

## Frederick II: from mythomoteur to mythophantom Identity, mythologization, nationalism and regionalism\*

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### *Introduction*

Why did the Nazis want to steal Frederick II's sarcophagus from its place in Palermo and take it to Germany in July 1943? Why decide, in 1993, to name a large thermo-electric power plant in Apulia after Frederick II? What do Germans and Italians have in common with the Emperor Frederick II (1194-1250) and where does this fascination with him originate? How can we account for this interest from both these countries, more than 750 years after his death? Taking these questions as a starting point, I will attempt to explain which factors contributed to the mythologization and representation of Frederick II in the context of the history of state- and nation building in Italy and Germany from the nineteenth century. Concepts like *mythomoteur* and *mythophantom* will be referred to frequently in this article, as will the characters of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde from Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel.

Few people have appealed to the imagination the way Frederick II of Hohenstaufen has. He is often seen as a remarkable, not quite medieval ruler. Born from Swabian-Sicilian-Norman ancestors, imbued with knowledge of Arabian culture and a love for science, it is difficult to reconcile him with the accepted image of medieval emperors. The degree of appreciation and admiration for Frederick II varies strongly both during his lifetime and after. During his lifetime, the divide can roughly be placed between Ghibellines (those favouring the emperor) and Guelfs (those favouring the pope), but amongst these groups of belligerents we also find highly diverse factions, with their own particular interests. And Frederick II has remained a controversial ruler after his death; he has been used and abused for multiple political ends, by both neo-Ghibellines, neo-Guelfs and other factions. Geopolitical, religious and political factors shaped the way he was and is valued, both as a person and as an emperor. In this, ethnicity, heritage, nationalism, religion, identity, language, pride and regional or demographic interests are essential. Given this background, it's hardly surprising that so many narratives stray into mythologization.

### *Mythomoteur*

Frederick II was considered a controversial person by both contemporaries and historians. Labelled both '*antichrist*' (Joachim of Fiore, a mystic and theologian, ca. 1135-1202), and '*messiah*' (Peter of Eboli, writer, ca. 1150-1220) and everything in between, including '*the first European to my taste, and a genius among the Emperors of Germany*' (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1844-1900), '*the first modern man on a throne*' (Jacob Burckhardt, 1818-1897), an '*exemplum tremendum*' (a horrifying example), and '*a model for the*

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*totalitarian state*' (Richard Seewald, 1889-1976). Countless myths have accrued around his person, but also in regard to his empire and the time in which he lived. He is often portrayed as a 'tolerant prince', a 'precursor of the modern state', 'the first Renaissance-man', 'the first pacifist', 'the first environmentalist', etc. without any concrete evidence to demonstrate the truth of those assertions.

For many historians, Frederick II, as the creator of his own mythology, has only himself to blame for the stereotyping and distortions. In essence, he could be labelled a *mythomoteur*, a 'myth-engine' meaning the driving force behind myths, because of this. The English historical sociologist Anthony Smith describes a *mythomoteur* as a constitutional myth for a polity which lends one or several ethnic groups their *raison d'être*. Myths like these embody the collective of conviction and sentiment designed to uphold ethnicity, to spread it and to pass it on to future generations<sup>1</sup>. Smith differentiates between three types of *mythomoteur*: the dynastic, the communal-political and the communal-religious. All are ethnocentric in nature since they are judged from points of view shaped by the observers' time and place in the world<sup>2</sup>. The sense of belonging to a larger whole, and thereby to positively differentiate one's group from others, is essential. Of these three types of ethnocentrism combined with the concept of *mythomoteur*, the last is the most intense, durable and long-lasting – indeed, sometimes it is still effective today.

To better understand and fathom the controversies surrounding Frederick II, the concept of Frederick II as a *mythomoteur*, be it in a different form, could lead to new insights. Of the three types of *mythomoteur* described by Smith, the communal-political could be said to apply to Frederick II, but so could the dynastic. The communal-religious type is less likely to apply, since there is no question of religious ethnocentrism surrounding Frederick II – even if the idea of a 'chosen people' can be a relevant from a different perspective, as we will see later on. With *mythomoteurs*, texts and stories play a prominent part. These narratives – *narratio's* – create or feed the identity of peoples and/or

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<sup>1</sup> A. SMITH, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 15. The dynastic *mythomoteur* is linked to a leader, or more broadly a royal house and dynasty. Its most important goal is to legitimize, aided by political propaganda, the actions of the rulers and the dynasty and to guarantee a smooth succession (a prime example: Merovingians who, after converting to Christianity under Clovis, refer to an alleged descent from the Trojan Aeneas, thereby setting themselves apart from other 'barbarian' kingdoms). In the case of the communal-political *mythomoteur*, emphasis is placed on the common cultural and social system of a community, and in doing so pointing out the otherness of different, neighbouring communities. Here, an example can be found in the ancient Greek city-states, and the Italian urban communities at the end of the Middle Ages, who set themselves apart politically from the other communities they feel they need to politically distinguish themselves from, i.e. a form of local nationalism. The communal-religious *mythomoteur* is religious and geo-communal in origin, which can be illustrated with the mythical examples of the return of the Jews to the Holy Land and of the Armenians to their Gregorian centre Etchmiadzin in Armenia. This religious entho-centrism is often linked to the concept of a chosen people. For all three types, Smith gives an answer to the question of how and why collectivism is created, why it is unique and what its goal is. The concept of *mythomoteur* was first introduced by the Spanish historian Ramon d'Abadal i de Vinyals and by the American political scientist John Armstrong. Subsequently, the concept was further developed and applied to the process of historical representation by the English sociologist Anthony Smith. See also <https://nationalismstudies.wordpress.com/2014/10/07/anthony-smith-3-perspectives-of-ethnosymbolism/>.

Aside from Smith, the relationship between nationalism and *mythomoteurs* is mainly discussed by J. HUTCHINSON, *Warfare and the Sacralisation of Nations: The Meanings, Rituals and Politics of National Remembrance*, in «Millennium – Journal of International Studies», 38, London 2009, pp. 401-417. Hutchinson claims, for instance, that in case of war, amongst other aspects, *mythomoteurs* are very important for the founding of nations. In the historical consciousness of peoples, *mythomoteurs* form a point of reference, or framework, to explain (historical) events.

<sup>2</sup> SMITH, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations...*, cit., pp. 57-68.

communities. They connect people and groups and invoke a deep historical sense. In remembrances, pilgrimages and demonstrations, myths are created to shorten the perspective of time and to suggest an authentic historical reality<sup>3</sup>. Its function varies from a romantic quest for communality to aggressive nationalism. The essence of a *mythomoteur* is that its mythic property lends an ethnic community a sense and purpose through historical imagery.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, it's worth taking a closer look at the nature and the origin of the myths surrounding Frederick II. Myths can be very dangerous, but they can also be positive and facilitate bonding. In political conflicts, myths are often abused for political goals. Since Frederick II was a controversial person, both in the Middle Ages and today, a large number of politically loaded myths has popped up over the years.

### *Myths and fake news*

As we know all too well, in this day and age it is often difficult to ascertain which information is correct and which isn't, i.e. what is *fake news* and what isn't. Information that is presented factually can easily be used for propaganda purposes and contribute to mythologization, both positively and negatively. Medieval chroniclers were aware of this. In the present, medieval myths are often abused for political goals by nationalistic groups (sometimes with extreme views), in the concept of nation or state, or as a reaction to regional demands with neo-nationalistic tendencies<sup>5</sup>.

In 1954, the Dutch historian Pieter Geyl wrote: "*When I look around me, the first thing I notice is that the world's thinking is full of mangled or falsified history, from historical myths that, though they are so distant from the reality of the past, have no less powerful an effect on national and international politics of today*"<sup>6</sup>. Myths have a tendency to start leading lives of their own, and to be used and abused for political goals. For example, take Joan of Arc, who plays the part of the mythic-national heroin of France. In certain areas, Frederick II enjoys a heroic status comparable to that of Joan of Arc. This is illustrated by several appellations for Frederick II that were intended as praise, like '*Puer Apuliae*' (child of Apulia) and '*Stupor Mundi*' (wonder of the world)<sup>7</sup>. However, both appellations originally denoted negative connotations. '*Puer Apuliae*' is a concept originating in Medieval Germany. It was used by intellectuals at the court of Otto IV of Braunschweig, a Guelf and rival to Frederick II. It was meant as an insult, namely to signify degeneracy: Frederick II was accused of neglecting Germany and focusing all his imperial interest on faraway Italy. Not a single southern Italian chronicle mentions this appellation. Similarly, the appellation '*Stupor Mundi*' had a different meaning at its

<sup>3</sup> For some examples related to the Middle Ages, see P.J. GEARY, *The Myth of Nations. The Medieval Origins of Europe*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> See M. GREVER, R.-J. ADRIAANSEN, *In het kielzog van de mythomoteur*, in *Tafelwetenschappers Avond van Wetenschap & Maatschappij 2014 Blauwdrukken van de toekomst de wetenschap van vandaag is de wereld van morgen*, The Hague, Drukkerij Kedde b.v., 2014, pp. 26-27. Incidentally, the latter authors incorrectly cite the 'poldermodel' as an example of a positive myth. The poldermodel is by no means a myth. It's a metaphor that summarizes a historical reality.

<sup>5</sup> P.J. GEARY, *The Myth of Nations. The Medieval Origins of Europe*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003. *Passim*.

<sup>6</sup> P. GEYL, *Gebruiken en misbruik der geschiedenis* (the Terry Lectures, held at Yale University New Haven, Conn., U.S.A., in October 1954), Groningen, Djakarta, 1956, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> See also my article in the magazine *Kleio*, where I engage the mythologization of Frederick II further: H. KURSTJENS, *De fascinatie blijft. Nieuwe biografieën over Frederik II houden mythes in stand*, in «*Kleio*», 58, feb. 2017, pp. 56-60.

genesis.

