prague. In the end, Frederick appears as an actualization of existing forms and ideals. Kampers specifically denies any true innovations—for him Frederick and the Staufer are representative of a classical rebirth—while rather boldly connecting the emperor with principles which are claimed will eventually lead to the Reformation. Karl Hampe, Kantorowicz's mentor, also found time to proclaim Frederick's ecclesiastical policies as foreshadowing the birth of Protestantism, stating that the imperial belief that the Church be reformed in order to check the worldly papacy and return the institution to a more dignified and puritanical mode of religious

²⁰ *ibid.*, 35, 38, 41, 62.

direction anticipate Hus, Wycliffe, and Luther. Just as much of the brief persuasive piece focuses on feelings and contemporary notions about Frederick as it does on his worldly actions.²¹

Later German scholarship

Friedrich Heer's influential text on the Middle Ages from 1100-1350, released in 1961, still echoes the sentiments laid a century earlier by Burckhardt and Nietzsche. In Heer's work, St. Louis' refusal to crusade against Frederick at the behest of the pope illustrates the political pragmatism of the age illumined by Burckhardt on the fragmentation of universal Christendom with the dawning of the Renaissance. The New Rome was to be the new State. The contemporary *Minnesänger* Wolfram of Eschenbach recites in his verses an admiration for Islamic manners and discipline extracted from the personal experiences of crusaders returning from the Levant. The fraternity of mankind evident in the West much earlier with the worldviews of Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire reemerges in this period. Arnold of Lübeck's writings reflect this even if in a religious sense. Frederick's decision to convert the church at his Saracen colony of Lucera into a mosque for local use resembles the compromise reached when the Syrian Franks converted the mosque at Acre. In like fashion Frederick partitioned the holy sites of Jerusalem with al-Kamil in 1229, declaring it a tripartite city.²²

As with his German-language counterparts Heer includes the influence of the Muslims on Frederick and his style of proto-modern secularism. He states that the courtly pursuit of education, natural science, and culture was particular in this age to both the Islamic world "and other orientalized states" like Frederick's Sicily. The twelfth-century mystic Joachim of Fiore is

²¹ *ibid.*, 68-9, 75; Hampe, 299.

²² Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World, Europe 1100-1350*, trans. Janet Sondheimer (New York: New American Library, 1961), 144-5.

also given due attention as an early modern theorist of history.²³ Joachim wrote of a coming age in which the imperfect old order and struggle between Church and Empire would both end, forging a new world which maximized the perfection of the individual soul. He thereby freed the medieval intellect from the linear historical structure with all its implications. Though he could not entirely discard the Judeo-Christian framework—the approaching new age of the *spiritus sancti* would herald the End Times—he perhaps inadvertently gave breath to a new mode of historical study as well as a new worldview that was far more optimistic of the future of Christendom than the hysteria over the ninth Apocalypse that hovered over all intellectual thought in prior centuries.²⁴

Heer believes that Frederick's law code, the *Constitutiones*, was intended as a *norma regnorum* that rendered Sicily a fully functional bureaucratic state not unlike those which characterize modernity. Building on his Norman foundations, Frederick was free to create his ideal state in the Mezzogiorno as the temporal emulation of divine justice (personified by the deity *Justitia*) for human society “governed and regulated by officials, experts, judges, policemen, and a highly-developed system of taxes.”²⁵ More recent historical examinations coming out of the German *Sprachraum* also seem to hold fast to the ‘innovative-optimistic’ image of the emperor as a vibrant ruler who was, in many respects, ahead of his time. Bernd Rill's *Sizilien im Mittelalter* states that the secular bureaucratic Sicily of the Staufer functioned as would a machine with all the necessary organs of state. The *Constitutiones* was instrumental in this process, subordinating the entrenched aristocracy of the *regno* to the central authority of

²³ The Kampers work cited above explores this in far greater detail than any other medieval scholar of the time.

²⁴ Heer, 281, 286-7.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 324, 330.

the monarch. Thereafter, the great barons of Lower Italy were essentially transformed into revenue sources for the Crown.²⁶

Anglophone scholarship in the twentieth-century and beyond

For obvious reasons an analysis of Abulafia's text on Frederick II will not appear in this section as it will be adequately handled later on as one of the three modern biographies of the emperor. After a careful consideration of the following historians and sources, it will be simple to understand the reasoning behind this decision. Particularly noteworthy here are the North Americans who descend intellectually from the scholarly trailblazer Charles Homer Haskins. The first of his kind in American academia, he is often recorded as the first serious American medievalist. The work of the eminent Haskins however, seems to avoid the subject of Frederick II and contemporary opinions on Hohenstaufen Sicily altogether. This is quite telling considering the work of his descendants. Foremost among them was Princeton professor Joseph R. Strayer whose work *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, published late in his career, makes little mention of the Staufen emperor. Thus, it is clear from the outset that across the pond in America historians for the most part considered Frederick and his projects in Sicily to be marginal to the growth of modern nationhood and political secularism.

It is with the late Canadian historian Norman F. Cantor, though, that these ideas seem to bear new fruit and take on new meanings. Not unlike his predecessors, he makes little room for Frederick in his general medieval narrative *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, 1963.

Frederick's intellectual and peculiar personality, according to Cantor, was coupled with and connected to the central ideals and court rituals of "oriental despotism." There ends the similarity

²⁶ Bernd Rill, *Sizilien im Mittelalter: das Reich der Araber, Normannen und Staufer* (Stuttgart: Belser, 1995), 261, 263-4.

with the German-language historians. Cantor also sees fit to disparage Kantorowicz for the latter's dealings with the Nazis, even labeling Frederick "a sort of intellectual Fascist, a man of learning and fastidious tastes, but a brute and a bully nevertheless."²⁷ The language seems to be guilty of holding the emperor to more modern standards of political liberalism. It is also tempting to see this as an oversimplification of late-medieval realities as well as a neglecting to comment on such brutality's contribution to Renaissance ideas or the modern secular state in general. There is also no mention of the *Constitutiones*. Cantor appears unable to accept the Hegelian-idealist excuses for historical violence even if one need not be a Hegelian to acknowledge violence as a driving force in world history.

It is another much later publication of his, *Inventing the Middle Ages*, in which Cantor blasts the historiography of the German-speaking world, famously connecting such so-called Romantic ideals with the birth of Nazism. Tracing his roots through Strayer, the answer to Burckhardt's domineering theses concerning Renaissance Italy and its development out of specific trends, intellectual as well as political, arrives from New England. Haskins' landmark work *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* argued for earlier medieval antecedents for Renaissance culture and intellectual humanism. The debate raged into the 1960s with Erwin Panofsky's work on the subject, heavily laden with the keen observations of a learned art historian. Panofsky, while acknowledging the High Medieval antecedents, unsurprisingly as a German-language art historian declared largely in favor of Burckhardt's conclusions from a century earlier. He demonstrated that despite instances of classicizing stimuli in previous centuries, aesthetic and literary subject matter remained medieval in outlook, applying classical

²⁷ Norman F. Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 1993), 459.

forms while ignoring or resisting their profane origin.²⁸ In other words, by Cantor's time the disconnect was maturing into an actual debate, now concerned less with earlier trends traced to the twelfth-century and now responding to the affirmations of Burckhardt emanating primarily from German-language scholarship.

