

Open and Closed.

Sicilian Society Before and During the Reign of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen

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1. Mediterranean, Pre-Atlantic Europe

1.1 Cartographic Prelude

In the year 1138 a remarkable meeting takes place in the palace of Palermo. In the great marble hall of his palace, King Roger II (1095-1154) receives a well-known, highly acclaimed scholar from North Africa. His name is al-Sharif al-Idrisi (1099-1166), born in Ceuta, Morocco, a specialist in knowledge of the Muslim world. He has traveled extensively and is, in addition to being a cartographer, also an Egyptologist and biologist. The king takes his guest's hand and leads him to a chair next to the throne. In doing so, he expresses his appreciation for the remarkable knowledge of al-Idrisi. The king has invited him to Palermo to carry out a great plan.

Seated next to his royal host, al-Idrisi hears Roger's numerous compliments for his knowledge of the world, the different peoples who inhabit it and the cultures that exist there. Then Roger gets to the point. He wants al-Idrisi to make him a map of the world. This way he will know the boundaries of his own country and from the countries around it, the routes to and from Sicily over land and over sea and to which climate zone the island belongs. All kind of things important for a seafaring country.¹ Al-Idrisi is given all kinds of privileges, including visiting the king on a mule, which is a high honor in the Arab world.² The scholar needs little time to think about it. The king appoints him head of a team of scientists, with whom he must be able to bring the project to a successful conclusion.

Al-Idrisi's stay at the Sicilian court is very productive³. After sixteen years, a world map is ready, as well as 70 sub-maps and a silver globe of 400 kilos. The cards are part of a volume with a beautiful title: *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Ikhtiraq al-Afaq*, or *The joy of him who wants to roam all quarters of the world*. In creating it, al-Idrisi collaborated with mathematicians, geographers, surveyors and philosophers.

¹ J.F. LEDGER, *Mapping Mediterranean Geographies: Geographic and Cartographic Encounters between the Islamic World and Europe c. 1100-1600*, Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016.

² H. HOUBEN, *Roger II von Sizilien. Herrscher zwischen Orient und Okzident*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997, p. 112.

³ The terms "Sicilian court" and "Sicily" throughout the rest of this article refer to the Sicilian kingdom, which also includes the lower part of the Italian boot. This whole area is also referred to by the term "Regno".

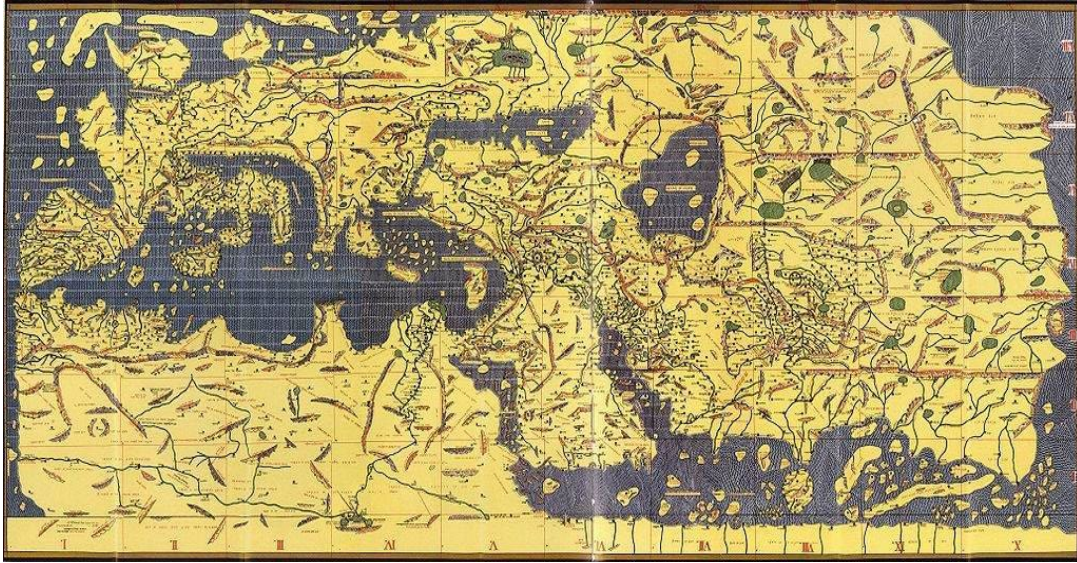


Figure 1. A Google Earth from 1154.

The appointment of al-Idrisi is a sign of the openness of the Norman court of Sicily as a center of culture and science⁴. His cartographic work has become a medieval Google Earth.⁵ Al-Idrisi's skills becomes really clear when we compare one of his maps from 1154 with a world map drawn around 1300 in the English county of Hereford. The comparison shows the cultural advantage of Southern Europe over Northern Europe.



Figure 2. The map of Hereford around 1300.



Figure 3. The map of al -Idrisi, 1154.

On the Google-Earth map of 1154, dots in the coastal areas indicate population density. All major population centers are located on the Mediterranean Sea, in the west Spain, Italy and the region where al-Idrisi was born, present-day Morocco. In the east are the areas where the great caravan routes from the Middle East, Persia and the Indian

⁴ H. HOUBEN, *Roger II von Sizilien*, cit., pp. 104-120.

⁵ In its original state, the main map was upside down with Africa to the north and Europe to the south. See P.M. COBB, *The Race to Paradise. An Islamic History of the Crusades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 13-15.

subcontinent reach the Mediterranean, such as in Egypt and Palestine. This urbanization also shows the lead of South over Northern Europe.

There is a great resemblance between al-Idrisi's Google Earth map and a map that details the situation some four centuries later. In the latter, the dots mark *funduqs*, caravanserais, inns and *fondacos*. They are overnight places for merchants, who also sell their goods there. The dots mark trade centers, trade routes and ports. Braudel's famous *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* argues how the decline of Southern European culture began around 1600. However, the map illustrates how important that area still was economically, compared to Northern Europe.⁶

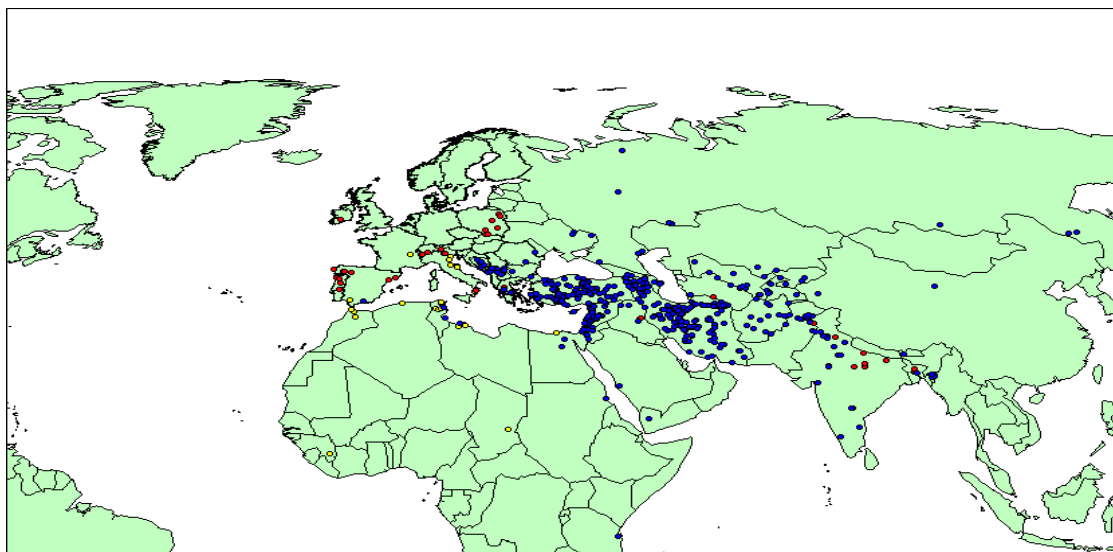


Figure 4. Funduqs and fondacos about 1600.

In one respect, however, there is a striking difference between the map of 1600 and the Google Earth map of 1154. Around 1150 the importance of Sicily is greater than the map from 1600 suggests. It depicts Sicily much larger than it really is. This can be clearly seen in the Apulian heel of the boot, which essentially forms an entirely new foot. Given al-Idrisi's precision elsewhere, this may indicate that he wants to give his boss the impression that he rules a larger territory than he actually owns. This Byzantinism is articulated by the praise al-Idrisi gives his royal master: "His measures are arrows that never miss their target. He untangles the most complicated matters with ease. He controls all government and administrative business. His sleep is like ordinary people's waking hours. His judgments are of perfect justice, his gifts like deep seas and bountiful rain."⁷ Also, the Moroccan may have simply intended to reflect the importance of Sicily as the center of the world at the time.

1.2 Europe in a Pre-Atlantic world

«There is no doubt that from the fall of the Roman Empire to the beginning of the

⁶ F. BRAUDEL, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, London, 1972.

⁷ H. HOUBEN, *Roger II von Sizilien*, cit., p. 182.

thirteenth century Europe [meaning Northern-Europe] was an underdeveloped area in relation to the major centres of civilization at the time...[-] clearly a land of barbarians»⁸. This quote from the well-known Italian historian Carlo Cipolla shows that before 1200 the peoples living around the Mediterranean Sea created a long-lasting civilization of their own. This is confirmed by Paul Cobb in his *The Race for Paradise*, in which he expresses himself in much the same terms as Cipolla.⁹

Fernand Braudel, who concludes his Mediterranean book with the death of Philip II (1527-1598), is aware of the simultaneous decline of a culture some thirty centuries old. That Mediterranean culture is also described by the Englishman David Abulafia in his *The Great Sea. A Human History of the Mediterranean*¹⁰. The American historian Janet Abu-Lughod does something similar in her book *Before European Hegemony*. In it, the map below shows the situation of about 1250, thereby demonstrating the ongoing importance of the Mediterranean Sea as an economic system (II) in the thirteenth century.