The English chronicler Matthew Paris (1200-1259) was the first to use it: on the one hand he could not suppress his admiration for Frederick II, while at the same time the use of the expression *stupor mundi et immutator mirabilis* (wonder of the world and he who miraculously changes it) denotes disapproval. In the conservative, Christian view of the Middle Ages, anyone who attempted to change the world should be viewed with suspicion, because the order of the world was God-given. Incidentally, the expression *Stupor Mundi* was not altogether new; it was also used to describe Richard I the Lionheart (king from 1189-1199)<sup>8</sup> in an anonymous English manuscript, and it was also used to characterize Pope Gregory IX (pope from 1227-1241)<sup>9</sup>.

#### *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, South- and North-Italy*

We have the Italian journalist Marco Brando to thank for raising the question of contemporary mythologization surrounding Frederick II. He published '*Lo strano caso di Federico II di Svevia. Un mito medievale nella cultura di massa*' in 2008. The book's title is a play on Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel '*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*'. Central to this book is a well-known theme in Western literature: the concept of good (Dr. Jekyll) and evil (Mr. Hyde) in everyone, the two extremes of the human mind. This is comparable to the split personality that was created around Frederick II during his life. His extravagant way of life, his character and the remarkable events during his life have all contributed to the fact that his person, more than for any other ruler, has been susceptible to misinterpretation and extremes. Few Medieval rulers are rated as varyingly as Frederick II. It wasn't just during his lifetime that appreciation and admiration for him varied so wildly; even today controversies surrounding his person are present in the public discourse. This difference in appreciation can even be measured geographically: he is revered in Southern Italy, vilified in Northern Italy and practically forgotten in large parts of Germany<sup>10</sup>. The reason for this reverie in Southern-Italy is due to the fact that he lived there for a large part of his life, that it was considered the centre of his empire, and because he is thought to be responsible for bringing prosperity in many different ways<sup>11</sup>. People are eager to associate themselves with his personality and hope that Fredericks reputation reflects well on the region. In Northern Italy, people want nothing to do with him and his family, because he wanted to subjugate the ascending cities, united in the Lombard League, and impeded their economic and political growth. Not just in name a reference to the Lombard League, the political party named Lega (Nord), is still a prime example of resistance: against central authority and for increased local autonomy.

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<sup>8</sup> M. BRANDO, *Lo strano caso di Federico II di Svevia. Un mito medievale nella cultura di massa*, Bari, Palomar, 2008, pag. 163-164 (second revised edition: *L'imperatore nel suo labirinto. Usi, abusi e riusi del mito di Federico II di Svevia*, Florence, Tessere, 2019); and H. HOUBEN, *Kaiser Friedrich II. (1194-1250). Herrscher, Mensch und Mythos*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2008, pp. 193-194.

<sup>9</sup> O. B. RADER, *Der Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron*, Munich, Beck, 2010, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> BRANDO, *Lo strano caso di Federico II...cit.*, pp. 33-124.

*Adoration in Apulia: from mythomoteur to mythophantom*

Frederick II and Apulia have always been united by a strong bond. Frederick II has been systematically transformed into a myth in this region. A myth that is sometimes difficult to understand, or define: where does the ‘real, pure’ myth end and where does the consciously created myth start?<sup>12</sup> It is at this point that we can identify the beginning of Frederick II as a mythological figure capable of summoning a sense of belonging to a wider community. The Italian historian Raffaele Licinio, professor of medieval history at the University of Bari and Foggia, gives us some examples of who we should count as *mythomoteurs* in the age of Frederick II and who we should not. King Enzo, one of Frederick II’s sons, has mythic properties to the people of Bologna, but was not someone who arouses a sense of ethnicity, or as they say in German: a sense of ‘Heimat’, i.e. not someone associated with a collective identity. This is exactly what Frederick II does for Apulia: arouse a sense of collective identity. More so, Frederick is the basis for the Apulian identity, incorporating myths, symbols, values and memories<sup>13</sup>.

Frederick II, as a symbol of all that is good and beautiful, arouses a sense of pride, i.e. he can be seen as a Dr. Jekyll-type for embodying good. It is the metaphor of *laudatio temporis acti*<sup>14</sup>, a sense of longing for a nostalgic past that has never existed. This longing has spread out over Apulia, and disintegrated into longings on local levels: every town and hamlet wants to differentiate itself from the others, thereby reverting to traditions of yore<sup>15</sup>. In doing so, folkloristic manifestations are utilised to express pride. This often means mystification not just to generate pride and attention, but also mystification that can bring a certain sense of marketability. These mystifications often start leading lives of their own and will gradually be considered true, as if based on actual historical events. The *historic* myth gradually transforms into a *politicized* myth<sup>16</sup>. If that should happen, it can do a lot of harm when abused for illegitimate political goals. This is not the case in Apulia. Because of a lack of a common identity there is a need for collective memory and a collective pride, a sense of belonging and recognition. Right now, the sense of not being

<sup>12</sup> See: F. DELLE DONNE, *Federico II, la condanna della memoria. Metamorfosi di un mito*, Rome, Viella, 2012, pp. 136-137.

<sup>13</sup> R. LICINIO, *La Puglia di Federico II dopo Federico II. Continuità e discontinuità*. The text is based on a speech at the international congress “L’eredità di Federico II – dalla storia al mito, dalla Puglia al Tirolo/Das Erbe Friedrichs II. – Von der Geschichte zum Mythos, von Apulien bis Tirol“, held at Innsbruck between 13 and 16 April of 2005 and published in Bari 2010, pp. 11-28. BRANDO, *Lo strano caso di Federico II...*, cit., pp. 20-21 and 253. Incidentally, at this point Fulvio Delle Donne disagrees with Licinio. He states that the concept of *mythomoteur* is not applicable to Frederick II in the context of the origin for a sense of nation, or of a nationalistic sense. This is because Frederick has not (yet) been raised up to a mythic symbol of the *ethnic* identification of Apulia. DELLE DONNE, *Federico II, la condanna...*, cit., p. 137. Massimiliano Ambruso agrees that the ethnic component is missing: “a *mythomoteur*,” to quote Raffaele Licinio, “in which myths, symbols, values, and memories are incorporated”, but without the “ethnic” values that are typical of the concept of *mythomoteur*.” (M. AMBRUSO, *Castel del Monte. Manuale storico di sopravvivenza*, Bari, Caratteri Mobili, 2014, p. 129; second revised edition: *Castel del Monte. La storia e il mito*, Bari, Edipuglia, 2018, p. 121).

<sup>14</sup> Praising deeds from the past, which a nostalgic undercurrent suggesting that ‘everything was better in the old days’.

<sup>15</sup> According to Harry Jansen, there is something ambivalent about thinking in traditions. On the one hand it’s inevitable: every community needs its traditions. On the other hand, it leads to mythologization, which is nowhere near guaranteed to be harmless. See: H. JANSEN, *Triptiek van de Tijd. Geschiedenis in drievoud*, Nijmegen, Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2010, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> See: DELLE DONNE, *Federico II, la condanna...*, cit., pp. 158-159. He warns most of all for this transformation from historical to politicized myth.

taken seriously by the rest of Italy prevails in Apulia.

In Apulia, the mythic person of Frederick II has not developed into an ethnic *mythomoteur*, but he has become someone with whom people can positively self-identify (Dr. Jekyll). This is evident from innocuous tv-programmes, movies, computer-games or costumed parties. These modern expressions can lead to memories different from the historical memory. Faced with a slippery slope and fading boundaries, without any historical depth, and without historical awareness, mythologization can acquire a negative dynamic. That could lead to manipulations, fabrications and distortions (*'invented traditions'*), however much originating from a sense of love for one's country, region or demographic, but without the core of truth remaining. But if the memory is based on nothing, then so is the justification for the adoration and the myth. It becomes apparent that what we are discussing then is a fantasy, an illusion or a ghost, or to put it yet another way: a phantom. Therefore, in regard to mythologization, it is better not to speak of Frederick II as a *mythomoteur*, as someone around whom myths have been created, but of Frederick II as a *mythophantom*, to be used and abused for political and other goals by later generations.

#### *The controversy Licinio/Brando vs Russo and Apulia*

Illustrative for the mythologization surrounding Frederick II are the reactions to the publication, in 2008, of the book already mentioned above, by the Italian journalist Marco Brando: *Lo strano caso di Federico II di Svevia*. Renato Russo, a self-styled cultural promotor, journalist and historical researcher from Barletta (Apulia), was violently opposed to the positions of the historian Raffaele Licinio – the inspirator and mentor of Marco Brando – who he believes was the evil genius behind Brando's book. Russo writes that "it sends shivers down his spine to see this great king brought down so"<sup>17</sup>. Devotees of Frederick blame Licinio for killing off the myths surrounding Frederick II (*"Professore, ma lei così mi distrugge un mito!"*; "Professor, in this way you are destroying a myth for me!"). To them, Frederick (*tifosi-federiciani-oltre-ogni-limite*; "fans of Frederick without limits") is a dream worth cherishing. They are unable to take a step back from their passion. History however, is not an objective product but a 'creation', not an isolated phenomenon surrounding one person but an analysis of a phenomenon as part of a general and social coherence – according to Licinio. He feels Medieval myths are abused all too often to legitimize new nations, especially in the nineteenth century, as we will see later. Licinio described how the concept of Frederick II as a *mythomoteur* has great appeal in Apulia, while in actuality the Apulia of today is nothing like the Apulia of Fredericks time, nor is it the area where he was born of where he grew up. It's Licinio's belief that, since the inhabitants of Apulia lack a common identity, they require positive collective recognition, and who better to provide it than Frederick II, the Dr. Jekyll that has lived in Apulia for so many years<sup>18</sup>!

Russo is furious at the way in which Licinio labels the devotees of Frederick II: paranoid defenders, devoid of objectivity and historical awareness. He thinks it's inappropriate for Licinio to claim that the Apulians, lacking in identity, would resort to conveniently inventing one to satisfy the requirements of identity. In this way, Licinio ignores the king's

<sup>17</sup> R. RUSSO, *Pugliesi tutti pazzi per Federico. Il più grande monarca dell'Occidente o un sovrano mitizzato da esaltati creduloni?*, Barletta, Rotas, 2009, p. 121.