The most informative and relevant section in Cantor's historiographical work deals of course with Ernst Kantorowicz. Kantorowicz's original doctorate was in Oriental economic history and he never intended to publish his autobiography of Frederick for a scholarly audience.²⁹ For Cantor, Kantorowicz exemplifies the trends of *Geistesgeschichte* or the style of studying perceived underlying drives of a civilization or people (*Volk*) which are materially actualized as cultural institutions and tendencies. Therefore, Kantorowicz was searching for "the dynamic person behind the ideas" driving history in the typical Hegelian sense. Though of Polish-Jewish heritage, Kantorowicz mainly drew his inspiration from the literary circle of poet Stefan George which was highly nationalist in character and idealized a German civilization under visionary leaders. Here, Cantor seems to make a connection with the *Führerprinzip* of National-Socialism while acknowledging the presence of other Jews and the George Circle's ultimate repudiation of the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*). Kantorowicz was perhaps directed by George to compose Frederick's biography in hopes of furthering spiritual and national renewal in a Germany steered by "cultured supermen." The resulting manuscript receives praise from the critic for Kantorowicz's vast knowledge of sources, the modernist approach, and a vigorous eloquent style. Commenting on its commendable accessibility, Cantor suggests quite precisely that if Kantorowicz were alive, he would only need

²⁸ Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The lives, works, and ideas of the great medievalists of the twentieth century* (New York: William Morrow & Co. Inc., 1991), 181-5.

²⁹ Hence the lack of footnotes, the author choosing instead to rely upon consulting his mentors Karl Hampe and Friedrich Baethgen.

to edit seventy-five of the seven-hundred page behemoth to produce an adequate revised edition.³⁰ However the criticism of Kantorowicz and his historical outlook did not end with accusations of Nazi-like tendencies followed by simple scholarly praise. In paralleling Kantorowicz with his friend Schramm, the latter of whom became an enthusiastic Nazi party member, Cantor calls them both “far-right in outlook” in spite of the former’s Jewishness—frankly, as if individuals of Jewish heritage and post-war ultra-nationalism were somehow incompatible elements.³¹

A veteran of the First World War on the Turkish front, Kantorowicz joined the *Freikorps* upon his return to Germany. Cantor quickly labels these groups as being “proto-Nazi” though the Nordicist racialism and vehement anti-Semitism that matured under the Nazis was not the domineering current at the time, the main concern being a virulent stifling of the communists who were arguably equal in their militancy during the interwar years. In 1931, responding to sharp criticism from the academic establishment in Berlin, Kantorowicz published the appendix volume to his work. Just four years later, under the auspices of the new regime, he was dismissed from his professorship at Frankfurt. He continued to live untouched in Berlin until 1938 when he chose to emigrate to the United States. For Cantor, in the end Kantorowicz is at least guilty of fueling the emphasis on the *Führerprinzip* that kindled the Third Reich, even if he rejected both Hitler and Nazism.³² Ironically, it was in Leftist and liberal circles that Kantorowicz later found favor after refusing to sign an academic loyalty oath during the Red Scare of 1950.

³⁰ Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages*, 82-6.

³¹ *ibid.*, 90. Italian Jews were instrumental in their country’s Fascist movement prior to the disastrous wartime alliance with Hitler’s Germany. Similar paramilitary organizations at the same time burgeoned in Palestine, particularly the Irgun movement of Avraham Stern.

³² *ibid.*, 95-6.

What of Frederick II Hohenstaufen has filtered down into mainstream academic texts intended for use by undergraduates and less specialized audiences in the English-speaking world? The fourth volume of the encyclopedic collection *The Outline of Knowledge* contains a brief section on the emperor. “Of Frederick it can only be said that he was a Sicilian...with even Oriental elements in him... He was a sceptic and a mystic, a lover of philosophic disputation, a master of many languages, a voracious reader, a dabbler at least in natural science of most kinds...But with talents the most brilliant and the most versatile were combined chimerical and illusory great designs which might have solidified in the hands of a man of less brilliancy, whose imagination did not outrun his practical capacity.” Besides this description combined with the usual political-military summary of his reign, the text mentions his founding of Lucera after suppressing the revolts of the Arab highlanders and its later economic prosperity. The Saracens of the settlement then become the instruments of the emperor’s centralized style of monarchy, delegating officials here and there as he went. “In the two Sicilies Frederick’s role was that of the enlightened despot. He was the first monarch to establish (at Naples) a university by royal charter. He himself wrote poetry in the Sicilian tongue, and the royal example gave a great impulse to the vernacular as a literary language. The Sixth Crusade and peaceful acquisition of Jerusalem are brought up only in passing, the author seeing fit to include that Frederick crowned himself during his visit to the Holy Sepulchre.”³³ Judith Bennett’s 2011 undergraduate study text *Medieval Europe, A Short History* also briefly examines the Sicilian emperor. Frederick is here described as a “flamboyant” and “brilliant” figure, a product of his upbringing in close contact and intellectual discourse with the culture of Islam. The *Constitutiones* are included as an enhancement to the central authority of the monarch in the *regno* followed by a short listing of

³³ Arthur Donald Innes, “The History of the World,” in *The Outline of Knowledge, vol IV*, ed. James A. Richards (New York: J.A. Richards inc., 1924), 416-8.

other achievements and advancements for the kingdom.³⁴ All in all one has here a very general treatment of the material with no mention of Lucera, connections to the Renaissance, or any debate of modernity or modern forms. What is clear from both of these general texts is that they both refuse to take a strong position on the full relevance or certainty of either the Romantic-ideal of Burckhardt or the truncated version of skeptics like Cantor and Abulafia. Keeping all the aforementioned opinions and schools of thought in mind, one can now confidently turn to the three secondary sources which offer the greatest wealth of information and the most in-depth interpretations of Frederick II and his role in Western civilization.

The secular state

In order to reduce any confusion amidst this mass of information, the three sources mentioned above—that of Kantorowicz, Van Cleve, and Abulafia—will be analyzed within each section chronologically and in their turn without interspersing each writer’s thoughts for the sake of as much clarity as can be attained. First among the themes to be considered will be the supposed building of the first secular bureaucratic state in Frederick’s Sicily and its attempted application in other parts of the empire, followed by the influence of and relationship to Muslims domestically and abroad, the intellectual and artistic climate of Frederick’s court, and finally the general conclusions of each of the three authors.

-Kantorowicz-

One may begin with what Kantorowicz has to say on the subject, his biography having acquired the most age of the three (original publication, 1927). Frederick, it is known, called all holders of royal lands, grants, charters, and privileges, both collective and private, before his

³⁴ Judith M. Bennett, *Medieval Europe, a short history* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 245.