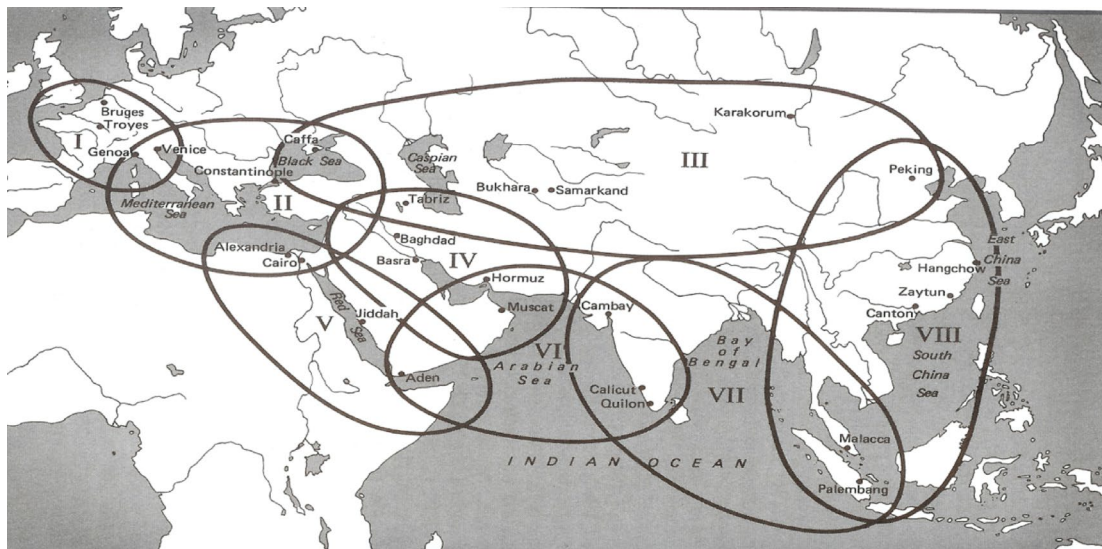


Figure 5. Map of the world, 1250

This System II is linked to seven other major global economic systems, of which System VI (around the Arabian Sea) is the most important for the Mediterranean¹¹. After 1600, the nations of northwestern Europe would conquer the world. It is this “European hegemony”, that Abu-Lughod’s book title refers to. System I shows the link with the Southern Netherlands, the first step towards that Atlantic hegemony. The situation of 1250 displays Italy as the heart of System II. Al-Idrisi’s world map from a century earlier

⁸ This quote from Carlo Cipolla is taken from J. ABU-LUGHOD, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*, Oxford, p. 106. See also: H. JANSEN, *Rethinking Burckhardt and Huizinga. A Transformation of Temporal Images*, in «Storia della storiografia», 70, 2, 2016, p. 95.

⁹ P.M. COBB, *The Race for Paradise: An Islamic History of the Crusades*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 19-23.

¹⁰ I have used the German edition: D. ABULAFIA, *Das Mittelmeer. Eine Biography*, Frankfurt, Fischer Taschenbuch, 2013.

¹¹ J. ABU-LUGHOD, *Before European Hegemony*, cit., p. 34.

underlines this importance. Both maps suggest that Italy is going through a period of prosperity.

1.3 The Undulation of Civilizations. Defining an Open and Closed Society in the Middle Ages

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur points out that history is about how civilizations grow, flourish and decay. He illustrates this narrative approach with the work of Braudel¹². From a bird's eye view, the history of the Mediterranean shows a clear undulation, especially in its economic and socio-political development. An example: the power of Byzantium ends in 1204 with the Fourth Crusade and then Istanbul becomes a major power in the same region in the 15th and 16th centuries. This undulation spans many centuries, but the pattern of rise and fall can also be seen by studying only one century. Such is the case with Sicily. It makes a special contribution to the history of Renaissance Italy between 1200 and 1500¹³.

This study mainly discusses the life and work of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (1194-1250), which focuses on the history of the Sicilian monarchy between 1200 and 1250. However, we should not neglect the previous seventy years, because then the foundations on which Frederick builds further have been laid. That is why I begin this essay with Roger II (1095-1154), who reigned over southern Italy from 1128 until his death. With regard to the undulating character, the important question is whether the period from 1200 to 1250 is a decrease after an increase, or an increase after a decrease. Chua shows in *Day of Empire* that an increase is usually the product of an open society, while a closed society causes a decline. This gives us the intrigue of this essay: before Frederick II, Sicily is an open society, during his reign it becomes a closed one.

The terms "open" and "closed" should not be taken as normative, as Popper does¹⁴. Often a medieval prince cannot fully enforce the laws and regulations over his subjects. He has no modern bureaucracy to control his lands, usually he has to trust his feudal vassals¹⁵. In a complex network of relations between political and social forces, he has only limited room for maneuver. Therefore open and closed need a new definition.

We consider a medieval society to be open when its landlord or monarch tolerates diversity and openness of communication. In addition, his subjects should not be taxed too hard, so that they can do business and achieve a reasonable subsistence level. This requires the monarch to impose restrictions on himself in his foreign policy and also to

¹² P. RICOEUR, *Time and History 1*, Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 208-218.

¹³ See also: H. HOUBEN, *Roger II von Sizilien*, cit., p. 80.

¹⁴ For the definition of "open" and "closed" in a medieval context I have used: K. POPPER, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998; H. BERGSON, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, translated by R.A. AUDRA and C. BRERETON, with assistance of W.H. CARTER, Notre Dame, Macmillan press, [1935] 1977, pp. 18-27, 45-65, 229-234; A.G. WEILER (ed. P. BANGE), *Sacrale structuren en seculariserende tendensen in de middeleeuwen en renaissance*, in ID., *De Middeleeuwen voorbij*, Nijmegen, Centrum voor Middeleeuwse Studies Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, 1992, pp. 25-50, there pp. 28-30; G. GURVICH, *Maatschappijen en de typen van hun structuur*, in ID., *Handboek van de Sociologie I*, Utrecht, Het Spectrum, 1968, pp. 314-364, there pp. 334-348.

¹⁵ H. HOUBEN, *Roger II von Sizilien*, cit., pp. 149-162.

look after the economic interests of his subjects at home and abroad. Therefore, rulers should pay attention to the situation in the cities. To this end, freedom of trade and industry, but also freedom of religion and freedom of cultural expression are essential¹⁶. In this context, the term “tolerance” will sometimes be used, although this term is not quite adequate in reference to the Middle Ages.

For obvious reasons, a closed society has opposite traits. Without attention to diversity, there can be no effective communication. Raising heavy taxes leads to poverty and hinders economic activity. Foreign policy, based on an unrealistic and radical idea, is costly. The same goes for monarchical self-aggrandizement. In my view, “open” and “closed” refer to the degree of application of laws and regulations. This can be done “moderately” or “radically”. I think Roger II somehow limits his ambitions and improvised largely on existing structures. Frederick wants to push his ambitions and plans much more against the existing relationships¹⁷.

2. Roger II and his Successors

2.1 The Nature of the State

The protagonist in this part of my discourse is Roger II (1095-1154) from the Norman house of Altavilla. It owes its position to the Franco-Norman family of Hauteville, who have ruled Sicily since 1091. Roger II, in particular, is responsible for raising its status. He obtains the royal title and makes it his mission to revive the classic Sicily of the great tyrants, such as Dionysius the Elder and Hiero the Second. For official occasions, Roger dresses in Byzantine, imperial robes or wears the garb of an Arab emir. In this way he shows his own importance, but also his feeling for the religious and political diversity of the Sicilian culture. The latter is also manifested by the granting of self-government to Greek Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim subjects. However, this should not be seen as tolerance. James Powell and Abulafia claim that there is no such thing in those times¹⁸. Rulers, as Roger and also Frederick II, are led by *Prudentia*, which means that friendship and cooperation with minorities or enemies are constantly weighed against the needs of society¹⁹. To Frederick, as we shall see, “the needs of society” mean something different than to Roger.

With *Prudentia* Roger II also distances himself from the papacy, which in the eleventh and twelfth centuries rejected Eastern Orthodox Christianity and expelled Islam from the

¹⁶ Ivi, pp. 166-168.

¹⁷ H. HOUBEN, *Politische Integration und regionale Identitäten in normanisch-staufischen Konigreich Sizilien*, in «Vorträge und Forschungen: Fragen der politischen Integration im mittelalterlichen Europa», 63, 2005, pp. 171-184.

¹⁸ “Relatively speaking, yes, he was extraordinarily tolerant, but not according to modern canons of equal treatment before the law, and in the mind of people of all religions; he was less overt in his piety than his devout contemporary Louis of France, but his links with the Cistercian order should not be ignored”, in D. ABULAFIA, *Frederick II. A Medieval Emperor*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, 437-438.

¹⁹ J.M. POWELL, *The Crusades, the Kingdom of Sicily and the Mediterranean*, London-New York, Routledge, 2007, p. III; Ivi, *Frederick II and the Muslims*, p. 7; W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II, Teil 2. Der Kaiser 1220-1250*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003, p. 199.

Holy Land. Also in another way, the Sicilian rulers distanced themselves from the Pope, evidenced by two ecclesiastical images, one in the Martorana of Palermo and one in the Basilica of Monreale. The first shows Roger II being crowned king by Christ himself and the second shows Roger's grandson William II performing the same ritual. The Sicilian rulers thus want to show that they have received their power directly from God, without papal intervention.



Figure 6a. Roger II (left).



Figure 6b. William II crowned king by Christ.

David Abulafia describes Roger II as a talented, but ambitious and ruthless prince.²⁰ Stürner points out that his decisions could not be challenged.²¹ This is certainly true, but Roger can limit his ambitions and cruelty and even must do so. The nature of his state becomes clear when we follow the discussion between Antonio Marongiu and Léon-Robert Ménager. Marongiu sees Sicily during Roger II as a model state, while Ménager does not find him original in this regard.²² This discussion is continued by Errico Cuozzo, who follows Marongiu and David Matthew does the same with Ménager. I think Matthew is right when he says that when Roger founded the state, he didn't start from a specific concept. He improvised largely on the basis of existing structures and models. He borrowed bureaucratic elements from the Arab world; by perpetuating feudal jurisdictions he followed western influences.²³ It is precisely the feudal aspects that make it an open

²⁰ D. ABULAFIA, *Das Mittelmeer*, cit., p. 417.

²¹ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, cit., p. 199.

²² A. MARONGIU, *Uno "stato modello" nel medioevo italiano: il Regno normanno di Sicilia*, in «Critica storica», 1963, pp. 379-394; L.-R. MÉNAGER, *L'institution monarchique dans les États normands d'Italie. Contributions à l'étude du pouvoir royal dans les principautés occidentales aux XIe-XIIe siècles*, in «Cahiers de civilisations médiévales», 2, 1959, pp. 303-331; pp. 445-468.