<sup>18</sup> BRANDO, *Lo strano caso di Federico II...*, cit., *Introduction* written by Raffaele Licinio, pp. 13-26.

greatness. According to Russo, Frederick II was a precursor to the modern state, a promotor of the Sicilian school and at the same time the initiator of *volgare*, the Italian vernacular. He was a hero reconquering the Holy Places without shedding a single drop of blood, and the author of *De arte venandi cum avibus* (“The art of hunting with birds”), the standard book on falconry<sup>19</sup>. In short, he was the greatest promotor of culture of his time. And the Apulians are overreacting by heaping praise on him?! According to Russo, Licinio’s problem is that he is unable to find a balance between arguments for and against Frederick II<sup>20</sup>. On December 9 of 2008 journalist Gianfranco Summo reviewed Brando’s book in the *Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, stating: “*di fatto questo testo ha distrutto il mito dell'imperatore*” (“In effect this book has destroyed the emperor’s myth”)<sup>21</sup>. Russo used this quote to react vehemently to “this attack on one of the greatest rulers of all time”. He went on: “*The article closes with the authors latest provocation, this time not directed at the king, but at his 'fanatical' followers, with an unpleasant message: "Attenti, pugliesi, che continuando a camminare con la testa rivolta all'indietro, finirete per non accorgevi dove state andando.*” (“Beware Apulians, if you continue to walk with your heads turned back, you will find yourself on a path with an uncertain destination.”) To Russo, this almost feels like a conspiracy to severely damage Apulia’s tourism: it invites the risk of losing the almost 300.000 tourists that visit Castel del Monte annually thanks to “our great king”. According to Russo, avoiding this risk requires feeding the myths, not suppressing them<sup>22</sup>. That these myths are being fed in Apulia is clear. The thermo-electric power plant of Cerano carries Fredericks name, a ceramist from Grottaglie exclusively makes statues of the dynasty of Hohenstaufen, you can drink Frederick-wine there, there is a brand of soup named after him, there are Frederick II hotels, diners and travel agencies and for a time there was an airline called *Federico II Airways*... and there are annual Medieval festivities, like parades and running contests et cetera centred around Frederick II. The list goes on. It would seem odd that in this day and age, with its changeability, internet, globalisation, secularisation, social media and *fake news*, a phenomenon such as the adoration of Frederick II can continue to exist. Anthropology and ethnology however demonstrate that communities with complex societal structures tend to incorporate mythical images and symbols – for example with stories containing a constant, stable narrative core – which do not necessarily conflict with reality<sup>23</sup>. We will learn more about this constant narrative core when we deal with the process of creating a nation.

### *Frederick II, Italian nationalism and the Italian unification*

How did mythologization around Frederick II and the Hohenstaufen dynasty affect the process of unification and national identity in Italy and Germany? Both countries were relatively late, compared to the rest of Europe, in creating their national state. In Italy the difference in development between the towns of the North and the South-Italian Mezzogiorno is an important factor in Italy’s late unification; for Germany the foremost obstacle was that the country consisted of a patchwork of around forty lesser states, large

<sup>19</sup> For the scientific aspect of this book about falconry, see: B.J.P. CRUL, *Keizer Frederik II. Een moderne wetenschapper uit de middeleeuwen 1194-1250*, Utrecht, Paperback, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> RUSSO, *Pugliesi tutti pazzi per Federico...*, cit., pp. 122-125.

<sup>21</sup> Ivi, p. 134.

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, p. 135.

<sup>23</sup> BRANDO, *Lo strano caso di Federico II...*, cit., from the *Introduction* by Raffaele Licinio, pp. 20-21.

as well as small. In the nineteenth century, members of the cultural and societal elite started to propagate a national identity. All kinds of myths, including those involving Frederick II, were used to solidify this national identity.

Italy in the first half of the nineteenth century was fragmented into lots of tiny states. Question about what the national identity was supposed to be kept coming back. On the basis of a common language and literature, by which the country was culturally united, an Italian nation was supposed to grow. One problem for the realisation of this nation was the presence of the Papal State, with its unique position of power in Italy. This nation would contain areas that were under direct papal sovereignty. Also, the south of Italy has a history that is very different from that of Northern Italy. In the south of Italy, Frederick II, as we have seen, is well thought of, like a real Dr. Jekyll.<sup>24</sup> In the north of Italy, however, the conflicts between the city-states and the German emperors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were – and are – by no means forgotten. Here too we can sense Frederick II ghosting about, but in the guise of Mr. Hyde. Still, in Italy he is viewed unanimously as the founder of the Italian language. *Volgare*, the national vernacular, is the basis for this achievement. This accomplishment seems to contribute to a recognition and confirmation of Italian as a popular language, and with that, of Italy as a state. In short, Frederick is seemingly endowed with the potential of possessing the dynamic of a *mythomoteur*. He was seen by some as the pioneer of Italian unity and in the nineteenth century he gradually gained popularity and relevance as a topical matter. Some examples to illustrate this will follow<sup>25</sup>.

In his history of Sicily, Rosario Gregorio (1753-1809) wrote that Frederick II, despite his numerous wars, cultivated poetry in the vernacular (*volgare*) at his Palermo court. Even more, he has shown himself able to formulate a legal system which was applicable not just to Sicily, but also to different, larger areas<sup>26</sup>. The famous Italian poet Ugo Foscolo (1778-1827) in 1824 also viewed Frederick II as a role model. He posited that Frederick II had turned Italy into a strong, European monarchy, with one king, one form of government and one language<sup>27</sup>. In essence, Frederick II was the benevolent, unifying prince, a personification of Dr. Jekyll.

More and more, Frederick II was becoming the subject of a complex political discussion which resembled the situation of the Middle Ages. Then, Guelfs, favouring the pope, and Ghibellines, favouring the emperor, were at odds; in the nineteenth century it was the ‘neo-Guelfs’, a Catholicism-inspired political movement advocating a federative Italy, and ‘neo-Ghibellines’, proponents of a secular Italian unification. In this debate, the Catholic Church kept stressing the importance of a society of faith and of papal primacy, without suggesting that a centralised and unified state should have the pope at its head. The proponents for a secular state, on the other hand, were trying to create a nation in which the power of, and the role played by the church was to be pushed back in favour of a strong worldly state with strong secular leaders.

Historian and statesman Cesare Balbo (1789-1853) was not in favour of Italian unity.

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<sup>24</sup> It is somewhat remarkable that the founders of the Italian unified state preferred to use Medieval history to legitimise a unified Italy, when the rival Medieval city-states can much easier be thought to symbolise the deep divisions of Italy. See also: L.H.M. WESSELS, T. BOSCH (red.), *Nationalisme, naties en staten*, Nijmegen, Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2012, pp. 355-356.

<sup>25</sup> For this outline I have used Roberto Delle Donne’s contribution, *Storiografia dell’Ottocento e del Novecento*, in «Federiciana», 2005.

<sup>26</sup> R. GREGORIO, *Discorsi intorno alla Sicilia*, I, Palermo, Librai Pedone e Muratori, 1820, pp. 22-23.

<sup>27</sup> *Epoche della lingua italiana. Epoca seconda*, 1824, in C. FOLIGNO, *U. Foscolo, Saggi di letteratura italiana*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1958, p. 130.



He expected the pope to be hostile towards a large, unified Italy. But even he, as a ‘neo-Guelf’, praised the personal qualities of this emperor who so appealed to one’s imagination – most especially because of his interest in poetry in the vernacular. Balbo considered Frederick more Italian than German<sup>28</sup>. The ‘neo-Ghibellines’, on the other hand, did want an Italian national State, but one independent from the papacy. They appreciated Frederick II, but only in as far as he fought the popes, whom they considered a hindrance to Italian political unity. This made Frederick a role model of a different kind: to them, Frederick II was considered a ‘father of the secular Italian fatherland’. Another well-known proponent of this line of thought was the anti-clerical patriot and man of literature Luigi Settembrini (1813-1878). According to him, Frederick was the only one able to realise Italian unity. He had the power, the inner fortitude, and – since he was born and raised as an Italian – the right to do so. The other emperors, no matter how ambitious or cruel, were also good Christians. They bowed to the pope, rendering them unsuitable to govern all of Italy<sup>29</sup>. According to Settembrini, Frederick II wanted to conquer all of Italy and make Germany a boundary-province. Most of all he wanted to diminish the pope’s influence. To Settembrini, Frederick II was the one to make the first push towards the creation of a single language and a single national literature, especially because he was an Italian and wanted to establish a strong, authoritarian, secular and anti-clerical state. This seems ample justification to consider Frederick II a potential *mythomoteur*, a Dr. Jekyll, to the Ghibelline Italian unification.

Some years later, between 1870 and 1871, Francesco De Sanctis (1817-1883) published the history of Italian literature. He included the Sicilian School in the canon of Italian literary tradition, giving Frederick II credit for making Palermo the cultural capital of Italy<sup>30</sup>. As a democrat, De Sanctis had some reservations about including a feudal king, but he did appreciate Frederick II as one of Italy’s first poets able to inspire others for the patriotic, nationalistic cause.<sup>31</sup> Ugo Foscolo, Luigi Settembrini and Francesco De Sanctis viewed Frederick II as a father to the fatherland, someone able to finally unite the country in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the twentieth century – in other words: after the unification of Italy – this discussion went on unabated. An example of a ‘neo-Ghibelline’ view of Frederick II is a monography published in 1938 by the leftist liberal Gabriele Pepe (1899-1971): ‘*Lo Stato Ghibellino Di Federico II*’ (Frederick II’s Ghibelline state)<sup>32</sup>. In this book, Frederick II’s monarchy is compared to the experiences of fascism (i.e. Mussolini), as is happening at the same time in certain circles of Germany with Frederick and Hitler. The title of the book itself is proof the alleged modernity of the anti-clerical state devised and created by Frederick<sup>33</sup>. A ‘neo-Guelf’ reaction wouldn’t take long. In 1949, Cardinal and Archbishop Emilio Nasalli Rocca di Corneliano (1872-1952) published a biography of Frederick II in which he lashed out at the emperor severely. He condemned Frederick for his secular ideals. To him, the Church was the only force capable of guiding politics – not just in the thirteenth

<sup>28</sup> A. CORBELLI, *Le speranze d'Italia*, Torino, Utet, 1925, p. 56; F. NICOLINI, *Della storia d'Italia dalle origini fino ai nostri giorni. Sommario*, Bari, Laterza, 1913, p. 223.