Chancery in order to confirm or strip them of what they held under the supervision of the Crown. Kantorowicz calls him a legalistic Machiavellian—justice benefits not just the prince but the state, a previously amorphous concept. After the imperial coronation, Frederick applied such divisive tactics against the powerful barons of the Mezzogiorno, confiscating or militarily seizing several key fortresses. In December 1220, the Law of Privileges was directed against the resistant aristocracy at the Diet of Capua. In the spring of the following year Celano was razed and the population resettled elsewhere for cooperation with rebellious nobility and attacking imperial troops. The nobles of the *regno* for the most part ceased their resistance to the imperial order for the remainder of Frederick's reign. To dispel ineffectual feudal organization, Frederick gave earlier Norman assizes "wider application and a definite direction." Subinfeudation was prevented and measures were taken to ensure that vacant fiefs often reverted to the Crown for its own benefit and dispensation.³⁵ In order to prove Frederick's dexterity in economic manipulation and central planning, Kantorowicz provides the example of the royal monopoly on the coveted Sicilian grain supply which forced out merchants of the maritime commercial powers through price fixing. In 1222, Palermo was temporarily opened for free trade with such merchants during the pacification war against the Saracen highlanders, thus feeding the army at that time in a desperate situation. Direct tax collections were carried out by crown-appointed justiciars and the emperor personally decided how to redistribute funds in the *regno*. The previously mentioned Diet of Capua restricted clergy and lords from exacting justice, instead delegating these powers to crown officials instructed in the rule of law. Thus, four years later a royal edict, the first of its kind, established the state university at Naples. The university charter explains its purpose with the utmost clarity. Though other disciplines were to be taught, including Salernitan medicine, the

³⁵ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194-1250*, trans. E.O. Lorimer (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1957), 112-9.

main purpose was to churn out learned officials and legal scholars for practical use by the state.³⁶ They were not only the most qualified of men from the perspective of the throne, but would remain objective judges of law since like the non-Christians of the realm they were beholden to the emperor alone and without formal feudal benefices.

In Kantorowicz's work Frederick becomes "the law-giving Caesar," the author insisting that legalistic tendencies of the monarchy finally returned the imperial office to a position on a par with that of ancient Rome. The summer of 1231 saw the introduction and promulgation of the *Constitutiones*, published at Melfi. Kantorowicz considers this the first constitutional codification in the West since Justinian. As with Augustus, Frederick recognized that the final and singular object of secular governance was the establishment of *pax et justitia* under strong centralized rule. This interest in law "indicates the beginning of secular, non-theological education." The *Constitutiones* or *Liber Augustalis* made the emperor the *lex animata in terris*, associating the imperial person with a living god containing the sacred germs of *Justitia*. This intellectual preoccupation with crown-oriented justice and jurisprudence exposes a sense of imperial infallibility in the application of the law.³⁷ Since the laws of the emperor were rooted in what was deemed to be natural law issuing forth from the Almighty, to dispute these promulgated laws and edicts was not simply treason but akin to heresy.

Like Augustus more than a millennium prior, Frederick absorbed or usurped traditional or customary powers into his own person, cementing his legacy with the Roman Caesars. Kantorowicz goes on to claim that the secular *regno* restored the worldliness of the divine absent since Classical Antiquity, transforming the miraculous God of past centuries who manifested

³⁶ *ibid.*, 126-7, 132-3.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 221-4, 229, 231.

Himself through the mystery of faith into a deity of the now “comprehensible state law,” making the divine unintelligible without this new brand of world-order (*Deus et Justitia*). As may be expected, the imperial court was carried out much in the same way as a Church Mass, the sanctity of the emperor being so great that his voice was to be rarely heard and whose pronouncements were often indicated by the ringing of a hand-bell. Kantorowicz divulges that Frederick probably was in imitation of his earlier guardian Innocent III in his conception of the legal state, something the pope achieved during Frederick’s minority with the assistance of canon lawyers. In such a state “justice becomes that manifestation of God which is comprehended by reason and by knowledge, and which is operating within the state as Living Law.”³⁸ By winning over or even coercing men’s minds, Frederick was under these circumstances able to reduce the Church as it stood in the *regno* to the duty of saving souls, operating on the faith-based principle of God’s grace. This is a major source of contention for the papacy and speaks to later accusations that the emperor oppressed and manipulated the Sicilian Church to do his bidding. Indeed Sicilian clergymen were threatened lest they betray their sovereign. The Churchmen were still subjects of the almighty emperor and, in Frederick’s mind, not bound by any political or spiritual overtures from the papal monarchy in Rome.

What is indeed remarkable is the borrowing of Inquisition prosecution procedures from the papacy of Innocent III and their extension to the jurisdiction of authorities in the secular realm as a form of royal prosecution. This marked a break with medieval concepts of criminal prosecution which generally required plaintiffs to level charges, even if the innovation belonged to the papal monarchy. Kantorowicz reckons that Frederick’s application of these procedures to be “a mere secularisation” or conversely rather a deification of the laws of the State. Such

³⁸ *ibid.*, 234-7.

practices were mainly reserved for capital offenses against the Crown or its officials. In keeping with the theme of the emperor as *lex animata* and the grounding of the new laws in natural science, the entrance of the concept of *necessitas* or the animating force of the natural world into Frederick's notion of a legalistic state is Aristotelian and therefore Islamic in origin. The doctrine is employed equitably alongside Providence in the preface to the *Constitutiones*. *Necessitas* is based in human reason concerning the physical cosmos, and the author understands this to be the difference between authority and faith. Kantorowicz declares that Dante's model of the secular state in *De monarchia* mirrors such an earthly government of divine necessity that one encounters with Frederick's Sicily. Associations of the Almighty with human reason and the natural laws of the universe thus dispelled superstitious juridical remnants of the medieval period such as trial by ordeal while the old Teutonic practice of dueling was outlawed outright.³⁹

Kantorowicz asserts that Frederick was the first to conceive of such a juristic state apart from the pope-oriented despotism of the canonists. Such systems soon took hold in France, Aragon, and the shifting patchwork of Italian duchies and city-states. The officials themselves resemble a priesthood, called personally by the emperor the "Order of *Justitia*."⁴⁰ A professional class of legal scholars formed by the vast bureaucracy of justiciars and officials severely checked feudal, urbanite, and clerical powers and privileges in a kingdom in which imperial oversight was now omnipresent. Additionally, the customs system was Saracen in origin, especially the state-run warehouses or *fondachi* which, as in the Orient, doubled both as storage for goods which were being imported through customs and as inns for traveling merchants. Frederick nationalized the previously private warehouses, compelling Kantorowicz to make a connection with the Hanseatic League later, the origins of which lay with the Teutonic Order sponsored by

³⁹ *ibid.*, 239-41, 247, 251-2.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 272.

Frederick in the region. Indeed the Teutonic Knights developed in the Baltic a highly bureaucratic form of efficient state administration on a par with Sicily and Aragon.