²³ E. CUOZZO, *L'unificazione normanna e il Regno normanno-svevo*, in G. GALASSO (ed.), *Storia del Mezzogiorno*, vol. II, Napoli, Edizioni del sole, 1989, pp. 593-825; D. MATTHEW, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, Cambridge, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks, 1992. See also H. HOUBEN, *Roger II von Sizilien*, cit., p. 4.

society. It limits the monarch's ability to interfere in the ordinary life of landlords, entrepreneurs, merchants and commoners, especially those who live in the cities. This is confirmed by Hubert Houben who states that only since 1140 a more centralized government arose on the island of Sicily and Calabria. Even then there were separate departments for the Greek, Arab and Latin subjects. Feudal relationships persisted in Apulia, Bari, Tarente, Capua and Naples.²⁴ Terms such as offices and officials should not be given too modern connotations.²⁵ Houben calls the Sicilian monarchy, during the reign, of Roger II, a state with a lack of integration possibilities.²⁶ He experiences it negatively, I see it as a positive point. Here lies a difference between the political and the more socio-economically oriented historian. The political vision seeks community consciousness, the socio-economic vision emphasizes people's potential for self-development. I don't know whether Houben means it positively, but I totally agree when he says, that Roger «had only limited room for maneuver in a complex network of relationships between political and social forces»²⁷. The restrictions of the monarch mean more freedom for the people. Roger's propaganda clearly shows that he is not unfamiliar with self-aggrandizement, but he can connect it with interest in the world around him, as the story of al-Idrisi illustrates. Roger's Christianity is no obstacle to considering the Muslim al-Idrisi as his equal.

2.2 Economy

Sicily, also called the *Regno*, is one of the four most prominent trading powers of Italy, along with Pisa, Venice and Genoa, in the twelfth century²⁸. Its ports are frequented by Genoese, Venetian, Amalfian, Pisan, Arab and Jewish merchants. Powell notes that the Norman kings did not interfere, neither in commerce nor in industry. Even agriculture has no monarchical meddling. The Norman kings only confirm the habits and customs of towns and rural communities, which thus gain power through royal sanction.²⁹ Powell sees this non-interference as the result of an exclusively feudal view of economic affairs of the Norman rulers. Norman feudalism implies a fragmentation of public authority, and Powell sees this as a failure³⁰. The English professor probably has centralization in mind, as an aspect of modernization³¹. I see this modernization differently, because he also refers to a provision in the Norman legislation «admonishing all who had among them burghers, rustics, or men of any profession to treat them with humanity»³². Here feudal

²⁴ H. HOUBEN, *Roger II von Sizilien*, cit., p. 156.

²⁵ Ivi, p. 149.

²⁶ H. HOUBEN, *Politische Integration und regionale Identitäten*, cit., pp. 171-184.

²⁷ H. HOUBEN, *Roger II von Sizilien*, cit., pp. 1-7, especially p. 7: «in einem komplexen Beziehungsgeflecht der politischen und gesellschaftlichen Kräfte nur einen begrenzten Handlungsspielraum hatte».

²⁸ D. ABULAFIA, *The Mediterranean*, cit., p. 417. See also: H. HOUBEN, *Politische Integration und regionale Identitäten*, cit., especially p. 172.

²⁹ J.M. POWELL, *Medieval Monarchy and Trade: the Economic Policy of Frederick II and the Kingdom of Sicily (a survey)*, Spoleto, Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1962, pp. 427-428.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 425.

³¹ J.M. POWELL, *Economy and Society in the Kingdom of Sicily under Frederick II*, pp. 1-13, especially p. 12.

³² J.M. POWELL, *Medieval Monarchy and Trade: the Economic Policy of Frederick II and the Kingdom of Sicily (a survey)*, cit., p. 426.

norms restrict rulers to deal with the economy, a reluctance that is fruitful in the long run, as the growth of northern Italian cities shows. The opposite is even more true, as Powell himself points out, arguing that Frederick II's long-term commercial and industrial initiatives are not paying off³³.

2.3 Foreign politics

Using his authority and feudal norms, Roger is able to keep the peace at home and conduct a firm foreign policy. He builds one of the strongest fleets in the Mediterranean, conquering Malta in 1127, and large parts of Greece and the area around Mahdia in Tunisia in 1148. According to Abulafia, Roger is in the 1150s creating a great *thalassocracy* (a seaborne empire), which, with his death in 1153, comes to an abrupt end³⁴.

Despite pursuing a policy of conquest, Roger maintains his composure. When Venice and Constantinople are about to form an alliance against him, he limits himself to small raids on Greece. He then turns his attention to North Africa. After the capture of Mahdia, the Sicilian troops are given a free hand to loot for two hours³⁵. After that, Mahdia is considered part of the Sicilian kingdom³⁶. The citizens of Mahdia are helped back on their feet by a sort of Marshall Plan: merchants are given credit to get their affairs in order, thus returning prosperity to the city. Here too Roger shows his attention to diversity: he appoints Mahdian judges to try the Muslim inhabitants according to their own customs³⁷.

2.4 Successors

While Roger's successors do not display his strength and charisma, they often act in his spirit. Roger's son William I, "the Bad" (1154-1166), despite losing his territory in North Africa, managed to maintain his grip on the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian Seas. This poses a threat to Genoa and Venice, cities that the Sicilian king must appease to protect his contacts in the eastern Mediterranean. Genoa even concludes a treaty with William, stating that the Genoese will import products from Sicily. Grain, wool and cotton are the main Sicilian exports, while valuable Northern Italian and Flemish sheets from Genoa are the import. Abulafia points out that Sicily is the spider within a large European economic network³⁸.

This is confirmed by the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* of the monk Peter of Eboli. Eboli writes his book in 1196, during the reign of Henry VI. Henry's wife is Constance, the (half) sister of William I. This makes Henry not only a German Emperor, but also King of Sicily, ruling it from 1189 to 1197. Eboli chronicles Henry's exploits, but his work is

³³ J.M. POWELL, *Economy and Society in the Kingdom of Sicily under Frederick II: recent perspectives*, pp. 1-13, in particular p. 10.

³⁴ J.M. POWELL, *Medieval Monarchy and Trade*, cit., p. 420.

³⁵ H. HOUBEN, *Roger II von Sizilien*, cit., p. 86. The same goes for Tripolis in 1146. See Ivi, pp. 84-85.

³⁶ P.M. COBB, *The Race for Paradise*, cit., pp. 156-160.

³⁷ D. ABULAFIA, *Das Mittelmeer*, cit., pp. 418-419.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 423.

has shown himself to be “more tolerant” than his fanatical Northern European counterparts, who at the time set out under the cross to liberate the Holy Land from Muslims.

One of the Muslims, thus saved, is Ibn Jubayr, born in Valencia in 1145. We know of this event because he keeps a diary⁴⁰. In it he is certainly not positive about the position of Sicilian Islam, «which he said was exposed to the most painful vexations on the part of the Christian authorities and whose near total extinction shrewd observers already foresaw»⁴¹. Despite Jubayr’s pessimism, he is not entirely gloomy about the Sicilian kings. He explains that many Mediterranean ports are closed off with heavy chains to protect them from raids by pirates and enemies. Merchandise is often brought ashore with smaller boats. Then he notices that Messina is much more accessible than most other ports. Messina has no chains and small boats, but gives direct access to moorings, to transport people and goods directly to the coast. He writes: «One sees ships on the quays, tied down like horses to poles or stables»⁴². The amazement of Ibn Jubayr on this state of affairs illustrates the fair openness of the Sicilian world in the twelfth century. The Norman rulers, such as Roger II, William I, William II and Henry VI, the latter infamous for his atrocities in battle with rebels, cannot be considered mild-mannered. Yet they show respect for society’s problems and impose limits on themselves in both their domestic and foreign policies.

Abulafia in his *The Two Italies* comments on the socio-economic position of Sicily, compared to the other major powers in Italy around 1200⁴³. In it, it becomes clear that Pisa has by then lost its position to two other northern Italian powers: Milan with its important industry and Florence as a financial center. Italy’s position in the Mediterranean is thereafter determined by five powers: Milan, Genoa, Venice, Florence and, importantly for this essay, the Regno of Sicily.

3. Frederick II

3.1. Christian Carolingian or Mediterranean Classical Emperor?

At the beginning of his reign, Frederick II (1194-1250) is the heir to two important legates, one from his Staufen and one from his Sicilian ancestors. Through his father and especially his grandfather, Frederick I Barbarossa, Frederick II discovers the importance of the German emperorship. Through his mother Constance and his other grandfather Roger II, he inherits the open society and the ambition to form a Mediterranean “thalassocracy”.

There is a long historiographical tradition, from Ranke to Rader, that sees Frederick II more as a Sicilian ruler than as a German emperor⁴⁴. However, this tradition is debatable.

⁴⁰ I. JUBAYR, *Viaggi* in M. AMARI, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula*, vol. I, Torino-Roma, Loescher, 1880-1881, pp. 177-178.

⁴¹ J.M. POWELL, *Frederick II and the Rebellion of the Muslims of Sicily, 1200-1224*, in ID., *The Crusades, the Kingdom of Sicily and the Mediterranean*, cit., pp. 13-22, especially p. 13.

⁴² D. ABULAFIA, *Das Mittelmeer*, cit., p. 412.

⁴³ D. ABULAFIA, *The Two Italies. Economic Relations between the Norman Kingdom of Sicily and the Northern Communes*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

⁴⁴ See H. HOUBEN, *Friedrich II., ein Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron?*, Lecture delivered on 15

Hubert Houben, a German-Italian historian, thinks the question of whether Frederick II gives Sicily precedence over the Roman-German Empire is wrong. According to him, they are connected and inseparable⁴⁵. I largely agree, although he does state that this issue should also be looked at from a German perspective⁴⁶. Olaf Rader does not look at this combination from a German, but from a Southern Italian perspective.

I think Frederick himself views his imperial position from a “German” Carolingian-Christian tradition, as well as from the Mediterranean tradition of the *Imperium Romanum*. Precisely this double form is important to Frederick. Both traditions combined give him a broad justification for his pursuit of what is called “*Weltkaisertum*” [emperor of a world empire]⁴⁷. His maternal grandfather (Roger II) calls himself “just” a classical Greek tyrant⁴⁸. Frederick aspires more and sees himself as the successor of the Roman Emperors Augustus and Justinian⁴⁹.