<sup>29</sup> G. INNAMORATI, *L. Settembrini. Lezioni di letteratura italiana*, part. I and II, Florence, Sansoni, 1964, part. I, pp. 53-54.

<sup>30</sup> N. GALLO, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, part I, Torino, Einaudi, 1971, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> F. TRUCCHI, *Poesie italiane inedite di dugento autori dall'origine della lingua infino al secolo decimosettimo, raccolte e illustrate*, part. I, Prato, Ranieri Guasti, 1846, p. XLIV.

<sup>32</sup> For more information on Gabriele Pepe, see [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gabriele-pepe\\_res-b6c9143c-3056-11e5-b07d-00271042e8d9\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gabriele-pepe_res-b6c9143c-3056-11e5-b07d-00271042e8d9_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

<sup>33</sup> G. PEPE, *Lo stato ghibellino di Federico II*, Bari, Laterza, 1938, p. 8 ef.f.

century, but also today<sup>34</sup>. In fact, the discussion between ‘neo-Ghibellines’ and ‘neo-Guelfs’ only strengthens the image of Frederick II as a *mythomoteur*, one which incorporates Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and facilitates the ongoing mythologization around Frederick’s person in the present.

Despite the fact that all of the previously mentioned people somehow related Frederick II to Italian unity, in reality there is no such thing as a single communal Italian identity. Italy’s unity as a nation-state is a result of a revolution (*Risorgimento*) from above and if nothing else it is a political unity. The state came first, to be followed by the nation. The people, as in Germany some ten years later, had no part in this process of political unification. After the kingdom was proclaimed in 1861, Massimo d’Azeglio is rumoured to have said “*L’Italia è fatta, ora dobbiamo fare gli italiani*” (“Italy has been made, now all we have to do is create Italians”)<sup>35</sup>. This helped to change Italian nationalism’s nature: from an ideal of liberty from down below to a state-ideology from above. As it turned out, local and regional interests were more important than a national identity. The movement for a national identity was largely a cultural-literary movement. This explains its lack of general popularity, and proves the fundamental weakness of the nation-state. Furthermore, the Italian nation is rarely, if ever, defined in terms of race or ethnicity. As we will see, German nationalism was quite the opposite<sup>36</sup>.

### *Frederick II, German nationalism and German unification*

In Germany, Frederick II is well-known in Swabia, the area that was home to the dynasty of the Hohenstaufen, but the opposite is true for the rest of Germany. In the German tv-show ‘*Unsere Besten - Wer ist der größte Deutsche?*’ [a tv-show in which the audience could vote for the ‘greatest German’, H.K.] of 2003, Frederick II came in at 94 – ahead of football-player Uwe Seele, but behind Beate Uhse, founder of a franchise in sex shops<sup>37</sup>. In contemporary German history, Frederick II is hardly prominent. When discussing Frederick II, our subject is confused by most Germans with the Prussian king Frederick II (1712-1786), better known as Frederick the Great, of the dynasty of the Hohenzoller<sup>38</sup>. Somewhat amusing is the misunderstanding in this context by the great German poet Goethe. In the introduction to his ‘*Italienische Reise*’ he describes the following incident. On the evening of April 28<sup>th</sup> of 1787 he had just arrived at the town of Caltanissetta (Sicily). On the market-square, he met up with a group of prominent residents eager to engage him in conversation. “*Wir mußten von Friedrich dem Zweiten erzählen, und ihre Teilnahme an diesem großen Könige war so lebhaft, daß wir seinen*

<sup>34</sup> E. NASALLI ROCCA DI CORNELIANO, *Federico II di Svevia*, Brescia 1949, *passim*. Incidentally, some modern Italian historians are still under great influence of their Catholic faith.

<sup>35</sup> P. CORDUWENER, A. WESTSTEIJN, *Proeftuin Italië. Hoe het mooiste land van Europa de moderne politiek uitvond*, Amsterdam, Prometheus, 2018, p. 29. See also: A.M. BANTI, *Il Risorgimento italiano*, Bari, Laterza, 2004.

<sup>36</sup> WESSELS, BOSCH (red.), *Nationalisme, naties en staten...*, cit., p. 355; J. VAN OSTA, *Een geschiedenis van het moderne Italië*, Amsterdam, Wereldbibliotheek, 2008, pp. 95-96.

<sup>37</sup> H. OBERMAIER, *Der Staufer Friedrich II. und die Geschichtsschreibung des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, in «Concilium Medii Aevi», 11 (2008), p. 83. The text is based on a speech at the international congress “*L’eredità di Federico II – dalla storia al mito, dalla Puglia al Tirolo/Das Erbe Friedrichs II. – Von der Geschichte zum Mythos, von Apulien bis Tirol*“, held at Innsbruck between 13 and 16 April of 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Frederick II of Prussia isn’t just better known to the German public than the Emperor Frederick II, he also did much better in ‘*Unsere Besten - Wer ist der größte Deutsche?*’, coming in at 42.

<http://www.klartextsatire.de/kultur/100besten-041-050.htm>

*Tod verhehlten, um nicht durch eine so unselige Nachricht unsern Wirten verhaßt zu werden*<sup>39c</sup>. Based upon the great emotional investment by the Sicilian prominents, it seems highly likely that they would want to talk about the greatness of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (Dr. Jekyll). But Goethe is clearly talking about Frederick II of Prussia, who had died shortly before, on August 17<sup>th</sup> of 1786. This episode is significant as an illustration of the difference in the way in which the emperor was generally remembered in eighteenth century Germany. Frederick II had barely made an impression on Goethe, who had come to Italy to admire the beauty of its nature and to admire its monuments of antiquity and the Renaissance – or was of no special significance to him at that particular moment in time and place. This obviates a confusion with the more modern eponymous Prussian monarch<sup>40</sup>.

The emperor Frederick II is most well-known in Swabia, the homeland of his dynasty of Hohenstaufen<sup>41</sup>. Because of his birth, his upbringing and his sojourns in Italy, he is viewed by most Germans as an Italian rather than a German, which is not entirely correct according to the German historian Hubert Houben, working as professor of Middle Ages at the university of Salento in Lecce. More on that late<sup>42</sup>.

Frederick II, and really the entire dynasty of the Hohenstaufen, has largely been discredited. Frederick's person has become a plaything of the interests of politically active groups like German nationalists and (neo)Nazis. Some examples to illustrate the way in which Frederick II has been used and abused, both personally and as emperor, for political goals in Germany will follow. First of all the so-called Kyffhäuserlegend. The Kyffhäuser is a mountain ridge on the border of the German federal states Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt. Its highest point is the Kulpenberg in Thuringia. The *Kyffhäuser-Denkmal*, near Kassel, was inaugurated on 18 June 1896 and was to remind Germany of its greatness. Today, the monument has become a symbol for German unity. It consists of a statue of an upright Kaiser Wilhelm I and below it, a statue of a seated Frederick I Barbarossa. According to legend, Barbarossa is not dead but sitting behind a stone table in a hidden chamber beneath the hills. Originally the Kyffhäuserlegend was centred around Frederick II.<sup>43</sup> He was supposed to have concealed himself deep within the Kyffhäuser mountain. According to the legend he appeared in 1537, revealing himself to a shepherd as a friend of the 'common man'. He took the shepherd into the Kyffhäuser and showed him large amounts of weapons, and after that he gave him a rich reward. Next, he asked the shepherd to tell the common folk outside that he wanted to reclaim the Holy Sepulchre with these weapons. During the nineteenth century Frederick II's persona in the legend has gradually been superseded by that of Frederick I Barbarossa. Frederick II fell into disgrace, because he was thought to have focused his attentions on his Italian

<sup>39</sup> JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE, *Italienische Reise*, Munich 1988 (5<sup>th</sup> edition), p. 263. (Translation: *We were asked to tell of Frederick II, and their interest in this great king was so great, that we decided to conceal his death, in order to escape being hated by our hosts for delivering such a wretched tidings.*)

<sup>40</sup> HOUBEN, *Kaiser Friedrich II. (1194-1250)*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer Urban, 2008, pp. 207-208.

<sup>41</sup> To be more exact: the castle of Hohenstaufen outside the town of Göppingen.

[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burg\\_Hohenstaufen](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burg_Hohenstaufen)

<sup>42</sup> See: HOUBEN, *Friedrich II., ein Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron?* Published in «Quellen und Forschungen aus Italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken, Deutschen Historische Institut (DHI)», Rome, December 2017.

<sup>43</sup> The first one to prove that the legend originally referred to Frederick II was Georg Voigt, *Die deutsche Kaisersage*, pp. 131-136. This was later confirmed by Sigmund Von Riezler (*Zur deutschen Kaisersage*), Moritz Brosch (*Die Friedrichsage der Italiener*), Ernst Koch (*Die Sage vom Kaiser Friedrich im Kyffhäuser*), Franz Kampers (*Die deutsche Kaiseridee in Prophetie und Sage*) and Karl Hampe (*Eine frühe Verknüpfung der Weissagung vom Endkaiser mit Friedrich II. Und Konrad IV.*)

empire, and to have thwarted the centralist development of a German national state. He would gradually disappear from German collective memory<sup>44</sup>. Here too, the ‘real, pure’ original myth, just as in Apulia, changed into a consciously created new myth, complete with the potential of a *mythomoteur*, not around the figure of Frederick II, but around his grandfather Frederick I Barbarossa.

In the end, Frederick I Barbarossa became a more important foundation for the resurrection of Germany, in which the Kyffhäuserlegend became an important part of the burgeoning German nationalism<sup>45</sup>. In 1896 Kaiser Wilhelm II was present at the monument’s inauguration, to remember Kaiser Wilhelm I. By being present, he endorsed the idea and the goal behind this nationalistic monument. In doing so, he directly linked the ‘First Empire’ of the Hohenstaufen, amongst others, to the ‘Second Empire’ of the Hohenzollern. The ‘Third Reich’ would be around shortly. Using the symbolic value of this monument for the honour and glory of German nationalism led the German historian and medievalist Knut Görich to cry in despair ‘*Geisterstunde der Nationalgeschichte*’, witching hour of national history<sup>46</sup>.