Internationally, Frederick's Sicily had frequent and long-lasting commercial dealings with the Muslims of Egypt, Tunis, and Spain.⁴¹

After the imperial victory at Cortenuova in late 1237, Frederick focused on consolidating his power in Italy rather than expanding elsewhere. This was done to solidify imperial domains and of course encircle the pope at Rome. While the emperor appointed justiciars to preside over Sicily, northern and central Italy was to be broken into vicariates or captaincies. This approach sought to organize Italy along similar lines as the *regno* but as the central imperial province. Kantorowicz sees "the beginning of that concentration of a maximum of might in a minimum of space which characterises the Renaissance." Roman law, already practiced to varying degrees in the towns, was expanded under this new administration. A whole host of bureaucratic subordinates were attached to the emperor's direct representatives, signifying in the author's mind the political genesis of those seigneuries that become the norm in Italy during the Renaissance. All of this is determined to be the result of "a mighty pan-Italian Seignory, which for a short time united in one state Germanic, Roman and Oriental elements."⁴²

Lastly, it remains to be seen how Kantorowicz grapples with the attempted application of similar legislation or at least the preparing of the ground for such legislation in Germany, the central issue here revolving around the *Mainzer Landfriede* of 1235. "It was to form the basis of all future imperial legislation," and indeed it would be renewed through the reign of Albert I Habsburg towards the end of the century. The contents mainly concerned the regulation of

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 283-4, 287-8.

⁴² *ibid.*, 488, 493.

nobility and clerical activities as well as mintage rights and fee and toll regulations.⁴³ For Kantorowicz the *Mainzer Landfriede* was to Germany what the Capuan assizes were to Sicily, hinting that the possibility of a *summa* of imperial laws to rival the recently introduced *Decretals* could have followed from this.⁴⁴

-Van Cleve-

The Capuan assizes of 1220 captured much independently or unrightfully held lands and strongholds which were integral to the kingdom's consolidation, also enacting a series of oaths and mandates for crown officials, legates, magistrates, castellans, and the like. This was the first step towards reorganizing the *regno* around the monarch and was a precursor of things to come in the *Constitutiones*, both of which largely expounded upon existent Norman laws from the reign of Roger II. Richard of San Germano relates that in the following year Frederick dictated Norman-influenced social laws at Messina that included a stipulation on extending the Capuan assizes to the clergy, subordinating them to the secular rule of Caesar even though no such guideline in relation to the sovereign lord existed in canon law.

Frederick's economic reforms encouraged a "national economy" in the kingdom's commercial dealings with Pisa, Genoa, and Venice. Unlike Kantorowicz, Van Cleve claims that these reforms were economically disastrous, affecting both Sicily and the maritime republics, the latter of which directed their mercantile activity to other ports like Marseilles or those on Sardinia.⁴⁵ Speaking on the state university at Naples, Van Cleve agrees that its purpose was "to

⁴³ Frederick may have had in mind the extension of the same universality of a Roman sovereign to his holdings in Germany as the papal monarchy attempted with the clergy of Europe and Outremer, transferring the Gelasian doctrine of papal hegemony to lay princes expected to rally around their monarch.

⁴⁴ Kantorowicz, 410-1.

⁴⁵ Thomas C. Van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, Immutator Mundi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 143-4, 149-50. Elsewhere he seems to down-play the negative effects of Fredericks trade regulations, 270.

provide thorough training in the learned professions” with the intention of producing legal scholars and state officials of substance. However, the university actually fell short of its intended glory, chiefly due to its foundation as a Crown institution quite unlike the autonomous schools at Bologna, Paris, and elsewhere, their curricula notwithstanding.⁴⁶

The emperor’s immediate contact with Islamic styles of statecraft in the Levant during the Sixth Crusade, according to Van Cleve, influenced the hierarchical absolutism later inherent in the empire. What Frederick wrought alongside his Norman traditions from these sources was a state governed by a vast bureaucracy of laymen schooled in Roman jurisprudence, enhancing the prestige of the imperial person. There was to be a continuation of Norman administration, but more power was to be centered in the high legates of the monarch. The Grand Justiciar became a permanent member of the *curia regis* and vizier or mouthpiece of the king. Two underlings, the Master Justiciars representing the insular and peninsular halves of the *regno*, were answerable to this right hand of the emperor alone.⁴⁷ It is no leap of faith here to recognize a similarity in Frederick’s kingdom of justice with the East, the state officials of Sicily as a class of legal scholars reflecting qualities of the Islamic *ulema* and its *qadi*. With the publication of the *Constitutiones*, the Chancery was subjected directly to the king and stocked with lawyers and notaries charged with producing the letters and decrees of the royal court. Van Cleve argues that, as time went on, the structure became more refined, augmenting the emperor’s control, the final result of which was his second excommunication in 1239. “The governmental reorganization which took place as a result of the promulgation of the *Liber Augustalis* tended, with the passing of time, to establish a tightly organized bureaucratic system in which officials, high or low, never

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 155-7.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 240, 246-7.

ceased to be conscious of the immediate influence of the royal court.”⁴⁸ The flowery and often inflammatory language of Kantorowicz is conspicuously absent here, but the ideas themselves remain largely the same.

The *Constitutiones* of Melfi enhanced the secular nature of Frederick’s governance as the concept of a necessary tyranny emerges to oppose punishment on the basis of sin, as delineated in the law-book’s preamble. Van Cleve believes that Frederick’s innovations concerning the state and sovereignty emanate not only from expediency but also from contemporary currents in natural philosophy.⁴⁹ On the other hand, he describes the *Mainzer Landfriede* as having an opposite effect in Germany. For the author, it was partially another grant of princely privileges, thus decentralizing the realm and hampering imperial control. This is blamed however not on Frederick or the nature of the *Constitutio pacis* itself but on the *interregnum* during which the powers and rights of the sovereign in Germany were greatly reduced.⁵⁰ The purpose of the promulgation at Mainz was to maintain public order and reverse the emperor’s previous decade of weakness north of the Alps. It was not so innovative as it was a “revitalization of laws which had fallen into abeyance.” The Grand Justiciar of Germany was to preside over legal matters aside from the princes and clergy, “rendering justice in all complaints.” He was to be a layman, naturally, and dependent on the emperor for his office. Van Cleve also hints at Frederick’s future plans to introduce Sicilian-style reforms to Germany once Italy was secure.⁵¹

-Abulafia-

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 254-6.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 257-60.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 119-20.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 382-6.

Abulafia's newfound criticism of previous historians' views on Frederick's reign is discernible throughout his entire 1988 monograph. He labels the classic interpretations of the *Constitutiones* as "wishful thinking," denying the idea of the Sicilian model-state or *norma regnorum* found in other works. He argues that Frederick's model cannot be compared in the same breath to the Roman or canonist legal traditions in that it is merely a compendium of laws and customs "founded upon a variety of conflicting traditions" and is only suitable in design for application in Sicily. Abulafia sees no inherent imperial hegemony in the *regno* either, emphasizing its subordinate status as a papal vassal. In order to dispel the declarations and speculations of past historians on the subject, he takes note that Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* were not yet available in Latin, necessitating that Frederick's political model owed more to Augustine than being, as was previously proposed, a product and proponent of natural law imbued with Islamic undertones. In Augustine's *Civitas dei*, the state corrects the sinful nature of mankind, making Frederick's absolutist monarchy not so much secular as it was simply reluctant to accept the pope's authority and his intermediary position with respect to the divine.⁵²