Rader underscores Frederick’s Sicilian perspective by pointing to his naval policy. According to Rader, Frederick is using it to restore Roger’s Mediterranean empire⁵⁰. In my opinion, we can complement and reinforce this with his seizure of Jerusalem, his conquest of the Tunisian island of Djerba and his conflicts with Milan, Genoa and Venice. This desire to conquer, underlines his pursuit of both a classical Mediterranean and a Carolingian-Christian conception of empire.

These grand ambitions lead not only to the erosion of the open society that his Sicilian ancestors left him, but also to the decline of Sicily as a major Italian power. Both legacies weigh too heavily on his shoulders. Therefore Frederick can no longer be seen as a peace-loving and open-minded ruler as is often thought. He appears to be a “guerrafondaio” a warmonger, as Paolo Grillo recently asserted⁵¹. The reason for this is his craving for the restoration of the Roman Empire.

3.2. *The Journey to Germany*

At a very young age, Frederick realizes the importance of the German Imperial title. To achieve this, at the age of seventeen, he undertakes a very adventurous and dangerous journey to Germany. Frederick’s acceptance of his Hohenstaufen legacy is no small matter. The Imperial title of Germany is not automatically passed on from father to son. The German Emperor is first elected Roman King by the German princes and bishops and then crowned Emperor by the Pope. Therefore, it is by no means certain in advance, that Frederick will receive the imperial title. Due to this unique election procedure,

July 2015 in the Marienkirche of Aix la Chapelle, 3, note 6.

⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*. See also: W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2, cit., p. 213 and E. KANTOROWICZ, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, cit., pp. 98-99

⁴⁷ W.J. ZWALVE, *Power and Authority, A Trial of Two Swords. A History of the Union of the Holy Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Sicily (1186-1250)*, Den Haag, Eleven 2023. See also: W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2, cit., p. 405.

⁴⁸ D. ABULAFIA, *Das Mittelmeer*, cit., p. 417.

⁴⁹ Kantorowicz, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite* 336-349.

⁵⁰ O.B. RADER, *Friedrich II. Der Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron. Eine Biographie*, Munich, Verlag C.H. Beck, 2010, p. 352.

⁵¹ In my vision Frederick’s aspirations go beyond the unification of Italy, as Paolo Grillo argues in his *Federico II. La Guerra, Le Città e l’Impero* Milano, Mondadori, 2023.

Frederick has to undertake a trip to Germany.

This forces him to cross northern Italy. There are four important Italian powers: Genoa, Venice, Milan and Florence. Milan, part of the German Empire, is especially hostile to Frederick, because it still has a bone to pick with Frederick Barbarossa's grandson.

During Barbarossa, the cities of Lombardy show that they do not want to be part of the German Empire. The result is the catastrophic defeat of Barbarossa at the Battle of Legnano of 1176. The subsequent Peace of Constance (1183), while confirming the emperor's rule over the Lombard cities, removes him from administrative control over them. The cities are free to govern themselves, to appoint their own judges and to organize the judiciary as they wish. They are also given the freedom to collect tolls and taxes and to raise armies⁵².



Figure 8. Frederick's Journey from Sicily to Germany

From the Milanese perspective, it is highly undesirable for Frederick to become emperor of the German Holy Roman Empire. Frederick could undo the Lombard victories confirmed by the Peace of Constance. That is why Milan is the great opponent of Frederick's trip to Germany. Unlike Barbarossa, he is also a Sicilian monarch, putting Lombardy in danger of losing its autonomy between the jaws of the German Empire in the north and the Sicilian kingdom in the south. Milan therefore wants to prevent Frederick from reaching Germany. He is nearly caught but manages to escape and is crowned Roman king in 1215 in Aix-la-Chapelle.

Genoa is a different case. We know that Frederick used ships from Genoa and Pisa for the first part of his journey. The partnership of both cities with Frederick is based on the hope of preserving the port and toll privileges in Sicily. In doing so, Genoa accepts the risk of a conflict with Milan. It remembers Roger II and apparently considers the power of Sicily greater than that of Milan. Genoa is allied with the Emperor of Byzantium, and when Byzantium falls into Venetian hands after the Fourth Crusade (see below), it

⁵² E. HORST, *Friedrich II, der Staufer. Kaiser, Feldherr, Dichter*, Düsseldorf, Heyne Verlag, 1990, p. 248.

maintains contact with the Byzantine Emperor at Nicaea. Ergo, it is to Genoa's advantage to keep open access to the eastern part of the Mediterranean. That is only possible with Sicilian help. This is another example of how Sicily is still considered rich and powerful around 1220, despite the difficulties encountered during Frederick's stay in Germany.

Unlike hostile Milan and friendly Genoa, Florence and Venice remain neutral towards Frederick. The Doge sees no need to antagonize Sicily, certainly not from 1204 when his city is in the process of putting the knife on the Byzantine emperor's throat. Frederick is ten years old at that time, too young to close off the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian Seas, as his Sicilian grandfather would have done. Unlike Milan, Venice is not part of Imperial Italy. It has its own empire stretching along the Adriatic and Greek coasts as far as Constantinople. From the year 1000, the Byzantine Empire is under constant threat from Turkish and Arab invasions. Venice has consistently supported the Byzantine emperor with credit and troops, but in the end the emperor is unable to pay his debts. As compensation, Venice has been given territory such as Crete and Euboea, but now it also demands money. The Emperor cannot meet these demands, whereupon the Doge decides to resort to force to impose his demands. When the pope asks the Venetians to transport crusaders to Palestine, Venice demands that the crusader army first helps that city to force the Byzantine emperor to pay his debts. In 1204 this leads to the situation that the Crusaders first conquer Constantinople before they leave for the Holy Land. Venice establishes a Latin empire and thus gains a powerful position in the eastern Mediterranean. This has implications for Genoa and Sicily, as seafaring nations. Genoa is forced to settle for the much weaker, Byzantine Empire of Nicaea, to which the Emperor of Constantinople has fled. Sicily is not yet able to resist, due to Frederick's underage and the resulting power vacuum. The Venetian interests lie outside Italy, which is why the Doge does not want to interfere with Milan and the Lombard city federation.

We can be brief about the role of Florence as an important city-state. It is the financial center, the Wall Street, of medieval Italy, and as such it wants to stay out of the Italian conflicts. Frederick likes to avoid Florence because of a prophecy that says he will die in a place named after a flower. Even if that were true, it seems more likely that he finds it undesirable to engage in a fight with a city that can provide him with a significant number of lenders.

3.3. *The Court of the Emperor*

In 1220 Frederick is crowned emperor. At the age of twenty-six, he is emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and king of the Sicilian monarchy. Frederick certainly has a genius streak. He shows great adaptability in his dealings with people, is humorous and extremely curious. Even a great opponent of the emperor, the Franciscan monk Salimbene, acknowledges this⁵³. His court is very open, as it accommodates all kinds of people, from great scientists and artists, to musicians, dancers and even magicians. From the highest officials to the most ordinary servants, he employs Muslims, Jews and Christians, giving him a reputation for "tolerance"⁵⁴. His curiosity is not limited to politics, he is also interested in art, architecture, theology and science. He is engaged in

⁵³ G.C. COULTON, *From St. Francis to Dante. Translations from the Chronicle of the Franciscan Salimbene 1221-1288*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972, p. 244. See also: W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2., cit., p. 345.

⁵⁴ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2., cit., pp. 345-352.

literature and strives to elevate the vernacular, the *Volgare*, in addition to the usual Latin, into a language of literature and culture. In terms of architecture, he seeks geometric clarity, sometimes quadratic in shape, sometimes octangular⁵⁵. As for theology, his curiosity is expressed in questions about the eternity of the world and the mortality of the soul. He presents them to his court philosopher Michael Scotus and the Arab Ibn Sab'in⁵⁶. His interest in science stems from his ideas about architecture, health and care and especially from his interest in ornithology. His *Liber de arte venandi cum avibus*, based in part on an Arabic book called *Moamin*, is the result of it⁵⁷. In Frederick's time, Aristotle's writings were studied by Arab and Jewish scholars and translators, such as Averroes and Maimonides. Scholars in Frederick's court, such as Michael Scotus and Theodor of Antioch, also participate. Frederick sometimes takes part himself in the discussions and then comes up with divergent ideas. This gives him an air of openness and raises the question of how it is possible that he can also be portrayed as a rather authoritarian ruler and the creator of a closed society.

3.4 Controversial ruler

Strangely enough, there is a connection between the two attitudes. His interest in Mediterranean culture implies on the one hand Greek philosophy and the administrative culture of the ancient Roman Empire and on the other hand the way Arab leaders rule their country. From the Romans he learned to deal with different cultures and religions, from the Arabs a command structure of governance. This character trait increasingly prevails during his reign.

Frederick's dual interest - classical and Arabic knowledge - was already evident in the historiography of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In his telling biography *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, Kantorowicz points out that Frederick sees two of his imperial ancestors as his great examples: Justinian as the emperor of justice and Augustus as the emperor of peace.⁵⁸ For a ruler, embedded in a Mediterranean culture, this is not so strange. Kantorowicz gives many arguments to show that Frederick wants to follow the path of those two Caesars. This is apparent from the Constitutions of Melfi, drawn up in 1231, and especially from the opening words: *Imperator Fridericus Secundus, Romanorum Caesar Semper Augustus*⁵⁹. The many laudations from courtiers and others must have strengthened Frederick's belief that he is called to great deeds⁶⁰.

Burckhardt in his *The Culture of the Italian Renaissance* is more negative. When discussing the *Liber Augustalis*, as Melfi's constitution is also called, he says:

Frederick's statutes (especially since 1231) ended in the complete destruction of the feudal state. The emperor transformed the population into an easily controlled, will-less and weaponless mass. He centralized the entire judiciary in a way hitherto

⁵⁵ Ivi, pp. 352-361. See also: H. KURSTJENS, *Castel del Monte between Fact and Fiction. Apulia's Crown in Historical Perspective*, Soest, Uitgeverij Boekscout, 2022.

⁵⁶ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2., cit., pp. 393-397, 418.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*. See also: B. CRUL, *Keizer Frederick II. Een Moderne Wetenschapper in de Middeleeuwen 1194-1250*, Utrecht, Uitgeverij Omniboek, 2017.

⁵⁸ E. KANTOROWICZ, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, cit., pp. 336-349.

⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 173.