### *The Hohenstaufen and German nationalism*

With that, we have arrived at the German nationalism that was being pushed at the start of the nineteenth century by people like the German philosopher Gottlieb Fichte and the Prussian statesman and reformer Karl vom Stein. The latter is known to have said “*Ich habe nur ein Vaterland, das heißt Deutschland*”<sup>47</sup>, before German unification had become a reality. But which Germany should that be, on the basis of which communal past? The first thing to come to mind is the Holy Roman Empire, even if it could be classified as a governmental chaos with enormous divisions between emperor, electors, imperial nobility and free cities. There are no other forms of a German collective<sup>48</sup>. By rejecting the ideals of Enlightenment, which was viewed as symbolism for French oppression, the quest for a singularity as a people was all that remained. This singularity was found in the Germany of the Middle Ages, casting Charlemagne as the German hero. The movement to use the Medieval past as inspiration for the wellbeing of Germany in the nineteenth century was spearheaded by two historians, Friedrich von Raumer (1781-1873) and Heinrich Luden (1778-1847). In his *Geschichte der Hohenstaufen und ihrer Zeit* Friedrich von Raumer stressed that the strength of the German culture lies in its diversity of social estates, and the separate smaller states of which Germany consists.<sup>49</sup> For him, Frederick I Barbarossa and Frederick II were at the centre of an unequalled pinnacle of German history. They could both be models for Dr. Jekyll, because, according to Von Raumer, they both did a lot of good for Germany. Under Hohenstaufen rule, Germany

<sup>44</sup> See also: C. G. KAUL, *Friedrich Barbarossa im Kyffhäuser. Bilder eines nationalen Mythos im 19. Jahrhundert*, Cologne, Böhlau, 2007; M. THOMSEN, “*Ein feuriger Herr des Anfangs...*“. *Kaiser Friedrich II in der Auffassung der Nachwelt*, Ostfildern, Thorbecke, 2005, pp. 149-162.

<sup>45</sup> P. RAEDTS, *De ontdekking van de Middeleeuwen. Geschiedenis van een illusie*, Amsterdam, Wereldbibliotheek, 2011, p. 201. (German edition: *Die Entdeckung des Mittelalters. Geschichte einer Illusion*, Mainz 2016)

<sup>46</sup> K. GÖRICH, *Friedrich Barbarossa. Eine Biographie*, Munich, C. H. Beck, 2011, p. 664.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted from a letter to the Count of Münster dated 1 December 1812. (Translation: “I have only one fatherland, it’s called Germany.”)

<sup>48</sup> RAEDTS, *De ontdekking van de Middeleeuwen...*, cit., p. 190.

<sup>49</sup> F. VON RAUMER, *Geschichte der Hohenstaufen und ihrer Zeit*, 6 parts, Leipzig, 1823-1825.

had a rich diversity in society, allowing people to move freely in a state where power was shared and in which all societal groups were given their own responsibility. Emperors were required to leave direct governance to qualified lower institutions, like bishops and abbots, and intervene solely when conflict seemed insurmountable. That was true freedom: to every group its own freedom. According to Von Raumer, Germany chose diversity and freedom over unity and equality, under the inspired leadership of the Hohenstaufe<sup>50</sup>.

Heinrich Luden, the other historian, reached a diametrically opposed conclusion to Von Raumer in his *Geschichte des teutschen Volkes*<sup>51</sup>. He was convinced that only political unity could bring true freedom. The weakness and indifference of Medieval kings was the cause for the German people's political downfall. Therefore, a strong king was necessary. To Luden, Frederick I Barbarossa was an example of a glory-hungry, violent, cold and selfish man, the prototype of the Mr. Hyde archetype, whereas he allowed that while Frederick II was ambivalent and untrustworthy, he was also someone with a rich, creative mind and true charisma, a true Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in one person. Both rulers were wrong in intervening in Italy, a country that had nothing to offer them, and they both chose the wrong side in siding with the feudal nobility against the waxing towns. Luden needed an image of a divided German Middle ages in order to express his hope for the future of Germany. National unity goes hand in hand with liberty for the towns, or so said Luden. Wilhelm I was to be the embodiment of a new empire, like a Hohenstaufen 2.0, but an improved edition – not Barbarossa, but Barbablanca<sup>52</sup>.

The Polish count, Prussian diplomat and art lover Athanasius Raczyński (1788-1874) also saw the dynasty of the Hohenstaufen as a highpoint in German history and an example for a future Germany:

Das Zeitalter der Hohenstaufen (Ghibellinen) ist das ruhmvollste des Heiligen Deutschen Römischen Reichs. Mitten unter den blutigen Kämpfen, welche dieses edle Geschlecht gegen die Guelfen zu bestehen hatte, sah man, durch seinen mächtigen Schirm und Einfluss, die Wissenschaften, die Dichtkunst und alle Künste sich entwickeln und die Volkseigenthümlichkeiten sich ausbilden. Zahlreiche Denkmale bekunden diesen hohen Aufschwung und versetzen uns auf Kampfplätze und an Hofhaltungen, in Feldschlachten und Feste, wo wir immer die Hohenstaufen an der Spitze der Bewegung erblicken, welche die Welt zu gleicher Zeit erschütterte und belebte. (...) Kurz, das Zeitalter der Hohenstaufen ist die bedeutendste und glänzendste Erscheinung der Deutschen Geschichte<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> RAEDTS, *De ontdekking van de Middeleeuwen...*, cit., pp. 195-199.

<sup>51</sup> H. LUDEN, *Geschichte des teutschen Volkes*, 12 parts, Gotha 1825-1837.

<sup>52</sup> RAEDTS, *De ontdekking van de Middeleeuwen...*, cit., p. 199-203. The name 'Barbablanca' for Kaiser Wilhelm I comes from a collection of poetry by Felix Dahn, *Vaterland*, Leipzig 1892. The poem in question, of which the first stanza is cited below, is called: *Hail dem kaiser!*, p. 55:

<i>Heil dir, greiser Imperator;</i>	<i>(Hail to you, grey kaiser)</i>
<i>Barbablanca, Triumphator;</i>	<i>(Barbablanca, Triumphator)</i>
<i>Der du Frankreich niederzwangst</i>	<i>(You who have brought France low)</i>
<i>Und der Krone der Germanen,</i>	<i>(And given the crown of the Germans)</i>
<i>Witwe längst des Ruhms der Ahnen,</i>	<i>(So long widow to forbears' glory)</i>
<i>Glanz und Schimmer neu errangst!</i>	<i>(Newly won glamour and splendour!)</i>

<sup>53</sup> A. RACZYŃSKI - *Geschichte der Neueren Deutschen Kunst*, 1840, part. 2, pp. 5-6. (Translation: "The age of the Hohenstaufen (Ghibellines) is the most glorious of the Holy German Roman Empire. Between the bloody battles with the Guelfs, which this noble dynasty had to endure, one could see, through its mighty shield and influence, poetry and all art develop and the singularities of the [German people] take shape. Countless monuments testify to this great rise, and take us back to theatres of war and courts, to battlefields

And then we have the nineteenth century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who adored Frederick II. His worship was not based on nationalism, but focused primarily on the free-spirited and liberal mind of Frederick II. In *Ecce homo* he wrote of his great admiration for the greatest emperor of the Hohenstaufen, Frederick II, whom he considered an atheist and anticlerical ‘*come il faut*’. In *The Antichrist* he wrote: “*War to the knife with Rome! Peace and friendship with Islam! This was the feeling, this was the act, of that great free spirit, that genius among German emperors, Frederick II*<sup>54</sup>”. Directly and indirectly, the Hohenstaufen played an important part in the German unification, and were significant in (co-)shaping the German identity. But still, what Germany and which identity were meant? That is the subject of the following controversy.

### *The Sybel-Ficker controversy*

In the second part of the nineteenth century, Germany was the scene of an interesting political discussion about German identity: the Sybel-Ficker controversy. At stake in this discussion was where to look for the future and national identity of Germany: in a Greater Germany with many different peoples and together with Austria, or in a smaller Germany as a homogeneous national state including a predominant Prussia. On the basis of history, Julius von Ficker (1826-1902), a German-Austrian Catholic historian, was convinced that the Greater German idea (*katholisch großdeutsch*) was to be preferred; the protestant German historian and liberal politician Heinrich von Sybel (1817-1895) favoured the Small German idea (*preußisch kleindeutsch*). Both historians based their arguments on the Medieval empire.

Sybel started the controversy in 1859 by stating that the imperial policy of the Middle Ages was “not national”, to which Ficker replied in 1861 that the emperors of the Middle Ages pursued both a universal and at the same time national imperial policy. Besides, added Ficker, the empire is the guarantor for freedom and security in Europe, since it prevented the French, Norsemen and Islam from penetrating Germany. German culture did best by drawing in cultural neighbour Italy into the empire. This way, Germany was saved from a great many foreign influences. Sybel on the other hand claimed that the conflict with the papacy undermined the national basis of the German people. By using diplomatic tools instead of military power, central authority lost power under the rule of the Hohenstaufen. This allowed the electors to become kinglets in their own domains. Sybel held Frederick I Barbarossa accountable for a faulty Italian policy. By reaching out to Sicily, most especially by arranging the marriage of his son Henry VI to the Sicilian-Norman royal daughter Constance, he disturbed the balance of power in Italy, and made

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*and feasts – and everywhere we see the Hohenstaufen in the lead, both inspiring and shaking this world. (...) In short, this age of the Hohenstaufen is the most meaningful and shining manifestation of German history.”*

<sup>54</sup> FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *De antichrist*, Amsterdam 1977 (second edition), p. 110 (English translation taken from

[http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/19322.epub.noimages?session\\_id=60bfea21e5b89530e688b87b9e35fae2f064e946](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/19322.epub.noimages?session_id=60bfea21e5b89530e688b87b9e35fae2f064e946) [pdf document]).