In this more critical light, Frederick's trade policies, mainly the state warehouses of the *Constitutiones*—which, by the way, find mention in Boccaccio—are but efforts to maximize financial output in order to fund the emperor's incessant wars to the north. Abulafia argues that the Sicilian economy was complementary and codependent on Lombardy for textiles and other manufactured goods while the northern communes and maritime republics looked upon the *regno* for raw materials and, especially in times of famine, for the lucrative Sicilian grain supply. The grain taxes and monopoly were more to appease the Sicilian merchant classes, falling far

⁵² David Abulafia, *Frederick II, a Medieval Emperor* (New York: Oxford University, 1988), 202-7.

short of imposing a state-run economy.⁵³ Asserting less and questioning more, Abulafia appears to call attention to more uncertainties rather than attempting to satisfy traditional queries. The Grand Justiciar for Germany envisioned by the *Mainzer Landfriede* thereby was far reduced in the exercise of royal powers than were his counterparts in Sicily or even in Plantagenet England. Instead, the *Constitutio pacis* was intended to uphold just what its title implies, the public peace, which included not only enforcement of criminal statutes but also enactments which sought to prevent future conflicts among lay princes, the clergy, and the free imperial cities. Nor was the *Constitutio pacis* innovative, rather it upheld what were widely believed to be “traditional rights” among certain sectors of the population.⁵⁴ After all, imperial power had only a loose grip on those territories above the Alpine passes, and Frederick was forced to rely on prelates and local nobility to ensure that open warfare between baronial lords would not be fully loosed. Thus, Abulafia discredits any notion that Frederick believed the Sicilian model could be successfully imposed on Germany. Both he and Van Cleve seem to be in virtual agreement on this matter.

The Islamic factor

-Kantorowicz-

A discussion of Frederick’s interactions with the Muslim populace of his lands and Muslim powers overseas cannot overlook the mention of Lucera. More than 10,000 (Kantorowicz approximates 16,000) Saracens were transported to Lucera, mostly as serfs in the management of the royal *demesne*. Their official legal status within the kingdom, as with the Jews, was as *servi* of the Crown, tied directly to the monarch and thus responsible only to the king and his legates. They enjoyed a community governed by observance of Islamic law in

⁵³ *ibid.*, 215-9.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 243.

exchange for their service as a military colony of the empire. As Muslims, they were immune from the papal ban, and Kantorowicz, rather typical of his time, attributes their unquestioning loyalty to their Oriental propensity for servility under a strong ruler. He convincingly compares the population transfer to that of “an Eastern despot,” drawing comparisons to the Ottoman janissaries, while also heaping praise on the enterprise as the coming of uniformity to the *regno*—supposedly something key to Sicily’s national emergence.⁵⁵ Tolerance of non-Christians resident within the *regno* was a practical matter—“the moment injury accrued to the State the Emperor’s toleration was at an end.” According to this view the Muslims resettled at Lucera as well as the Jewish populations working citrus orchards and dye works were examples of pragmatic statesmanship and nation-building. Any tolerance of religious minorities was done in respect of whether or not “they were serviceable to the State.” Indeed, Kantorowicz acknowledges that the freedoms existing under Norman times were somewhat curtailed under Frederick.⁵⁶

Next, Kantorowicz moves on to international policies. The royal grain monopoly was utilized to sell considerable amounts to the Hafsids of Tunis during an African famine, the funds of which were used to alleviate the emperor’s war debts in Italy. The author compares this to later economic thinking such as that of Colbert, though he admits such commerce was driven by necessity rather than any capitalist impulse. In 1231 a ten-year commercial treaty was signed with the Hafsids, the Sicilian ambassadors comprising the first permanent overseas embassies from Europe. The first man in that capacity at Tunis was a converted Muslim, Henricus Abbas. Frederick also used these relations to successfully petition the Hafsids for soldiers to enhance his personal Saracen bodyguard. Similar commercial treaties would be struck with al-Kamil during

⁵⁵ Kantorowicz, 129-32.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 267-8.

the crusade. At the end of the day then, Germany's purpose could be viewed as to supply able bodies of troops while Sicily's could be seen as to acquire wealth for imperial expenditures.

No other set of events during Frederick's tenure is more critical to a discussion of religious tolerance and interfaith interactions than the so-called Sixth Crusade. Kantorowicz admits that the translation of the papal-imperial conflict to the Levant necessitated Frederick's concord with the Ayyubids, but spends far more time musing on the peculiar similarities between the emperor and the sultan. He sets Frederick and al-Kamil beside one another as learned men who understood "personal friendship," superseding a discussion of affairs between political rulers who both were independent of noble counsel. When given a chance to capture Frederick and his retinue after the emperor's route was betrayed to al-Kamil by the Templars, the sultan, seeing an opportunity to humiliate the pope, forewarned the *rex Siciliae*. For Kantorowicz "his crusade was purely an affair of state," a convincing statement to make considering the peaceful acquisition of Jerusalem and other corridors after the crusaders were expelled from its environs decades prior. It is this methodology which allows the author to name Frederick's self-coronation at Jerusalem as displaying the direct imperial relationship with the Almighty.⁵⁷

-Van Cleve-

As with Kantorowicz, Van Cleve uses the 16,000 number in counting the individuals which comprised the Saracen households set up at Lucera. Also in the same light as Kantorowicz, he relates the story of an Ayyubid ambassador named Jamal al-Din who was greatly impressed at the religious freedom and political autonomy of the Muslim colony during Manfred's reign. The envoy wrote in simplistic fashion that Manfred, like his father before him,

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 182-3, 186-91, 198-9.

was excommunicated due to a perceived “penchant for Islam.” The Curia failed to “appreciate the wisdom of Frederick’s solution to the Saracen problem” because of papal “fanaticism and prejudice” against an emperor governed by reason.⁵⁸ The previously mentioned decade-long trade agreement with Abu Zakariya and the Hafsids represents for Van Cleve another example of pragmatism, this time as a peacetime loosening of mercantile restrictions which otherwise constituted a substantial source of revenue for the treasury. He insists on the existence of similar negotiations with al-Kamil though no historical sources actually verify the completion of any such negotiations. However, in support of these claims, if Matthew Paris is to be believed, Sicilian merchants traveled as far away as India.

Van Cleve will not attempt to disprove that Kantorowicz was correct in claiming that the emperor was in contact with and deeply influenced by Islamic culture his entire life. The few Saracens left at Palermo in Frederick’s youth probably gave him his first introduction to the Arabic language, in which he was later proficient, as well as Islamic philosophy. The Saracens, despite their obvious marginalization since Norman times, were still numerous and influential at court. Johannes Maurus, mentioned by both Kantorowicz and Van Cleve, appears as royal Chamberlain c. 1240, probably being the first person of black-African descent in history to hold a high position in a European court. Visitors from afar and contacts between Muslim rulers and the court were frequent, not the least being the planetarium gifted by the sultan of Damascus in 1232 or the correspondence on astronomy and mathematics with the sheikh Alam-ad-Din Hanéfi.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Van Cleve, 153-5.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 271, 305-6.