⁶⁰ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2., cit, pp. 363-366, 370, 375-376

unimaginable in the West. No office was to be attained by public election, except on pain of the destruction of the city in question and the relegation of its citizens to serfs. Taxes, based on an impressive land registry, were levied in a mohammedan routine, and thus in a nagging manner. There can no longer be a people, but a completely oppressed mass of subjects, who, for example, could not marry abroad without a special permit, or go abroad to study [...]»⁶¹

Burckhardt is crystal clear that Frederick is tearing the open society of his ancestors to shreds. He also points at an Islamic influence in this regard. I do not want to discuss whom of either the two is right. I think these two texts are related, because in Frederick's view, the restauration of the Roman Empire needs a heavily taxed Sicily. Kantorowicz and Burckhardt are not the most recent authors on Frederick II, yet they have set the tone for the discussion about him.

Is Frederick really striving for imperial world domination? The German historians Rader and Kölzer differ in their reactions. Kölzer states: «In the academic world it is generally accepted that there is no Staufien ambition for world domination in the literal sense»⁶².

Rader's response makes more sense to me: «Frederick's reign was one last, failed attempt at imperial world domination»⁶³. Rader points out that Frederick uses the tradition of the Hohenstaufen to give the imperial status religious charisma, while at the same time Sicily provides him with the necessary economic resources. Rader is, in my opinion, more right than Kölzer: Frederick, through his maternal grandfather, is dominated by ancient-imperial ideas.

According to the English historian David Abulafia, Frederick is neither a political genius nor a visionary: «Frederick's cultural patronage was a pale shadow of that of his Norman ancestors»⁶⁴. For this reason, Abulafia's book is sometimes called the anti-Kantorowicz. Yet the contrast is not as great as is often assumed. Kantorowicz is right when he attributes great plans to Frederick, Abulafia is right when he says that not much has come of it.

3.5 Ambition and Economic Consequences

Since the Fourth Crusade (1204), Byzantium's position in the Mediterranean has been declining. According to Abu-Lughod, economic, military and political power in that sea seems to be in the hands of the Italian big four: Venice, Genoa, Milan and Florence⁶⁵. But Abu-Lughod begins her analysis of the world economic system of the Mediterranean in 1250. If she had started in 1220, she should have spoken of the big five, for the Regno of Sicily is certainly the equal of Genoa and Venice at that time⁶⁶. That seems strange, because the era of troubles has barely ended that year. But since 1212, while in Germany,

⁶¹ J. BURCKHARDT, *De cultuur der Italiaanse renaissance*, Zeist, De Haan, 1957, p. 2.

⁶² «Es ist heute Allgemeingut der Forschung das von einem staufische Streben nach Weltherrschaft im konkreten Sinne nicht die Rede sein kann», T. KÖLZER, *Die Staufer im Süden-eine Bilanz aus Deutscher Sicht*, in ID., *Die Staufer im Süden. Sizilien und das Reich*, Sigmaringen, Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1996, p. 255.

⁶³ O.B. RADER, *Friedrich II. Der Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron*, cit., 31 ff.

⁶⁴ D. ABULAFIA, *A Medieval Emperor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 439.

⁶⁵ J. ABU-LUGHOD, *For European Hegemony*, cit., p. 8.

⁶⁶ In addition to Venice and Genoa, Michel Mollat du Jourdan cites Palermo as a place where medieval Mediterranean merchants would have felt at home. Cfr., M. MOLLAT DU JOURDIN, *Europa en de zee*, Amsterdam, Agon, 1993, p. 131.

Frederick plans to regain the lost power of his Norman predecessors, Genoa in particular sees opportunities for itself in this regard⁶⁷. It therefore helps Frederick as early as 1212 with a large loan⁶⁸.

Why is Sicily still an Italian superpower in 1220? With its central location in the Mediterranean Sea and its ports in Syracuse, Messina and Palermo, the Regno is vital to merchants from Genoa and Pisa⁶⁹. Brindisi in Apulia is also essential for the Venetian merchants navigating the Adriatic⁷⁰. Moreover, Sicily is still the breadbasket of Italy. Last but not least, around 1220, it is also a demographically important power. With 150,000 inhabitants, Palermo was the largest city in Europe at that time. In 1330 it falls to eleventh place, with a population of 51,000, which explains why Abu-Lughod does not mention the cities of Sicily after 1250⁷¹.

Together with the Venetians and the Genoese, Frederick tries to exploit the economically advantageous connection of the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean. Therefore, during the Sixth Crusade (1227-1229), he signs a trade agreement with the Egyptian sultan al-Kamil to find an economic alternative to the favorable position of the Venetian merchants in Constantinople since 1204. Cairo is then «the mother [city] of the world»⁷². It is rumored that Frederick, through his agents, maintains contact with India⁷³. Grain exports and a trade agreement, signed in 1231, provide an economic and political link between Sicily and North Africa. The latter area supplies Frederick with gold⁷⁴. As in Genoa and Venice, Frederick decides to appoint consuls in North Africa to protect his economic and political interests there. He enacts the Laws of Capua (1220) to confirm the customs and rights of the cities and to prevent the nobility from gaining «a leading position in the political life of the kingdom»⁷⁵. However, this situation will not last long (see below).

His understanding of the importance of economic affairs for Sicily is also reflected in his reforms of the monetary system. Silver coins of various origin, value and weight are replaced by silver denarii with a fixed value, approved by the government. Gold coins, called Augustales, are also minted, but not primarily for commercial use. They serve for uniformity and constancy in value and «to fulfill Frederick's desire for self-aggrandizement and to provide the crown with a currency that would enable him to carry out his aims in war and diplomacy».⁷⁶ The names of these coins, as well as Frederick's

⁶⁷ J.M. POWELL, *Medieval Monarchy and Trade*, cit., p. 453.

⁶⁸ Ivi, pp. 452-453, note 10.

⁶⁹ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2., cit, pp. 213. Houben rightly states that southern Italy was not populated by paupers ['Armenhaus'], but a rich country because of African gold and its own agriculture. Cfr., H. HOUBEN, *Friedrich II, Ein Sizilianer auf der Kaiserthron?*, cit., p. 11.

W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2., cit, pp. 213; E. KANTOROWICZ, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, cit., pp. 98-99.

⁷¹ Bairoch database. See P. BAIROCH, J. BATEAU, P. CHÈVRE, *La population des villes Européennes de 800-1850*, Geneva, Droz, 1988, Table I. Powell gives a much lower rank to Palermo with no more than 40,000 inhabitants, but he also admits that Palermo was larger than Rome. Its source dates from 1937-39 and is much older than Baroich e.a. See: J.M. POWELL, *Medieval Monarchy and Trade*, cit., p. 423.

⁷² J. ABU-LUGHOD, *Before European Hegemony*, cit., p. 149.

⁷³ E. KANTOROWICZ, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, cit., p. 223.

⁷⁴ H. HOUBEN, *Friedrich II, Ein Sizilianer auf der Kaiserthron?*, cit., p. 11, note 43.

⁷⁵ J.M. POWELL, *Medieval Monarchy and Trade*, cit., 453.

⁷⁶ Ivi, p. 511.

image on them, show his ambition to shape his empire on the ancient Roman model⁷⁷.



Figure 9. Augustalis of Frederick II⁷⁸.

Frederick does not lose sight of his own interests. By regularly lowering the gold and silver purity of his coins through frequent monetary reforms (1225, 1236, 1239, 1242, 1248 and 1249), he manages to get significant amounts of money into his treasury⁷⁹. In addition, agricultural reforms, a trade agreement with al-Kamil, the construction of state yards and the establishment of a strong merchant fleet (1221) point to his economic insights, but also to his eye for imperial interests. Later we will see how his cunning but cruel tax system makes Frederick II the richest ruler in Europe since Charlemagne.⁸⁰ It has been calculated that Sicily, even after the wasteful wars of Frederick II, still yields more tax than the Pope, France under Louis IX and England under Henry III combined: 300,000 ounces of gold. Kantorowicz, who is a great admirer of Frederick, cannot deny that Frederick is depleting this wealthy region economically, but he obscures this by saying, «ohne einen derartigen Raubbau bis zur Erschöpfung des Landes ist noch niemals das Ungeheure geleistet werden – man denke an Frankreich während und nach den Kriegen Napoleons»⁸¹. One question remains. Why does Frederick sacrifice so much for his imperial plans and care so little for his people and their open, urban society?

⁷⁷ W.J. ZWALVE, *Power and Authority, A Trial of Two Swords*, cit., p. 258. For Frederick's reform of the monetary system, see W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2., cit, pp. 30-33.

⁷⁸ "Augustalis" of Frederick II Hohenstaufen (r. 1215–50), Italian, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (metmuseum.org).

⁷⁹ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2., cit, pp. 219-220. See also : J.M. POWELL, *Medieval Monarchy and Trade*, cit., pp. 505-513.

⁸⁰ See P. HERDE, *Carlo I d'Angiò nella storia del Mezzogiorno*, in C.D. FONSECA, H. HOUBEN, B. VETERE, *Unità politica e differenze regionali nel regno di Sicilia. Atti del convegno internazionale di studio in occasione dell'VIII centenario della morte di Guglielmo II, re di Sicilia (Lecce - Potenza, 19-22 aprile 1989)*, Congedo, Galatina, 1992, pp. 181-204, there p. 197. It proves how cunning Frederick's Sicilian tax-system was, but also how rich Sicily was at the start of his reign. See also E. KANTOROWICZ, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, cit., p. 223.

⁸¹ «Only by economically exploiting a nation to exhaustion in such a manner is the extraordinary accomplished — think of France during and after the Napoleonic Wars», in E. KANTOROWICZ, *Friedrich der Zweite*, cit., p. 224.

3.6 Antiurbanism and Aristocratism

Although he confirmed the towns of the Regno in their traditional rights and customs in 1220, Frederick seems to have an ambivalent attitude towards cities, both Italian and German. (We'll see how he treats them below.)



Figure 10. Frederick II and the cities of the *Nuova Cronica*.