Nietzsche linked his admiration for Frederick II to mythologization. According to Nietzsche, historiography’s main concern is to create images. In this imagery, reality is reflected in a mythical way. Mythologization therefore, is an inevitable element of historiography. According to Nietzsche, as long as man is aware that he views the world through mythology, he mythologizes himself. See also H. JANSEN, *Triptiek van de tijd...*, cit., pp. 147-148.

an enemy of the pope<sup>55</sup>. The expansion of the empire wasn't supposed to be southbound (towards Italy), but eastbound (towards Eastern Europe). The German people had always been possessed of an irresistible desire to civilise the East: the '*Drang nach Osten*'<sup>56</sup>.

Fickers answer didn't take long. According to him the downfall of the empire wasn't a result of the conflict with the papacy, but of the struggle between the Hohenstaufen and the Guelfs, two more or less equally strong royal houses. The internal rivalry between these royal houses prevented the monarchy from growing into a strong, centralised institution. To retain the support of the other electors, Frederick I Barbarossa chose not to limit the power of Henry the Lion, Otto IV's father. Where both Sybel and Ficker agree, is in the disastrous role Frederick II played in the end of the Staufian empire in the Middle Ages. According to them, it came about because Frederick focused too much on the kingdom of Sicily, and neglected Germany<sup>57</sup>. After Frederick II's death, the entire structure of the state came crashing down, thereby separating the nation from the empire<sup>58</sup>. Because of the political developments in Germany after 1860, the defeat of Austria in 1866 and the founding of the German nation-state under Prussia in 1871, the political tide turned in Sybel's favour, and he was considered the winner of the controversy. However, this does not mean that he has also become the winner in the scientific controversy. Ficker's position that the Middle Ages should not be judged by means of modern political notions and insights is still valid in today's day and age. Using the concept of a nation-state for the Middle Ages is out of place; it cannot be applied to an empire consisting of a disparity of tribes like Franconians, Saxons and Bavarians to name just a few. Sybel on the other hand felt nothing for an ideal of scientific objectivity. He believed that any historian who strove for 'distinguished neutrality' must inevitably become 'soulless and affected'<sup>59</sup>.

In this controversy, there is hardly any mention of Frederick I Barbarossa or Frederick II as a *mythomoteur*. Both Sybel and Ficker did use the Middle Ages and the dynasty of the Hohenstaufen to clarify their positions regarding nineteenth century German nationalism and the German identity. First and foremost, however, they were haunted by politically inspired illusions and mirages, therefore we must conclude that in this sense both Hohenstaufen are more like *mythophantoms*.

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<sup>55</sup> Frederick I Barbarossa knew that an actual unification of the kingdom of Sicily with the empire (*unio regni ad imperium*) wasn't especially likely to occur, since William II had recently contracted a marriage, but he must also have known that it would be a possibility in the case that said contracted marriage would remain childless. In that case, the empire would have had a legitimate claim to the kingdom. The ancient claim of the Holy Roman Empire on the kingdom of Sicily (*antiquum ius imperii ad regnum*) maintained that Sicily had always been part of the empire. The claim already existed, but with this new situation it came closer to becoming reality. See also GÖRICH, *op. cit.*, p. 523-524 (see also nota 46).

<sup>56</sup> RAEDTS, *De ontdekking van de Middeleeuwen...*, cit., pp. 329-330. (Translation: "the instinctive drive to go east".)

<sup>57</sup> M. THOMSEN, "Ein feuriger Herr des Anfangs..." *Kaiser Friedrich II. in der Auffassung der Nachwelt*, Ostfildern, Thorbecke, 2005, pp. 162-165 (based on: Sybel, *Nation und Kaiserreich* (1862), p. 221 and Ficker, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich in seinen universalen und nationalen Beziehungen* (1861), pp. 101-103).

<sup>58</sup> A. RIENOW, *Der Streit zwischen Heinrich von Sybel und Julius Ficker*, in: Blumen für Clío: Einführung in Methoden und Theorien der Geschichtswissenschaft aus studentischer Perspektive, Bochum 2011, p. 237-269; F. SCHNEIDER, *Universalstaat oder Nationalstaat. Macht und Ende des Ersten deutschen Reiches. Die Streitschriften von Heinrich v. Sybel und Julius Ficker zur deutschen Kaiserpolitik des Mittelalters*, Innsbruck, Wagner, 1943.

<sup>59</sup> WESSELS, BOSCH (red.), *Nationalisme, naties en staten...*, cit., pp. 60-61.

*Ernst H. Kantorowicz*

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Frederick II, unlike his grandfather, did not play a significant role in German historiography. This had everything to do with German nationalism and the pursuit of German unity. In Germany at that time, Frederick II was mainly seen as a southern Italian/Sicilian sovereign and had little importance for German nationalism. But after the end of World War I Germany saw a rise in interest in Frederick II. The first impulse for this interest was given by the German poet Stefan George (1868-1933) who started gathering a circle of artists around him in the 1890's. To George, Frederick II was the greatest emperor ever, and the one who brought Eastern wisdom to the Christian Roman Empire. George's circle was known as the George-Kreis from 1910 onwards. The Kreis consisted of a group of men who together made up an intellectual, cultural microcosmos. In 1919, the Kreis convened in Heidelberg. Amongst them was the later to be famous German-Jewish historian Ernst H. Kantorowicz. Kantorowicz volunteered to fight during the First World War, and afterwards he participated in setting up the Freikorpsen and paramilitary units of demobilised militaries to fight, amongst others, the Spartacus League of Berlin. In 1921 he obtained his doctorate in Heidelberg. Together with George, who stayed with him when he was in Heidelberg, Kantorowicz drew up a plan to write a biography of Frederick II. In 1922 Kantorowicz started writing what would become a colossal biography, almost a hagiography, of Frederick II. It was supposed to become a '*Mythos vom Sehen des ganzen Volkes nach Einung von Nord und Süd*' ('*Myth of seeing the entire people unified from North to South*'). In his book he calls Frederick II *puer Apuliae* in the mythical sense of the word<sup>60</sup>. Furthermore, according to the British historian David Abulafia (b. 1949), the concept of the German nation in the view of the George-Kreis was mythical before it was ethnic<sup>61</sup>.

In May of 1924, members of the George-Kreis, including Ernst H. Kantorowicz, laid a wreath at Frederick's sarcophagus in Palermo, reading '*Seinen Kaisern und Helden – Das geheime Deutschland*' ('*To its emperors and heroes – the secret Germany*'). The concept of 'the secret Germany' was an idea by Stefan George. He was a prime exponent of German symbolism, a revolutionary-conservative movement that wanted to spiritually reconcile Germany with classic antiquity, as an indication of a new classicism. Shortly after its publication in 1927, the book had sold 12.000 copies. Just nine years after the end of the First World War, the *Deutsche Reich* was once again a topic of conversation. The book was rightly labelled the embodiment and example of an '*übermenschlichen Führergestalt*' ('*superhuman leader-figure*'), an emperor with a mythical character.<sup>62</sup> Kantorowicz admired Frederick II (Dr. Jekyll) as the founder of the secular state, based on enlightened doctrine and capable of uniting the masses. He painted Frederick II, who was in Italy and Sicily for large parts of his reign, as a 'Roman' emperor before anything else. Kantorowicz also saw the thirteenth century as the stage for a new awakening of rational thought and individual freedom of conscience, the beginning of a national sensation, and he saw these thoughts reflected in the theories of state that have been worked out in law<sup>63</sup>. Though Kantorowicz used superlatives for Frederick II in his book,

<sup>60</sup> E. KANTOROWICZ, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1998, second edition 2003, p. 525.

<sup>61</sup> D. ABULAFIA, *Italy, Sicily and the Mediterranean 1100-1400*, London, Variorum Reprints, 1987, p. 194.

<sup>62</sup> HOUBEN, *Kaiser Friedrich II. (1194-1250)...*, cit., pp. 218-219.

<sup>63</sup> DELLE DONNE, *Kantorowicz e la sua opera su Federico II nella ricerca moderna*, in: *Friedrich II. Tagung des Deutschen Historische Instituts in Rom im Gedenkjahr 1994*, herausgegeben von Arnold Esch und Norbert Kamp, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1996, p. 82; DELLE DONNE, '*Historisches Bild' e signoria del presente*



he did not view Frederick as a precursor for the modern German empire, nor was it a plea for a narrow-German nationalism. To Kantorowicz, Frederick II was ‘a Renaissance genius on the imperial throne’. He described Frederick like this:

[...] Gottessohn Weltenrichter Widerchrist zugleich [...] Heiland und Antichrist zugleich [...] der erste Gottlose und der erste von sich aus göttliche, nicht durch die Kirche heilige Mensch [...] (“Divine son, Judge of the World and Antichrist all in one [...] Saviour and Antichrist in one [...] the first godless man, the first man to be divine in nature, and the first man holy not through the Church [...])<sup>64</sup>.

This panegyric however opened a Pandora’s box, allowing the Nazis to use the Mr. Hyde aspect of Frederick II, created by Kantorowicz, for political ends connected to ethnicity and identity<sup>65</sup>.

In 1933 the Nazis issued a ban on publication for Jews, except for those, like Kantorowicz, who fought for Germany during the First World War. In July of 1934 Kantorowicz was required to take an oath of loyalty to Hitler, but he refused and decided to take a long leave aged thirty-nine<sup>66</sup>. In the beginning of December of 1938, days after the Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass), Kantorowicz accepted an invitation by Oxford University to teach there. To him, the nearly mythical adoration of Frederick II had become a nightmare which was to haunt him the rest of his life.

The adventure of Nazism was a trauma to Kantorowicz: as a historian (by contributing to the belief in a German rebirth, starring Frederick II as ‘a shining example’), as a patriot (highly dedicated and connected to Germany) and as a Jewish German (subjected to anti-Semitism). After the Second World War Kantorowicz refused to consent to a publication of a new German edition. He felt that his book had begun to lead a life of its own and had been misunderstood. It was only to be reprinted after his death<sup>67</sup>. With its archaic language and idolatrous tone, Kantorowicz’ *Kaiser Friedrich II* appears quite dated these days. Yet his style is highly praised by some as original, aesthetic and poetic, in concordance with

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il “Federico II imperatore” di Ernst Kantorowicz, in R. DELLE DONNE, A. ZORZI (a cura di), *Le storie e la memoria. In onore di Arnold Esch*, Firenze, Firenze University Press 2001, pp. 295-335.