As far as Frederick's half-hearted crusade is concerned, Van Cleve places emphasis on the disunity of crusader forces and a lack of adequate troops and supplies in explaining Frederick's decision to employ diplomacy over open warfare in Outremer. Though his papal ban was well known, the author believes that all parties involved on the Christian side were hoping for a quick reconciliation with Rome. He considers the contemporary accounts, then decides upon the most modestly worded among them. On the other side, al-Kamil was much better suited to negotiate with the crusaders after taking Jerusalem, formerly held by his rival brother who had ruled from Damascus, while at the same time presenting the words of the Muslim chronicler Abu' al-Fidā stating that Frederick's sudden landing at Acre during the internal strife amongst the Ayyubids was "like an arrow in a wound." In reliance on another account, that of Maqrizi, Van Cleve asserts that al-Kamil both feared losing the war with the Damascenes as well as dishonoring himself since it was he who invited the emperor as an ally in the first place. As a result, the truce was struck on the 18th of February 1229.⁶⁰

-Abulafia-

As can be expected, Abulafia is quite straightforward in his censure of preceding medievalists on the subject matter. He challenges such views openly, including those of Van Cleve which present the Saracen colony at Lucera as an act of enlightened despotism from the court. While recognizing the Oriental influences, the harem, and the emperor's delight in all things exotic, the author states that the real uniqueness behind Lucera was its self-governance under Islamic law. Frederick was fully aware of the *dhimmi* status of the Muslims under his charge and that they were personally bound to him as *servi* of the royal court. Thus, they were to be admired in a practical sense mainly for their honed military prowess while their social

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 214-20.

standings remained restricted by the presence of the Roman Church. In Abulafia's eyes, Lucera was both a financial and a political exploit. Attempts were made, some successful, to tie the Muslim population to the land. Frederick hoped to better control a static agrarian community that would prosper in the same way as it had independently in Sicily.⁶¹

From this it naturally follows that Abulafia will extend his criticism of the Romantic-ideal and Renaissance-forerunner proposals of years past to classic interpretations of Frederick's relatively bloodless crusade, 1228-9. He declares that the Muslim world viewed the Crusades not so much as Christian *jihad* but rather as expansionist military ventures waged by the destitute Franks of the West, further implying that Frederick employed a policy of pragmatic diplomacy in the Levant after studying the difficulties of Richard Lionheart. Unlike Kantorowicz and Van Cleve, the fact that Frederick reached out to al-Kamil's enemies in Damascus as well, even if to no avail, does not escape the historian's words.⁶² Nor does Frederick appear all that welcome in this narrative by the time he actually arrived in Palestine. An Islamic source, ibn Wasil, is quoted as explaining that Frederick's arrival was a thorn in the sultan's side, not dissimilar from the metaphor drawn above by another Muslim source of the time. Continuing with this version of the aloof and distant sultan, it is insisted that the nephew of Saladin had more pressing matters to deal with in northern Syria and that the emperor's obstinate attempts to ingratiate himself with the sultan as well as his negotiation for the cession of a strategically unimportant Jerusalem⁶³ were distractions from more immediate problems.

The resulting truce and treaty were unpopular with many in both Latin Christendom and the *Dar al-Islam*, as one may infer from al-Kamil's words which assured restive Muslims that

⁶¹ Abulafia, 147-8, 335-6.

⁶² *ibid.*, 171-2.

⁶³ It is said that the city at the time was greatly reduced and without effective ramparts or walls.

little was conceded to the *Firanj* and that the sultan planned to make easy pickings of Jerusalem and secure the other Islamic holy sites once the decade long truce expired. Reaching this point in the narrative, it would only be appropriate for Abulafia to attack traditional views of Frederick's self-coronation at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The wearing of the crown, he argues, was not an act of defiance but a simple affirmation of the Roman-imperial universalism that Frederick hoped to embody for Christendom. In this way the emperor was little concerned with affairs in his Levantine territory and more obsessed with its symbolic bestowal of a "Christ-king" status. The self-coronation, he believes, is confused and muddled by comparisons to Napoleon's similar behavior in modern times. Rather, Frederick's symbolic wearing of the royal crown in Jerusalem helped to strengthen the emperor's position and to cement his legitimacy against the papal monarchy. Much of this is contrary to the views of Kantorowicz and other earlier historians that Frederick imitated the Oriental-style despotism he experienced on crusade once he returned to the *regno*.

Culture at court

-Kantorowicz-

It cannot be disputed by any of the three historical biographies under analysis that the emperor's mind was at least curious by nature and drawn to the sciences, philosophy, and other learned pursuits. Upon meeting the famous Leonardo of Pisa, otherwise known as Fibonacci, Frederick directed a series of honest mathematical inquiries to the thinker. Afterwards, a cordial scholarly relationship was maintained between Fibonacci and the court, keeping in touch with the emperor over the years. The historian's goal here is a diagnosis of whether such attitudes represent radical changes in the Western mentality or if they are only peculiarities and signposts

pointing further away to a more distant Renaissance. For Kantorowicz the *regno* was based on an almost entirely secular state bureaucracy, replacing the old order of Church dominance over the Western intellect (the monopoly on the truth). The pulse of the emperor's intellectual spirit can be sensed in those of his international correspondences of queries which are preserved, most importantly his exchanges with the sage of Ceuta, ibn Sab'in. The author further explains that Frederick's curiosity concerning the natural sciences and the mechanics of the cosmos, while connected to the musings of Scholastics like Thomas Aquinas, was less preoccupied with seemingly abstract principles surrounded by Biblical precepts—the logical exercise concerning how many angels could fit onto the head of a pin, now infamous in modern philosophical discourse, comes to mind. Frederick's inquiries concerned mostly the concrete nature of Creation. In short, he could not be satisfied with the *creatio ex nihilo* solutions espoused by past Churchmen that seemed to hover ominously over the university Scholastics.⁶⁴

Scholarly material and translated manuscripts were naturally being produced by the restless academics and philosophers at court as well. Though Palermo and Sicily in general remained inferior to Toledo in translations, as it had been before Frederick's time, the court philosopher Michael Scot was the most prolific translator of the emperor's inner circle. At least twenty seminal Aristotelian texts, some including Avicennan commentaries, can be ascribed to this brilliant *litteratus*. The emperor himself also composed scholarly treatises, the most notable being his handbook on falconry *De arte venandi cum avibus*. He finds time in this text to rebut Aristotle on certain points of zoology, stating that though the ancient philosopher never himself hunted with the aid of birds that the emperor had and was thus better suited to discuss the matter at hand. Kantorowicz also lends credit to Frederick in the at least partial composition of another

⁶⁴ Kantorowicz, 293, 350-2.

manual attributed to Jordanus Ruffus, a native Calabrian. The text *On Horse Healing* was both widely used and translated in the West for ages to come.⁶⁵

Under Frederick, born of necessity rather than any personal direction by his hand, the plastic arts undertook a drive towards truth as it stood in relation to the sensible world. The mystical and opaque forms of Church-directed aesthetics were rendered unacceptable and ill-suited for the times. The apparently pagan symbolism of the Capuan gate is given as an example by Kantorowicz. Indeed the structure centered around the figure, even if only metaphorical, of a pagan goddess while the façade is entirely devoid of any crucifix or ecclesiastical adornment. Not only was there an evolution of aesthetic forms in physical artworks, but also a reformist movement taking place in literary circles. In opening his praise of the vernacular poetry of the Sicilian school, in which style the emperor himself used to compose his own verse, Kantorowicz refers to Frederick's Angevin successors, well known as ambitious agents of the anti-Staufen papacy, as incomparable "joyless bigots." The Sicilian school was dependent in its formal structure upon the troubadours of Provence, making its origins hardly innovative. What is important here for the author is that he believes the Sicilian lyric was indicative of the Italian vernacular's delayed emancipation from the medieval Latin of its day and thus a major contribution to the awakening of Italian national consciousness that emerges during the Renaissance. Such claims appear to place Frederick on a par with Dante in relation to the elevation of Italian as a modern language.⁶⁶

-Van Cleve-

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 340, 362-4.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 323-6, 528-9.