The image above, taken from Villani's (1276/80-1348) *Nuova Cronica*, appears to symbolize Frederick's ambivalence⁸². It is found in chapter four of Villani's book, which is entitled *La monarchia Normanno-Sveve (1140-1266)*⁸³. The chronicle dates from the fourteenth century, so long after the death of Frederick II. The image shows how Frederick II's soldiers receive their wages. The soldiers are both German and Sicilian. Germans can be recognized by their helmets and the eagle on their breasts. Frederick himself is depicted wearing a German helmet and a crown. Note his expression and the size of his figure compared to the city wall «on which he places his hand». Both elements aptly illustrate that he considers himself greater than the cities. The semantics of «laying a hand» is both «taking possession» and «wanting to impose your will on someone of lower status than you». The thread connecting the payment tent to the city wall seems to indicate that the money that Frederick appropriates to pay his soldiers, must be earned by the cities. The question is, is Villani's portrayal supported by the facts? Has Frederick an anti-urban attitude?

It is indeed true that Frederick II shows great contempt for anything related to an urban, entrepreneurial spirit. This disdain stems from his "aristocratism". As a nobleman, he grants himself a special social status with a corresponding mission in the world. This is evident from his preference for the granting of offices to nobles, and especially in his

⁸² *Nuova Cronica*, di Giovanni Villani, edizione critica a cura di Giovanni Porta, 3 voll., Fondazione Pietro Bembo, Ugo Guanda Editore in Parma, 1991. See especially: Libro settimo, XX. See also: http://www.classicalitaliani.it/villani/cronica_07.htm.

⁸³ The original *Cronica* itself is probably in Florence, Villani's hometown. The Vatican Library also has a copy. In 1991 a new edition appeared in Parma.

attitude towards his two sons, Henry and Conrad⁸⁴. After Frederick was crowned emperor by the pope in 1220, he also succeeded in having his eldest son elected Roman king (Henry VII, 1222-1235). In this capacity, Henry ignores his father's wishes: several times he sided with the German cities against the German princes. Yet Frederick's policy is to bind these princes by giving them large sums of money. In 1235, Henry goes so far as to join the Lombard cities⁸⁵.

For Frederick, his son's rebellious attitude is a huge blow. First, Henry chooses an alliance with his greatest adversary, and second, he rebels against Frederick's aristocratic worldview. Although he was an innovative thinker in cultural issues, he thought traditionally in political matters. In his eyes, the nobility exists to rule over townspeople and peasants. The relationship between father and son ends in tragedy. Frederick has Henry arrested and the latter dies in captivity seven years later⁸⁶.

Frederick's aristocratic attitude becomes even more apparent in 1238, when he has his son, Conrad IV, elected as King of the Romans as Henry's successor⁸⁷. In an educational letter he urges the young man that nobility and kingship do not only mean that one has a higher position in society, but also that one can «look further and act more skillfully» [«tiefer blicken und tüchtiger handeln»]. «We cease to be rulers», writes Frederick, «when we lack wisdom, ... and prefer to be ruled by the minority than to rule ourselves» [«[...] lieber uns durch die Minderheit beherrschen lassen als selber zu herrschen»]⁸⁸.

Retroactively, we see the great blow Henry must have dealt his father by uniting with the German and Italian cities. In all likelihood, Frederick thought that his son is collaborating with people who cannot rule. In Frederick's eyes Henry (VII) has succeeded in confirming the truth of the above wisdom through a number of unfortunate decisions⁸⁹.

Yet the question arises whether Henry, in supporting the German and Italian cities, is not pursuing a more modern policy than his father. The future is in the hands of European cities, not the nobility. Eberhard Horst indeed draws that conclusion, and I agree.⁹⁰ The cities are the founders of the later, open society of Western Europe. Despite his aristocratism, nevertheless Frederick curtailed the role of the nobles. He destroys the political power of the barons and creates a court nobility in much the same way as Louis XIV later does with his Versailles⁹¹. This is another example of the closed nature of

⁸⁴ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2., cit., p. 205.

⁸⁵ E. HORST, *Friedrich II, der Staufer. Kaiser, Feldherr, Dichter*, cit., p. 229. Henry proved to be no match for his father and was forced to surreptitiously give up his alliance with said cities. The same goes for the rights he granted to the Bishop of Verdun. The bishop of that city resisted vehemently, and Henry is defeated here as well as in Italy.

⁸⁶ Henry will go down in history as Heinrich (VII) [*‘Heinrich Klammer Sieben’* – ‘Henry in parentheses the seventh’], because some time later there is another Roman king named Henry VII (1308-1313) and his reign ends a little less dramatic.

⁸⁷ Apparently, Frederick had once again managed to let the German electoral princes do his job.

⁸⁸ W.J. ZWALVE, *Power and Authority, A Trial of Two Swords*, cit., p. 268; E. HORST, *Friedrich II, der Staufer. Kaiser, Feldherr, Dichter*, cit., p. 252.

⁸⁹ E. HORST, *Friedrich II, der Staufer. Kaiser, Feldherr, Dichter*, cit., pp. 229-232.

⁹⁰ E. HORST, *Friedrich II, der Staufer. Kaiser, Feldherr, Dichter*, cit., p. 228. It should be noted that Horst is as hesitant as Henry (VII) in his urban policy. On page 231 he states: «The emperor was by no means less city-friendly than the German king, as evidenced by his numerous urban foundations and privileges». This applies only to the cities that were loyal to him and followed his example, not the rebellious ones. See also Ivi, p. 230.

⁹¹ J.M. POWELL, *Medieval Monarchy and Trade*, cit., p. 490. Zwolve even speaks of a “totalitarian state”. Cfr. W.J. ZWALVE, *Power and Authority, A Trial of Two Swords*, cit., p. 560.

Frederick's society.

3.7 Anti-Urban and Fiscal Policy

Frederick's aristocratism and his imperial, anti-urban mentality, despite his economic views, led to a strict and undermining fiscal policy.⁹² This already starts with the Constitutions of Melfi (1231), which stipulate that all city officials must be sanctioned by the king, on pain of the eternal destruction of their city, with the inhabitants being forced into serfdom⁹³. Powell rightly notes that:

While the Normans sought to bring the cities under royal rule, although they had granted them many local rights and privileges, Frederick, after promulgating the Constitutions of Melfi, tries to *force* them to recognize royal supremacy by law⁹⁴.

Since then, it has been impossible for the towns of the Regno to obtain the status of free city, as is achieved elsewhere in Europe.⁹⁵ This seems to be the deathblow for an open society. Frederick sees the Regno as an imperial domain, from which he draws more financial support than from the German Empire. No wonder he sees it as the main pillar for building his Empire⁹⁶.

Trade and industry suffer in many ways. Frederick establishes an imperial monopoly on both, meaning that the state can claim up to 75% of the trades of salt, iron, silk, etc.⁹⁷ Economic freedom is also curtailed by the fact that agriculture and the industry of dyers and slaughterhouses are brought under state control⁹⁸. The government also determines the wages of the workers. Arbitrary and restrictive taxes follow, the worst of which is the *adoha* or *collecta*.⁹⁹ Non-payment means billeting of German or Muslim garrisons in the city and final condemnation of the inhabitants to the galleys. Frederick also limited the financial and economic influence of the Sicilian Church as much as possible¹⁰⁰.

Not only fiscally, but also economically, Frederick shows an autocratic regime. He directs *state fondaci* where goods are traded under state supervision. He also nationalizes private warehouses and *funduqs*. Traders are therefore forced to stay overnight in state hostels and pay for accommodation and breakfast. Its revenues flow directly back into the royal treasury. Merchants are also forced to make a large part of their purchases from the government.¹⁰¹ Frederick denies his citizens the right to trade in grain and through a state

⁹² W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2, cit., p. 218.

⁹³ J.M. POWELL, *Medieval Monarchy and Trade*, cit., p. 503.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁶ Ivi, p. 505.

⁹⁷ For the monopolistic organization of industry, see Ivi, p. 491.

⁹⁸ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2, cit., pp. 211-212.

⁹⁹ The *adoha* or *collecta* had its origins in the obligation of the holders of fiefs to provide military service to the monarchs. They could get rid of this duty, if they paid the *adoha*. The landowners collected the fee from their tenants, thus in practice the peasants were to pay the *adoha*. After 1238 it became a general tax, the *collecta*.

¹⁰⁰ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2, cit., 211-212, 214.

¹⁰¹ Ivi, p. 212; E. KANTOROWICZ, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, 220-222. For the *fondacos* in

monopoly he begins to export grain as head of state. Since he also owns the largest *latifundia* and is therefore the largest grain producer, he has a great advantage over private traders. In this way, the grain trade is almost completely nationalized.¹⁰² In addition, merchants have to have their goods weighed in government weigh houses and pay high costs for this¹⁰³. With all these measures, Frederick is not encouraging the growth of a native merchant class¹⁰⁴.

He reduces Sicily to a colony for exploitation. All this is compounded by forced lending and extortion. In addition to these economic measures, there are social restrictions, such as the prohibition to marry foreigners, procure divorce and the obligation to study at the University of Naples.¹⁰⁵ Due to the large number of measures and the limited means of communication and control, a large part of them will not be enforced or will be poorly enforced. Yet Frederick's grip on the economy and social life is much greater than that of his predecessors.

It's not just the Sicilian cities that suffer from Frederick's fiscalism and anti-urbanism; the northern Italians are also curbed. There Frederick closes ports, levies taxes and duties, announces trade monopolies, and collects landing fees, anchor dues, and port tolls. He appoints supervisors and inspectors for warehouses, anchor fees and excise duties.¹⁰⁶ Only the emperor himself is exempt from charges. Although he continues to guarantee the privileges of the northern Italian trading cities for a short time, he simultaneously buys a large number of their ships and sells them grain, livestock and other foodstuffs at greatly increased prices. In 1224, he even went so far as to temporarily ban all exports, driving prices up even more¹⁰⁷. How much further can you curtail a medieval economy and society? This bothers Pisa and Genoa the most, especially since they helped Frederick travel to Germany in 1212. Venice is also confronted with rising grain prices, which the doge does not appreciate either.

These measures are due not only to Frederick's many wars with the papacy and his followers, nor to the continued suppression of revolts in the German Empire or his Sicilian kingdom. It is true that Frederick's Sicilian anti-feudalism leads to ongoing campaigns against rebellious lords¹⁰⁸. Yet his budgetary policy is mainly determined by his imperialist ambitions¹⁰⁹. Even the cautious Stürner disapproves of Frederick's fiscal policy:

Within ten years [especially after 1240, HJ] the profits from the economic activity of its [Sicilian, HJ] inhabitants, increasingly, disappeared into the war chest of the ruler, to finance his foreign wars. This is a disappointing development for many

Sicily, see: O.L. CONSTABLE, *Housing of the Stranger in the Medieval World. Accommodation, Trade and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, CUP, 2004 (online publication 2009), pp. 201-233.