<sup>64</sup> KANTOROWICZ, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, Berlin, Erschienen, 1927 (*Werke der Wissenschaft aus dem Kreise der Blätter für die Kunst, Geschichtliche Reihe; Ergänzungsband Quellen und Nachweise*, Berlin 1931).

<sup>65</sup> The famous English historian David Abulafia states “[...] that Kantorowicz’s vision of Germanness [...] is at many fundamental points far removed from the thinking of contemporary Nazi theorists”. (ABULAFIA, *Kantorowicz and Frederick II*, in *Benson and Fried, Ernst Kantorowicz*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997, p. 125). Robert Lerner writes in his biography about Kantorowicz “[...] in a letter of October 1932 he explicitly opposed Nazism and that earlier he implicitly reviled the Nazi’s as ‘vomit’. But he did not hate the Nazi’s enough to reconsider his ‘nationally oriented’ views.” (R. E. LERNER, *Ernst Kantorowicz. A Life*, New Jersey/Oxfordshire, Princeton University Press, 2017, pp. 160-161). See also: THOMSEN, “*Ein feuriger Herr des Anfangs*“..., cit., pp. 259-260 “[...] he (Kantorowicz H.K.) seems to have become aware of his own responsibility for the rise of the Third Reich [...]”.

<sup>66</sup> DELLE DONNE, in: *Handbook of Medieval Studies, Terms - Methods – Trends*, Edited by Albrecht Classen, Volume 1: Kantorowicz, Ernst Hartwig (May 05, 1895, Posen – September 09, 1963, Princeton, NJ), Berlin/New York 2010, p. 2389. And: Lerner, p. 163.

<sup>67</sup> In Lerner’s biography, Kantorowicz reneged on his refusal, on the conditions that the book was only to be sold together with its *Ergänzungsband* (a companion volume which contained detailed historical documentation for the biography), and without the swastika on its cover and its reference to “the secret Germany” on the frontispiece. According to Lerner he relented because otherwise an illegal copy would certainly be published; he however immediately regretted his decision, when he was congratulated by a German general, proving to his mind that the book was being bought ‘for the wrong reason’. Lerner, p. 364.

the poet George's wishes.<sup>68</sup> The book's contents are still considered a milestone for historiography of the Medieval empire in general, and the development of the concept of sovereignty in particular. But his book opened up enough space for Frederick II to become a figurehead for the Nazis and for Mr. Hyde to gain the upper hand.

### *Nationalsocialists and the Second World War*

As Kantorowicz fled the Nazis, he also distanced himself intellectually from his book. The Nazis however continued to believe in the Hohenstaufen emperors, like Frederick I Barbarossa and Frederick II, as role-models for the Third Reich. What was it that made the connection between the Nazis and the dynasty of the Hohenstaufen so remarkable? Hitler's Third Reich was supposedly a continuation of the Second Empire of the German Kaisers at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries and ... of the First Empire of the German emperors, called *Sacrum Imperium* (Holy Roman Empire) from 1157 onwards by Frederick I Barbarossa, only to perish ignominiously in 1806. It was an attempt by the Nazis to give their political constellation a semblance of respectability.<sup>69</sup> Ergo, Frederick II and the Hohenstaufen were, through the medium of Kantorowicz' book, used by the Nazis as mythical examples, as inspiration and therefore a dynastic *mythomoteur*. For instance, the Nazis gave the military assault on the Soviet Union of 22 June 1941 the codename *Operation Barbarossa*, and in February of 1943 the 9<sup>th</sup> SS-Panzer division was named *Hohenstaufen* after Frederick II.

The Nazis used Kantorowicz' book to illustrate the greatness of the German past and as examples of an emperor as an *Übermensch* and a national socialist *avant la lettre*, but in reality, the biography of Frederick II had nothing to do with fascism or Nazism, neither in design nor in composition. Kantorowicz' book was gifted to Mussolini by Reichsmarschall Herman Göring ("*mit Widmung*" – "with dedication"). Himmler even kept a copy on his nightstand. Hitler himself was also a great admirer of both the book and Frederick II ("*What courage they must have had! How many times did they cross the Alps on horseback! Men of calibre, who have ruled over Sicily no less!*")<sup>70</sup>. Hitler very deliberately employed the imperial myth as a basis for the German claims to global rule<sup>71</sup>. Hitler also admired Frederick II as the great rival of the Catholic Church. On New Year's Day of 1941, as an act of tribute, Von Ribbentrop gifted Hitler with a detailed scale model of Castel del Monte (scale: 1:50). Finally, we must also mention Admiral Canaris' tale. Condemned to death by strangulation for his complicity in the attempted attack on Hitler, he chose Kantorowicz' *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite* as his last read<sup>72</sup>. Equally remarkable is an event which took place on Sicily in 1943. Several days before general Patton was to invade the island with his allied army, on July 10th of that year, Göring sent out a peculiar ukase: Frederick II's and his families' porphyry sarcophagi were to be removed from Palermo forthwith and transferred to Germany. This order was tacitly ignored: the dead were to be left in peace. One of the greatest emperors of all was not to be removed from

<sup>68</sup> DELLE DONNE, *Kantorowicz e la sua opera su Federico II...*, cit., pp. 71-72.

<sup>69</sup> See also JANSEN, *Triptiek van de Tijd...*, cit., p. 45.

<sup>70</sup> BRANDO, *Lo strano caso di Federico II...*, cit., p. 78.

<sup>71</sup> D. Just, 11. Ein Kultbuch der Rechten. Ernst H. Kantorowicz - Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite, Waiblingen, November 2007, p. 5. [www.d-just.de](http://www.d-just.de).

<sup>72</sup> BRANDO, *Lo strano caso di Federico II...*, cit., p. 78.

the place that played such an important part in his life ...<sup>73</sup>.

There are however historians who see a resemblance between the policies of Frederick II and Hitler. London historian Fossey John Cobb Hearnshaw (1869-1946) published an article bearing the title *A Thirteenth Century Hitler* in 1942, i.e. during the Second World War<sup>74</sup>. For instance, he mentioned the parallel of racial purity between Frederick II and the Nazis' racial doctrine: Frederick prohibited mixed marriages between his Sicilian subjects and foreigners<sup>75</sup>. According to the author, there were more resemblances between Frederick II, now as Mr. Hyde, and Hitler. Both were proponents of a totalitarian state, hostile towards the church and extremely cruel and evil. Lying and treachery were part of their favoured repertoire, political opponents, such as heretics and Jews, were persecuted, and both claimed to be above the law. They were not to be trusted. Just as Frederick II treated his confidant Peter de Vinea, so did Hitler with Ernst Röhm, in the Night of the Long Knives. Therefore, argued Hearnshaw, it was not strange for Frederick II to be referred to as the Antichrist and the devil himself in his own day and age. Here he created a terrifying image, in other words, a *mythophantom*. He concluded his article with the remark that the most significant propensities of Nazism are not new to the German character, but part and parcel of a set of characteristics which can be traced back directly to Frederick II in the thirteenth century.

Of interest now is the question whether Frederick II was a *mythomoteur* to the Nazis. A dynastic *mythomoteur* is unlikely, since the dynasty of the Hohenstaufen was gone. Yet we can clearly discern some dynastic traits in the links between the First Empire and the Third Reich. Apparently, the Nazis thought the Hohenstaufen represented a higher political goal, in which ethnicity, identity, racial doctrine and a shared past play an important part. The Nazis needed the myths surrounding Frederick II to serve a greater political goal. This relegated him to a *mythophantom*, used and abused as a political tool for a higher political good: national socialism and the German national state. But does Frederick's life really lend itself to be used by national socialism, and if so, to which national state? To be more concrete: is he to be considered a Sicilian, or a German? This is the subject of the following controversy.

### *The controversy Rader vs Houben*

The discussion whether Frederick II is either a *mythomoteur* or a *mythophantom* to certain areas of Italy and Germany cannot be viewed separately from the question of his identity as it is conceived of in historiography: is he a German or an Italian? Though little

<sup>73</sup> This information comes from the so-called Morrison-papers of 1948, containing the report of vice-admiral Friedrich Ruge during the evacuation of Sicily. *Washington D.C., Naval Historical Center, Operational Archives Branch, Morrison Papers, The Evacuation of Sicily*, Box 50, Folder 32, p. 45. See also: <http://archives.nypl.org/scm/20741>.

<sup>74</sup> F. J. C. HEARNSHAW, *A Thirteenth Century Hitler*, in «National Review», 1942, II Vol. CXIX, pp. 157-163.

<sup>75</sup> HEARNSHAW: "When the men of Sicily ally themselves with the daughters of foreigners the purity of the race becomes besmirched, while evil and sensual weakness increases, the purity of the people is contaminated by the speech and by the habits of the others, and the seed of the stranger defiles the hearth of our faithful subjects", p. 158. Dieter Just also points out the way in which Frederick II engaged in racial politics on Sicily: "But Frederick went further. It was this emperor's goal to create a single race out of these Sicilians, in which he simultaneously attacked the institution that was so holy to the papacy, namely marriage, by forbidding, on pain of confiscation of goods, all Sicilian men and girls to marry foreigners without specific imperial approval." Dieter JUST, p. 11.

is known of what Frederick himself thought about this, we can say something about his preference for Apulia. He preferred the northern part of Apulia, a region known as the Capitanata, with Foggia as his prime residence. In this neighbourhood he practiced his beloved falconry. A marble plaque commemorating the foundation of his palace in Foggia in 1223 still displays a text in which he glorifies the towns' importance.