The Norman and Byzantine cultural inheritance such as the medical school at Salerno, the architecture of the Apulian Greeks, and the liberal education offered at Monte Cassino all combined to forge a Norman French culture fused with local Lombard, Greek, and Arabic traditions. Muhammad al-Idrisi, John Doxapater, and Henry Aristippus all attest to the Norman court's wide-reaching diversity during the reign of Roger II. Van Cleve states that the post-Norman *interregnum* that preceded Frederick's accession was overemphasized or neglected by those scholars who sought to disassociate the Norman kingdom's brilliance with that of the later Hohenstaufen court. Frederick, he holds, operates in the same sphere as the Hauteville monarchs, the only difference being his accidental familiarity with Arabic cultural influences due to his upbringing in Palermo. The emperor's insatiable interest in scientific pursuits as well as his tolerance of both non-Christians and heretical Greeks all point to an adherence of long established Norman tendencies. Frederick had a "quality of cosmopolitanism together with his intellectual honesty—his insistent search for truth as opposed to tradition."⁶⁷

As stated above, Michael Scot was a highly influential translator in the thirteenth-century who also operated as court astrologer, mathematician, and scholar of philosophy. The Irishman spent at least a decade at the emperor's side before his death probably shortly before the imperial victory at Cortenuova, during his lifetime earning the praise of his intellectual contemporary Roger Bacon (who frequently cited Scot's translations) and of his master's enemy, Gregory IX. Along with Master Theodore, an Antiochene native, he represents the immense influence of "Hispano-Arabic science" and learning at the constantly mobile Sicilian court. Van Cleve implies that rulers like Frederick and his subordinates⁶⁸ were complicit in gradually ushering in a new age of reason that directly threatened the pretensions of the papal monarchy. The emperor's

⁶⁷ Van Cleve, 284-7, 300-1, 305.

⁶⁸ Michael Scot was tempted more than once by the papacy with the promise of his own episcopal dignity.

own *De arte venandi* is a book of “modern science” containing a deliberate purpose of grasping the reality of the world as it is. Illustrative of contemporary uneasiness over such vigorous pursuit of worldly knowledge, not to mention of the imperial conflict with Parma, all the fantastic tales of barbaric cruelty in pursuit of Frederick’s scientific aims stem from the Parmesan chronicler and visceral Guelph-papalist Salimbene. The Sicilian Questions addressed to ibn Sab’in, c. 1240, and another text dispatched to an Andalusian-Jewish encyclopedist both mirror a set of royal inquiries delivered to Michael Scot which communicates the emperor’s curiosity in the natural sciences and all the forces which govern phenomena within and beyond the sub-lunar realm.⁶⁹

In reckoning the place of the Sicilian school of vernacular poetry, Van Cleve pronounces that the troubadours of Provence and northern Italy had a decided influence on the development of such poetry at the Hohenstaufen court. Even Dante in his *De vulgari eloquentia* states that “whatever the best Italians attempted first appeared at the court of these mighty sovereigns,” in reference to Frederick and his son Manfred. Quite apart from the Provençal lyric poetry that betrayed its country of origin, Sicilian poetry provided linguistic forms that became the standard measurement of Italian—an objective *volgare* and a courtly style which lent itself to the Tuscan dialect that became the basis for modern Italian. As with Kantorowicz, Van Cleve will also make time to examine evolution in the forms of the plastic arts. He takes note of Frederick’s excavations at Megara Hyblaea, an ancient Greek colony next to the city of Augusta which the emperor founded in 1232, to exemplify an interest in reviving the artistic forms of antiquity. Indeed, a neo-classical style hearkening to the antique is evident in the ruins and recorded descriptions of the former triumphal arch along the Via Appia in Capua. The forever baffling

⁶⁹ Van Cleve, 309-14, 317-8.

Castel del Monte, completed toward the end of Frederick's reign (supposedly as a hunting lodge though Van Cleve insists on its martial purposes), blends ancient, Gothic, and geometrically unique styles and concepts.⁷⁰

-Abulafia-

Abulafia is stalwart in his stance that the *regno* was no longer the ethnic melting pot nor the cultural center that it once was by the time of Frederick's ascent. Fibonacci is discounted as a major influence, his productive years primarily passing during the emperor's youth and being a Pisan foreigner to the Kingdom of Sicily. In fact, the court was "culturally dependent on that of Castile" for learned advancements. Despite the intellectual musing of the emperor and his correspondences with scholars in Spain, Morocco, and Egypt, the imperial court itself lacked the academic prestige of Toledo or Provence, the Sicilian translations being often inferior in quality, not to mention in quantity, to that of more prominent translation schools. Though Frederick's mind was active and "interested in the facts of the material world," he was still operating within a strictly medieval framework of Judeo-Christian concepts. The Sicilian Questions appear only to demonstrate Frederick's personal ignorance of the extant Aristotelian arguments and methods already trickling into Europe from the Orient. Patronage of Latin education lagged behind elsewhere in the West while the royal university at Naples had little influence outside the kingdom apart from the later attendance of Thomas Aquinas who is better remembered for his lecture post at Paris than his days as a student in Naples. Abulafia reiterates, like Kantorowicz and Van Cleve, that the main purpose of the university was to train legal scholars and court officials. The Salernitan medical school is claimed to have suffered intellectually via imperial intervention in the curriculum, yielding prominence to Montpellier. The impressive rhetorical

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 328, 331-2, 335, 341-5.

works and anti-papal diatribes of Piero della Vigna and others are, according to Abulafia, only perfected imitations of preferred contemporary styles. The emperor's most notable intellectual moment comes in the form of his personal composition on falconry, exhibiting a genuine interest in scientific knowledge.⁷¹

Abulafia also implies that Lombard settlement in Messina, something encouraged by the kingdom after the pacification and expulsion of the Muslim highlanders, allowed for the propagation of north-Italian lyric forms throughout the *regno*. However, he also raises the issues of the difficulty of the historian's and linguist's task in that much of what has come down to posterity was later bastardized to be intelligible to Tuscan audiences. Fastened unquestionably to the monarch, the so-called Sicilian school was limited to courtly poetry in subject matter and was not an intensive effort to forge a new literary tradition, owing much more to the Provençal troubadours and German *Minnesänger*. Similarly, the members of the succeeding house of Charles of Anjou were unimpressed with the scale of Hohenstaufen architecture, preferring to build in a much grander style. The Capuan gate imitated classical styles rather poorly in spite of the fact that it adequately captured Frederick's ideals of a universal sovereign presiding over his subjects without interference from the papacy. Abulafia describes Castel del Monte and other Hohenstaufen-era structures as "proto-Gothic" in style, concluding that all of Frederick's architecture was but an extension of the Norman inheritance. Frederick's sarcophagus at Palermo was originally intended for Roger II, making the emperor more of a propagandist in this respect rather than an innovative builder-king.⁷²

Conclusions of each author

⁷¹ Abulafia, 254-9, 263-6, 279.