¹⁰² W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2, cit., pp. 221-231.

¹⁰³ Ivi, p. 212.

¹⁰⁴ J.M. POWELL, *Medieval Monarchy and Trade*, cit., p. 493.

¹⁰⁵ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2, cit., p. 196; J. BURCKHARDT, *Wereldhistorische beschouwingen*, Bussum, Moussault, 1956, pp. 66-67.

¹⁰⁶ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2, cit., p. 215.

¹⁰⁷ E. HORST, *Friedrich II, der Staufer. Kaiser, Feldherr, Dichter*, cit., p. 85.

¹⁰⁸ This anti-feudalism does not apply to Germany. There, his policy is one of supporting feudal potentates.

¹⁰⁹ In Frederick's case, there is no mercantilism, because it is not based on *raison d'état* and prosperity for its subjects. Cfr. E. KANTOROWICZ, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, cit., p. 222.

reasons, not least because there were many useful investment opportunities in the country, and above all because they were necessary for the reforms that had already begun [in light of the constitutions [of Melfi, HJ]]¹¹⁰.

Kantorowicz considers Frederick II a father of the nation and a guardian of the economy¹¹¹. He excused Frederick's actions by labeling them necessary to organize state finances, regain control of Sicilian ports, and secure supplies to the army¹¹². What he omits, however, is that Frederick's measures destroy the legacy of his Sicilian grandparents. Kantorowicz also ignores Frederick's rough and unfeeling treatment of northern Italian cities¹¹³. It is therefore obvious that the benefits of an open society, which values the interests of its citizens, are clearly neglected here. Gregory IX's claim that in the kingdom of Sicily no one raises a hand or moves a foot without an imperial order, does not come entirely out of the blue¹¹⁴.

Burckhardt urges his readers not to sympathize with Frederick's tyrannical tendencies in his pursuit of a centralized state with a monopoly on violence¹¹⁵. He sees Frederick's decline as a direct result of his Sicilian fiscal policy, especially the imperial monopoly on trade throughout the Mediterranean. I think his struggle with the Lombard cities also played an important role¹¹⁶. The only thing that stands out about this battle is Frederick's quirkiness. He is often willing to make concessions to the Pope and the German princes, but not to the Lombard cities. In the triangular struggle for power between pope, emperor and cities, Frederick would rather side with the Pope against the cities than with the cities against the pope¹¹⁷. Kantorowicz suggests that the papacy fits into Frederick's reactionary, aristocratic worldview, based on a divine order of unity between ecclesiastical and secular powers, in which the cities do not belong¹¹⁸. This leaves no

¹¹⁰ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2, cit., p. 233.

¹¹¹ Kantorowicz suggests that the Norman rulers, and Frederick in particular, tried to transform the Sicilians into one community with a common history, but I think this is more a result of Kantorowicz's romantic notion of history than any valuable body of evidence. Cfr. E. KANTOROWICZ, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, cit., pp. 224-225.

¹¹² Ivi, pp. 102-103.

¹¹³ See E. HORST, *Friedrich II, der Staufer. Kaiser, Feldherr, Dichter*, cit., pp. 213-260, especially 217.

¹¹⁴ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2, cit., p. 207. Stürner finds this claim a bit exaggerated, and he is not entirely wrong, for the Pope could easily have intended hostile irony or had propagandistic motives. Nevertheless, and given Stürner's own discourse on Frederick's political and economic reforms, I feel that the Pope's claim is probably not entirely unfounded.

¹¹⁵ Ivi, p. 202. J. BURCKHARDT, *Weltgeschichtliche beschouwingen*, cit., p. 67. Burckhardt has a constant tendency to label Frederick's Sicilian state as Islamic. In particular, the process of centralization of the state, whereby orders, cities and feudal powers are abolished, is presented as an oriental or Islamic hallmark. While by no means a follower of Hegel, Burckhardt clearly shares Hegel's views on the Islamic state. Hegel believes that the Islamic state has far too little variation and exchange when it comes to social estates and businesses. This causes insufficient interaction between ruler and subjects. According to both Hegel and Burckhardt, the Islamic religion has a very close connection between religion and terror. See: G.W.F. HEGEL, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 451.

¹¹⁶ By Lombard cities is meant the cities in that part of northern Italy that belongs to the Holy Roman Empire, such as Milan, Cremona and Pisa. Venice, for example, does not.

¹¹⁷ E. KANTOROWICZ, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, cit., pp. 164-165.

¹¹⁸ Ivi, p. 165.

room for an alliance between the Emperor and the Third Estate.¹¹⁹ I agree with Kantorowicz in this regard.

3.8 *Anti-Urban Policy Answered*

The major trading cities of Lombardy, and especially Milan, suffered greatly from Frederick's economic policies. The year 1226 marks the first time that he is confronted with collective Lombard resistance on a large scale. This happens when he wants to organize an Imperial Diet in Cremona. On a Diet, princes and rulers from the Holy Roman Empire gather to discuss affairs of state with the emperor. In fact, this means that in 1226 Frederick decided to impose his royal will on his subordinate feudal lords and cities. It is expected that both Lombard cities and German princes will come to Cremona. Frederick himself tries to hide the purpose of the coming Diet, speaking of a new affirmation of privilege, fighting heresy and support for his plans to go on a crusade.

The Lombard cities are nevertheless alarmed by these statements. Confirmation of privileges for them suggests a return to the situation that Frederick Barbarossa left behind after the Peace of Constance in 1183. Since then, the cities have been able to significantly increase their favorable position with regard to trade in the empire. For them, a return to the situation of 1183 would be a significant step backwards. Milan acts as leader of the resistance. It is no accident that Frederick chooses Cremona as the site of his Diet, as it is a fervent enemy of Milan. Both cities compete for control of the intermediate area, Crema and its surroundings.

Frederick abandons the whole plan when he learns that Lombard troops, led by Milan, have managed to block the way for his German horsemen. Henceforth he can only call on a small group of Lombard cities, led by Cremona, for help. The majority, headed by Milan, remain hostile to the Emperor. But even if the Roman Curia secretly supported Milan, it is not right to blame the Pope for the failure of this Diet. It is Frederick's economic policy that fuels the hostility of the Lombard cities. This is compounded by his attitude toward heresy.

3.9 *Muslims, Heretics and other Minorities*

The Norman rulers are certainly not kind to their Jewish, Greek and Muslim subjects. The Greeks can maintain a certain cultural autonomy through their monasteries. That is not given to the Muslims, with the result that no Muslim culture can arise in Sicily. Roger II seems to be the only exception, due to the existence of a Muslim upper class during his reign.¹²⁰ We have seen that Ibn Jubayr is pessimistic about the position of the Muslim population in Sicily during his successors¹²¹.

Frederick approaches the minorities in his country according to the same rules of *Prudentia* as Roger has done. Prudence means the application of the principles of *necessitas* and *utility*. *Necessity* forces him to be friendly with minorities, *utility* implies the necessity of cooperating with them, for that is to the benefit of society. Frederick's

¹¹⁹ Ivi, p. 120.

¹²⁰ J.M. POWELL, *Frederick II and the Revolt of the Muslims of Sicily*, pp. 15-16.

¹²¹ Ivi, p. 13.

personal interpretation of *Prudentia* implies that it must be beneficial to his imperial ambitions. Unlike Roger's use of this principle, Frederick's application works differently for different groups.¹²² The Jews are given the most of the same civil rights by the constitution of Melfi as the other inhabitants of the Regno. They are not even exposed to the law of usury to which all other *regnicoli* are subjected. Frederick needs them to get loans because of his huge expenses. Nevertheless, Jewish men must wear a beard and all Jewish people must be dressed in yellow¹²³. The Greeks retain their position, which they already had during the Normans.

The Muslims and heretics are the worst off. The image of Frederick as a friend of the Muslims is the result of three different forms of propaganda, one from the Emperor himself, one from the Muslims and one from the Pope. Frederick and his Muslim friends al-Kamil and Fakhr al-Din, want to conclude a treaty on the Sixth Crusade. No wonder, that they have an interest in praising each other's goodness. The Pope's propaganda uses Frederick's so-called Muslim friendship to show his lack of religious involvement.¹²⁴ More than his friendship with some Muslims, Frederick's attitude towards them as a group becomes apparent after his return from Germany. He deports them to Lucera in Apulia (1224), putting an end to the role they played in the politics of the Regno. In Lucera they are no longer under the control of local barons, but under the control of the emperor himself.¹²⁵ All in all, Frederick's attitude toward minorities has little to do with modern tolerance. Powell, following in Abulafia's footsteps, points out that modern ideas about Frederick's "tolerance" do nothing but reflect the success of his propaganda¹²⁶.

The heretics deserve special attention. After his coronation as emperor in 1220, Frederick immediately issues an edict against heresy. Ten years later, in the Constitution of Melfi, the first article deals with the fight against heresy.¹²⁷ The question arises why Frederick finds this problem so urgent. Is it because he has been accused of heresy so many times that he wants to show that he is top of the class? Does he want to portray himself as the main adherent of Christianity? After being freed from excommunication, does he want to butter up the Pope? That is unlikely, because the Pope himself is still hesitant to condemn the Northern Italian heretics. He would not take that step until 1233, a year later than Frederick. Why does the Sicilian king want to be *plus catholique que le pape*? Frederick's condemnation of heresy has little to do with religion, and everything to do with politics. He views heresy as *lese majesty*, a form of rebellion against imperial authority and the unity of state. This is apparent not only from Melfi's constitution, but also from his ordinance against heresy issued in March 1232. In it he calls heretics: «Beleidigern Unseres Namens» and «der Majestätbeleidigung Schuldigen»¹²⁸.

Important in this context is the question of where the hotbeds of heresy are par excellence. Unsurprisingly, this is northern Italy, with Milan at its center. There are

¹²² J.M. POWELL, *Frederick II and the Muslims*, cit., p. 7.

¹²³ H. HOUBEN, *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen religiöser Toleranz im normannisch-staufischen Königreich Sizilien*, in «Deutsche Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters», 50, 1994, pp. 159-198, p. 194.

¹²⁴ J.M. POWELL, *Frederick II and the Muslims*, cit., p. 7-8.

¹²⁵ Ivi, p. 16.

¹²⁶ Ivi, p. 7.