From his imperial coronation on 22 November 1220 until his death in 13 December 1250 Frederick spent more than 27 years in Italy. In this period, he could mostly be found in the Capitanata and in the province of Bari, where he stayed a total of 23 times, totalling almost six years. Evidently Frederick loved passing lots of time in Apulia. In the opening lines of a mandate given at Orta on May 2 of 1240 he declared: "*If we, to our joy, often visit the province of the Capitanata, it happens more often that we reside there than in the other provinces of our kingdom*"<sup>76</sup>. His preference for Apulia is also evident from a letter he wrote to the Apulian harbour town of Brindisi, which "*makes the light of the imperial title shine, and renders it an honour to be called an Apulian.*" He went on to say that "*his Apulia was always near to him, whether in good times or in bad*"<sup>77</sup>. In other words, Apulia was his beloved homeland, but only as a part of the kingdom of Sicily, with Palermo as its capital. This is why the question often surfaces in historical debates whether Frederick II should be considered a Sicilian or a German.

To the German historian Olaf B. Rader (b. 1961), working as professor at the University Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften the issue is clear: Frederick II should be considered a Sicilian. In the introduction of his book *Friedrich II. Der Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron* ("*Frederick II. The Sicilian on the emperor's throne*") he explains why that is. Frederick was primarily interested in his kingdom of Sicily. For that reason, he made major concessions of royal rights to the electors of Germany<sup>78</sup>. Added to that, he did not want the Roman-German empire to profit from the economic potential of the North-Italian city-states, but wanted to employ it in favour of Sicily. This Sicilian policy was a complete break from the way in which Frederick I Barbarossa exercised his power. In this way, the age of foreigners on the imperial throne started with 'the Sicilian Frederick II'<sup>79</sup>. Even distinguished historians like Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) ("*Sicilian through and through*") and Johannes Haller ("*the first foreigner on the German throne*") considered Frederick II a Sicilian monarch rather than a German one. Historian Hubert Houben (b. 1953) questioned this attitude in his article *Ein Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron?*<sup>80</sup>. He does not deny the great importance of Sicily and Italy in his political

<sup>76</sup> DELLE DONNE, *Federico II: la condanna della memoria. Metamorfosi di un mito*, Roma, Viella, 2012, pp. 141-143. See also: W. STÜRNER, *Deutschland und Italien in der Herrschaftskonzeption Kaiser Friedrichs II.*, in W. STÜRNER, *Staufisches Mittelalter. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Herrschaftspraxis und Persönlichkeit Friedrichs II.*, Cologne-Weimar-Vienna, Böhlau, 2012, p. 155.

<sup>77</sup> HOUBEN, *Friedrich II., ein Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron?...*, cit., p. 7. There the Latin line: "*ut nos, quem cesari tituli fulgor illustrat, unum ex Apulia nominari non reputemus inglorium*". Houben indicates that it should be borne in mind that the letter to Brindisi and therefore its quote are part of an attempt to get Brindisi to support Frederick's war-effort against rebels through the request for a special tax, allowing for the possibility of sycophancy on Frederick's part.

<sup>78</sup> RADER, *Friedrich II. Der Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron*, p. 29.

<sup>79</sup> Ivi, pp. 29-31.

<sup>80</sup> HOUBEN, *Friedrich II., ein Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron?...*, cit. The article is an adaptation of a lecture held by Houben on 15 July 2015 in the Church of Mary in Aix, to the occasion of a scientific congress "*1215 – Friedrich II. In Aachen: "Ist dem wirklich so? War Friedrich seiner Herkunft und Sozialisation nach „durch und durch Sizilianer“, also „der erste Ausländer auf dem deutschen Thron“? Hatte für ihn das Königreich Sizilien stets Priorität vor dem römisch-deutschen Imperium?“*", p. 4. (Translation: "*Is that really true? Was Frederick, through his birth and socialisation "a Sicilian through and through", so "the*

actions, his character and his humanity, but in his opinion it is taking the argument too far to call him a Sicilian “through and through”. Frederick II was far more German than Rader alleges. First of all, because of his youth and upbringing at the court of Palermo. His guardians in Spoleto and the court of Palermo were predominantly German. His journey to Germany as a seventeen-year-old, the ensuing eight years he spent there and the associations he made with German speaking nobles were of great importance to his later emperorship. Hermann of Salza (1165-1239), grandmaster of the Teutonic Order, was his confidant and his crutch. If Frederick has spent only ten years north of the Alps, that does not mean, as Rader claims, that the kingdom of Sicily had absolute priority for him and that therefore Germany played a lesser part. They were inextricably intertwined to the German-Italian monarch, and of equally great importance. For Frederick II, the empire was the mainstay for his sovereign sense of self in the late-antique Carolingian and Christian tradition. The conflicts he had with the papacy and the North-Italian city-states can *only* [italization mine, H.K.] be understood through his imperial self-image, and not through Rader’s ‘southern perspective’.<sup>81</sup> According to Houben, Rader has not studied the results of previous research critically enough. In this, Houben joins Stürner (b. 1940), who claims that past research has been overly focussed on nineteenth and twentieth century modern problems, categories and criteria, like concepts of peoples, nation and national identity. By applying these concepts to the Middle Ages, according to Houben, research tends to become somewhat anachronistic.<sup>82</sup> Hence, in conclusion, it can be said that Frederick was a much more complex personality and ruler, than to be simply labelled a ‘Sicilian on the imperial throne’. After his socialisation in Italy and Germany, he was aware of his double Norman-Sicilian and Hohenstaufen heritages. Aside from this, he was a scientist with an appreciation for culture and Islamic and Jewish religion. Furthermore, with such an enormous empire, it was impossible to be both to the north and to the south of the Alps. If one is to persist in applying a modern concept on him, Houben argues that Frederick should be considered a transcultural personality.<sup>83</sup>

I tend towards a synthesis of both positions: the kingdom of Sicily has been extremely important to Frederick, but not all-deciding or to the exclusion of everything else. His position and responsibility as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire were just as important to him. Conflicts with popes and the North-Italian city-states were inextricably linked to

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*first foreigner on Germany’s throne”? Did the kingdom of Sicily always have priority over the Roman-German empire?”).*

<sup>81</sup> HOUBEN, *Friedrich II., ein Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron?...*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> STÜRNER, *Deutschland und Italien in der Herrschaftskonzeption Kaiser Friedrichs II.*, pp. 147-148. (“*Immer deutlicher wird jedoch auch, dass bereits die hier angesprochene Fragestellung selbst neuzeitliche Probleme, Kategorien und Kriterien einigermaßen anachronistisch auf das Mittelalter überträgt, dass sie deren Relevanz allzu selbstverständlich auch für jene ferne Zeit vorausgesetzt, während es die Aufgabe des Historikers doch zunächst einmal sein müsste, möglichst unvoreingenommen nach den spezifischen Grundvorstellungen und Zielen, nach den Abhängigkeiten und Handlungsspielräumen der damals lebenden Menschen zu Fragen und ihr Wirke allenfalls daran zu messen.*”) (Translation: “*It is becoming ever more clear, that even questions which are being asked here, project contemporary problems, categories and criticisms somewhat anachronistically to the Middle Ages, that their relevance to a time so far away is taken for granted, whereas it is really the historians assignment to inquire into the basic suppositions and goals of the people of that day and age, into their dependencies and their freedom to act, as un-biased as possible, and to measure their works after that.*”)

Peter Raedts uses slightly different words, but the meaning is the same: “*(...) the great danger, to which the nineteenth-century historians of the nation also succumbed, namely that the historian only has eyes for those phenomena which he considers relevant to the modern world, and disregards the rest.*” RAEDTS, *De ontdekking van de Middeleeuwen...*, cit., p. 352.

<sup>83</sup> HOUBEN, *Friedrich II., ein Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron?...*, cit., pp. 13-14.

his position as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire on the one hand and his position as king of Sicily on the other. From his Swabian-Hohenstaufen background, he brought the Carolingian-Christian tradition to his empire. At the same time, he strove for a Mediterranean-antique concept of empire, as seen from his Norman-Sicilian background. If he were either more Sicilian/(Southern)Italian or German, that would still be the same. He felt at home in both regions, stayed there for long periods of time since the end of his youth, and had access to a wide network of contacts in both regions. The question into his identity, and the exact label to apply to him, does not really matter: he is the product of both worlds.

### *Conclusion*

This article is not about the question whether Frederick II was a good emperor, or a remarkable one, or someone with extraordinary abilities. The question is whether Frederick II was a *mythomoteur*, and if as such he has been used in the formation of the national identity of Italy, Germany or regions in either country. There is no easy answer to this question. Both countries have a historical myth surrounding Frederick II, but that has not developed into an independent political myth. In Italy as in Germany, political application and (ab)use of the Hohenstaufen dynasty fall far apart. Attempts to use Frederick II and the Medieval past as nationalistic tools eventually failed. The question whether Frederick II was a German or a Sicilian serves to illustrate this point. The perspective from which this question is answered, either from a historiographical or political goal, is decisive, but for both countries his role in the national unification, and as regards nationalism, was eventually nothing more than marginal.

Frederick II's person has been used and abused out of a need for identity, the desire to belong to a greater community. This goes especially for Apulia. The need for a collective memory, collective pride and a sense of recognition for the region is projected onto Frederick II. There can however be no question of Frederick II as a *mythomoteur* along ethnic or political divides. Myths surrounding Frederick II are often used and deployed towards a number of goals, but most especially to stand out economically (tourism), politically (nationalism and identity), socially (sense of community), culturally (language, architecture) and scientifically. Most often this takes the shape of an ephemeral image ghosting about: whether relevant or not, these myths are both used and abused all the time, both in the positive sense (Dr. Jekyll) and in the negative sense (Mr. Hyde), to serve 'higher purposes'. Therefore, it is more appropriate to speak of the phenomenon of Frederick II as a *mythophantom*. It is the historian's job to interpret these myths, to expose them and to put them into a larger historical context. As the famous Dutch historian Pieter Geyl once said: "(...) we [historians, H.K.] are to fulfil our function, which is: to the best of our ability expose myths and to tell the world around us what we can find about the past reality; in short, to further righteous use and to oppose misuse of history"<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> GEYL, *Gebruiken en misbruik der geschiedenis...*, cit., p. 76.