⁷² *ibid.*, 271-4, 280-1, 284-5, 288-9.

-Kantorowicz-

Toward the end of his seminal piece Kantorowicz briefly summarizes the significance of Frederick's legacy. He assigns the rapidly evolving political landscape of Italy as well as all the hallmarks of the Renaissance political experience—the *condotierri* and *signori*, and all the accompanying aspects of fourteenth and fifteenth-century city-states in upper Italy—to Frederick's actions in Lombardy. In this single breath he dispels notions that Renaissance-era patronage was a product of the communes and statelets which arose thereafter. Frederick's intervention helps spread the example of the Sicilian model, the *norma regnorum* and all it entails. It is for these reasons that Dante's *De monarchia* was officially banned by the Church as heretical, remaining on the rolls of the *Index librorum prohibitorum* until 1897. Kantorowicz names Henry III Plantagenet a "puppet" of low spirits and a cowardly nature when compared to Frederick and St. Louis. He believes the English monarch's weaknesses are exhibited in his willingness to accede to varying factions that were vying for control within Christendom. Whether these voices were papal, imperial, or baronial depended upon both the occasion and climate. Frederick purportedly took several opportunities to publicly and formally bewail the vassalage of the English throne to the popes. Kantorowicz held up Frederick as "the Genius of the Renaissance," translating a Machiavellian sense of *virtu* to the later tyrants of the Italian city-states.⁷³

-Van Cleve-

Responding to his contemporaries, Van Cleve does not take a clear position on either side of the proverbial fence. He condemns the survival of scandalous opinions about Frederick that

⁷³ Kantorowicz, 570-1, 668-9.

continue in modern scholarship, arguing for the consideration of the emperor as an individual rather than a continuum who cannot be wholly medieval or Renaissance. Van Cleve instead prefers the terminology ‘modern.’ Any misdeeds one may perceive with present-day eyes should not be judged by such present-day standards and should not excuse the similar behavior of zealous Churchmen during a conflict of no small measure for Western civilization. The *Constitutiones* reveal Frederick’s skill in statesmanship, blending Anglo-Norman, Byzantine-Greek, Islamo-Arabic, and Roman legal traditions. Its greater importance lies in its composition by a class of trained jurists that would direct national politics into modernity.⁷⁴

Van Cleve also recognizes Frederick’s dissatisfaction with his brother-in-law Henry III, “the weak king,” for indecisiveness, lack of fortitude, ignorance of Oriental king-friendship, and allowing the papal legate to besmirch the imperial name in England while simultaneously raising revenues in dubious fashion to bolster the pope’s military adventures. Despite Frederick’s lack of military successes, his cultural contributions far outweighed these shortcomings. The author believes the emperor was aware that temporal ambitions would weaken the papacy and, alone among the Christian monarchs, sought to delineate the *imperium* from the *sacerdotium*. This suggests that Frederick was far ahead of his time in recognizing that the *ecclesia* should be concerned only with spiritual matters. Though the emperor’s abilities could often seem insurmountable in the face of impassable difficulties, only time brought the bare framework of his royal goals to fruition.⁷⁵

-Abulafia-

⁷⁴ Van Cleve, 531-3.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 434, 535-6, 539-40.

In his concluding remarks the British historian spares few for what he sees as the conjuring of a false spirit around the historical image of the emperor. He blasts Frederick's contemporary supporters as well as Burckhardt, Kantorowicz, and Van Cleve for lauding the Staufen emperor as the *stupor mundi* and a forerunner to the classical rebirth of Europe. Frederick's willingness to reconcile with the papacy and his apparent zeal for crusading are given as examples of his strictly medieval character. The bureaucratic state in Sicily cannot be credited to Frederick but to his predecessors, while his conflict with the popes becomes a backdrop to ongoing affairs in northern Italy that predate his reign. The state itself failed to live up to the ideals of Piero della Vigna and the *Constitutiones*. Rather than weak by comparison, Henry III is shown to be unpopular and wrapped up in the affairs of his own kingdom. Though reluctant, the Plantagenet king proved an apt fundraiser for the papacy in its protracted wars against Frederick. A famous quote from Matthew Paris grants a glimpse into Henry's predicament which only led the king into further conflict with the landed aristocracy—"I do not wish to oppose the lord pope in anything." Further characterizing Frederick as a medieval emperor, Abulafia affirms the devout nature of Frederick's Christian worldview which could never wish to dispense with the Roman Church by any means imaginable. Repeating his criticism of what scholars have previously hailed as Hohenstaufen cultural achievements, the author calls Frederick an end in relation to the Sicilian tradition rather than an inception in relation to the coming Renaissance. By this view Frederick takes on the airs of an overwhelmed monarch forced into defensive posture by the circumstances of his time.⁷⁶

Final remarks

⁷⁶ Abulafia, 383, 386, 436-9.

Overall, it is immediately evident that there have been vehement disagreements on how to view the rule of Frederick II and what exactly that reign means for the transition of Western civilization from the medieval to the early-modern. Kantorowicz, while being the most accessible and interesting of the three authors, clearly participates in the scholarly atmosphere determined by Burckhardt and his successors in the German university system. Van Cleve's text seems to represent an intermediary position, relying heavily on German scholarship (including Kampers) to supplement his claims while finding a few instances to levy his own beliefs about the emperor. It is with Abulafia that the Anglophone scholarship reaches a maturity, resulting in a hardline critique of how past historians handled the material and apparently imposed their own Romanticist adornments on a typical medieval emperor. Scholarly disputes such as these are essential to a meaningful study of history, a subject which defies the laws of systematic science in that the past events partake in the same continuum of time as the present, ever-changing in both mind and spirit. However, the debate has further relevance and implications in the reality of contemporary sociopolitical developments. The organization of an efficient modern secular state is often taken for granted in the West, sentiments illustrated with striking self-assuredness in the declaration of Francis Fukuyama in his seminal 1992 bestseller that modern man has reached the end of history with the conclusion of the Cold War and that Western-style liberal democracy was to be the final stage of human government and social organization. If anything, events since 1992 have proved that the administrative and political elements composing a fully functional bureaucratic nation-state can be quite transitory, considering the multitude of failed states across the globe whose societies and cultures rejected (perhaps sometimes even an involuntary rejection, more like a natural bodily function which cannot be helped) the imposed model of the democratic West. In this way, the debate around Frederick II becomes central to pinpointing the

origins of contemporary Western society. Such studies can, after a time, harbor a deeper appreciation for the relative comforts of modern political administration and social organization or perhaps even ignite a scorching desire to effect changes deemed necessary for the perfection of the State presided over by its blind female companion *Justitia*.

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