¹²⁷ B.K.U. WEILER, *Frederick II of Germany (1194-1250)*, in A.V. MURRAY (ed.), *The Crusades. An Encyclopedia*, New York, ABC Clio, 2006, pp. 475-477, in particular p. 476.

¹²⁸ «Offenders from Our Name and Those who are guilty of *Lèse Majesté*», in E. HORST, *Friedrich II, der Staufer. Kaiser, Feldherr, Dichter*, cit., pp. 217-218.

adherents of Manichaeism, an ancient religion in which good and evil are symmetrically opposed forces. This differs from Christianity, which views evil as the absence of good, an asymmetric juxtaposition. The Manichaeist movement was reinforced in the last quarter of the twelfth century by Cathar refugees, the Albigenses, from southern France. They have a form of heresy related to Manichaeism and together they form the *Pataria* movement in Milan. Another heretical group in the region is that of the Waldenses, who originated in Lyon around 1170 and are also known as “the Poor of Lyon”. The local bishop persecutes them so severely that they decide to flee to northern Italy, and like the Cathars they gather in Milan. Because of his struggle with the emperor, the Pope is less inclined to act against the Lombard heresies. This would mean open conflict with the northern Italian city authorities. He does not want to alienate them for the joint struggle against the emperor. He prefers to have Dominicans and Franciscans fight these heresies¹²⁹.



Figure 11. Albigensians forced to leave a town in the Languedoc.

This explains why the Pope waits until 1233 to follow Frederick’s example. However, the emperor insists that he cast a curse on heresy¹³⁰. He wants an alliance with the Pope against those he considers rebels against his authority¹³¹. *Lese majesty* is one of the most serious crimes in Frederick’s empire.¹³² In conclusion, we can say that Frederick comes into conflict with the Lombard cities, not only because of his economic policy, but also because of the fight against heresy. The call for an open society is again answered negatively. Frederick destroys the Rogerian openness not only in the economic sphere, but also in the politico-religious sphere.

3.10 A Pyrrhic Victory and a Parmesan Defeat

¹²⁹ See here <http://www.xenos.org/essays/waldo4.htm>

¹³⁰ E. HORST, *Friedrich II, der Staufer. Kaiser, Feldherr, Dichter*, cit., p. 223.

¹³¹ W. STÜRNER, *Friedrich II*, T. 2, cit., p. 198.

¹³² Ivi, pp. 199-201.

Frederick for a long time tries to avoid an armed conflict with the Lombard cities, but it finally breaks out in 1237. He defeats the union of Lombard cities, to which Venice joins, at the battle of Cortenuova on November 17. Frederick conquers the Milanese *carroccio*, a cart that carries the city's banner and carries the city's symbols. He sends it to Rome to be displayed on the Capitol in accordance with the custom of the classical Roman emperors. This leads to a confrontation with both Milan and the Pope: with Milan because it is a further humiliation, and with the Pope because the display of the *carroccio* refers to pagan-imperial customs. The medieval empire consists of a condominium between pope and emperor, in contrast to the classical concept of empire, which consists of universal and absolute imperial rule. This action by Frederick shows once again that he values the classical imperial tradition of his Sicilian heritage as much as his Carolingian-Christian heritage.¹³³



Figure 12. Imperial troops enter Cremona. The white cross on the red field is the banner of the Holy Roman Empire between 1200 and 1350

Milan accepts its defeat and offers Frederick peace on very generous terms. The Lombard capital will recognize his imperial sovereignty. Frederick is allowed to appoint the supreme judge, the city will send him hostages and pay a large compensation for the costs of the war. However, Frederick demands total surrender, and thus a free hand to decide matters of governance and jurisdiction in Milan. For the Lombard city, this feels like a deep humiliation. In addition to the Pope and Milan, Frederick also decides to insult Venice. He achieves this by hanging the defeated Podesta of Milan, Pietro Tiepolo, son of the Doge of Venice, from the top of the northeast tower of the castle of Trani. In this way Venetian ships, passing through the Adriatic, could perceive the humiliation inflicted on their Doge's son. This makes Venice an irreconcilable enemy.

¹³³ Houben points out that Frederick's conflicts with the papacy and the northern Italian cities should only be understood from his «imperialen Selbstverständnis» [imperial sense of self], and not from his «südlicher Perspektive» [southern viewpoints]. Cfr. H. HOUBEN, *Friedrich II*, cit., p. 9. Houben here again revives the dichotomy between Frederick as a Sicilian ruler and as a German emperor.

In previous years, Frederick has always chosen not to antagonize all his enemies at once. In his battle with Milan and the other Lombard cities, he tries to appease both the Pope and Venice. After his victory at Cortenuova, he abandons this policy entirely, with the catastrophic result that all his potential enemies are now up against him. The Milanese are very clear about it: they would rather die by the sword than submit unconditionally to Frederick. The Pope, still somewhat hesitant about Milan on the issue of heresy, now decides to fully support that city and excommunicates Frederick for the second time. As a result Frederick must fight against four enemies at once: the papacy, the Lombard cities, and the cities of Venice and Genoa. Frederick will lose this confrontation, making Cortenuova a Pyrrhic victory.

The beginning of the end turns out to be ten years after Cortenuova, in 1247 in Parma. That city was a former member of the Lombard City League, but since Frederick's victory over Cortenuova, he rules it through his son Enzo, appointed podesta. In June 1247, Parma expels the resident imperial officials and again decides to side with the Lombard City League. Enzo enlists his father's help and Frederick builds a large wooden city around the city walls of Parma, which he calls Vittoria.



Figure 13. Parma is on the right, and the wooden town of Vittoria on the left. The red cross on a white field is the banner of Genoa. It appears that Parma is aided in this mission by Genoese troops.

Frederick intends to starve Parma and then destroy it. After that, Vittoria will become a new imperial residence. Frederick has already ordered his crown jewels to be taken there, including his scepter, the Sicilian royal seal and his ceremonial crown. He has also built accommodations for his harem of Muslim girls and a menagerie for his exotic animals. The message behind these actions is that Frederick is not only the king of Sicily, but of all of Italy. He feels confident; on February 18, 1248, he decides to set out with a company of fifty horsemen to the marshes that surround the city, to hunt waterfowl with falcons. The people of Parma have their spies in Vittoria, so they know about the Emperor's absence. With the help of Genoese cavalry, they make a sortie. They manage to set fire to the wooden city and take Frederick's treasures back to their own city, which they show

triumphantly in public. Returning to Vittoria, Frederick is lucky enough to escape. This defeat shows that his anti-urban and therefore anti-open society policy has come back to Frederick like a boomerang.

4. Summary and Conclusion

This essay discusses Sicily's decline as an Italian 'great power' during the reign of Frederick II, a status it had in 1220, but no longer in 1250. That is not clear at first glance. Frederick is certainly the son of a Mediterranean civilization. He attaches great importance to culture and science, as evidenced by his interest in architecture and ornithology. His reforms of the monetary and agricultural system, his fleet-building project and trade agreement with al-Kamil show a great interest in trade, industry and finance. Despite all this, during his reign, Sicily loses its significance in the long-distance trade of the Mediterranean. This is made clear by Abu-Lughod, who in 1250 does not signal a big five, but only an Italian big four. Sicily has disappeared from the quintuple tableau. In his study of the Mediterranean, Abulafia devotes only one paragraph to Frederick II's Sicily.¹³⁴ This decline does not mean that Sicily immediately becomes an underdeveloped area, which does not happen until the sixteenth century¹³⁵.

In my opinion, Frederick's enormous ambitions give the first impetus to the decline of southern Italy. Because of his Staufen background, but also because of his Altavilla heritage, he aspires to be both a Carolingian-Christian and a Mediterranean-Classical emperor. The latter is confirmed by his implementation of a Roman coinage system and the promulgation of the Constitutions of Melfi, modeled on the Corpus Juris Civilis of Emperor Justinian. Displaying the carroccio at the Capitol, building a large Mediterranean fleet, the desire to own North Africa, the Crusade to the Holy Land and even his cultural pursuits show Frederick's interest in ancient Mediterranean civilization. All this is a sign of his desire to restore the empire and culture of the *mare nostrum*.

Frederick is smart enough to realize that he can only achieve these goals with sufficient financial resources. He heavily taxes economic activities and organizes trade and industry to generate income for the state, not for its subjects. This fiscal, economic policy should provide him with the income necessary to achieve his goal. Perhaps most important of all, Frederick II ignores the revival of the cities with their need for both economic and political-religious openness. In my opinion, this is caused by his aristocratic self-consciousness and his view of imperial political power. This forms the basis of his policy and also causes his conflict with the papacy. For Frederick, an old conception of power prevails over the social modernization of society.

Frederick's lack of understanding and disregard for the cities' relative autonomy is also evident in his condemnation of heresy. He has no religious motives to condemn the heretics, only motives based on aristocratic power politics. Religiously, Frederick himself seems to be a semi-heretic. No Christian Roman Emperor is so outspoken in its appreciation of Ancient and Islamic science and philosophy.

What the Norman rulers built in peace and prosperity in southern Italy before Frederick II, is set aside by him in favor of his unattainable ambition to recreate the *Imperium Romanum*. Southern Italy has fallen further and further into decline as a result. To this

¹³⁴ D. ABULAFIA, *Das Mittelmeer*, cit., p. 455. Aside: Roger II gets five pages: pp. 417-421.

¹³⁵ H. HOUBEN, *Friedrich II, Ein Sizilianer auf der Kaiserthron?*, cit., p. 11, note 44.

day, it has failed to break the downward spiral. Eberhard Horst can therefore rightly conclude: «Aus dem reichsten und bestverwalteten Land Europas ist eines seiner ärmsten und rückständigsten Gebiete geworden»¹³⁶. So we can only conclude: after its rise and bloom in the 12th and the early 13th centuries, Frederick II pushes Sicily into an era of decline. This marks the beginning of a process of economic contraction for Italy, which eventually leads to only northern Italy connecting to an awakening Atlantic world around 1600¹³⁷.

¹³⁶ [«From one of the richest, best administered countries in Europe, it has become one of its poorest and most backward regions», in E. HORST, *Friedrich II, der Staufer. Kaiser, Feldherr, Dichter*, cit., p. 14.

¹³⁷ H. JANSEN, *Rethinking Burckhardt and Huizinga. A Transformation of Temporal Images*, cit., pp. 108-109.