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ANDREA SOMMERLECHNER, *Stupor mundi? Kaiser Friedrich II. und die mittelalterliche Geschichtsschreibung*. (Publikationen des Historischen Instituts beim Österreichischen Kulturinstitut in Rom, Abhandlungen, 11.) Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999. Paper. Pp. 662 plus 24 black-and-white figures.

This erudite, well-grounded, and source-oriented study examines the contradictory representations of Emperor Frederick II, from the historiography of his age through that of the fifteenth century. At the same time it uses the emperor as a springboard for an examination of historiography during a period of radical change. Two hundred and seventeen works from Italy, France, Flanders, the Netherlands, the crusading kingdoms, England, Germany, and Castile, briefly characterized and listed in a concluding catalogue, form the substantial basis for the book, though none of these works actually places Frederick II at its center. The objective of this study, therefore, is to provide, not a coherent representation of Frederick, but instead an extremely differentiated and complex collection of individual facets of him. The results can be only roughly summarized here. The author manages to examine the elements shaping the texts superbly and, with a great wealth of detail, demonstrates the local, regional, and national interests they reveal as well as the interests of pro- and anti-imperial observers of the emperor.

The first chapter deals with the image of Frederick II in different genres and forms of historiography. The unique, goal-oriented momentum of the various genres becomes clear: from the annals as a simple echo of imperial actions to the history-as-exemplum of the friars (for whom the emperor's rise and fall served as a pedagogical parable). The Italian communes—whose political character produced a new historiography—preferred to place the emperor's function in the past in order to overcome their traumatic experiences with Frederick and to justify their partiality in the conflict between emperor and pope. Regional historiography also had to tackle difficult issues: in southern Italy, the differing perspective of empire and kingdom; in Outremer, the dual role of the emperor as crusader and king of Jerusalem; within the empire, the contrast between Frederick's claims to universality and the many disputes concerning the throne, succession, and interregnum. Sommerlechner is able to work out similarly diverse perspectives for episcopal and monastic histories as well as for the texts of the jurist Gerardo Maurisio of Vicenza, the poet Philippe de Novare, and the Franciscan Salimbene of Parma, which entail autobiographical elements.

The lack of an "official" historiography commissioned by Frederick leads to the central question of the second chapter: how did historians deal with the writings of contemporary publicists? Sommerlechner shows the intention and effect of those writings through selected documents and authors, such as the biased Matthew Paris, whom Sommerlechner rates as a distant witness of the propaganda on both sides; imperial writers, who were somewhat removed from the pressure of public opinion; papal scribes, who were to become extremely influential on future generations; and, finally, the Italian communes, which purposefully inserted certain writings in their texts as illustrative and stylistic devices.

Chapter 3 analyzes the multiple perceptions and historiographic presentations of Frederick's rule. Given his many governmental, dynastic, and representational functions, writers' images of his rule were of necessity made up of inadequate extracts full of inaccuracies. Difficulties also stemmed from the radical changes in power relationships that occurred over the course of his reign, from his election as king to his disquieting deposition. Moreover, the various historiographic genres reacted very differently to these challenges. World histories juxtaposed his reign with the papacy and apocalypticism. Italian local history developed an independent conception of space, time, and political relations, mostly autonomous from the emperor. In regional history the magnates were the principal figures of identification, not the distant emperor.

Chapter 4 explores the representation of Frederick's crusade across a widely varying field

of historiographic needs. These include the distant perspective of the chroniclers from Outremer, particularly their marginalization of the emperor through the importance given to the narratives' own protagonists. They include as well the challenge of describing complex facts in an accessible manner and (for Italian historiography) the need to place events within the Guelf-Ghibelline alliance system. It is noteworthy that the last of the imperial crusades—one that, although accompanied by catastrophes and criticism, led to a new kind of politics by contractual agreement—was in this historiography so clearly demoted from the list of key events in world history and is instead described inconsistently or ambivalently.

Chapter 5 focuses on the northern Italian communes, whose chronicles reveal increasing confrontation with the emperor (whose duties were taken over by local rulers) from 1236 onwards. Historians could provide an account of this complex landscape of Italian local history only by forcing aside the figure of the emperor and creating two new stereotyped oppositions: *discordia* versus the longing for communal unity (*concordia*) and Ghibelline versus Guelf. Because of a deep lack of understanding on both sides, writers reduced the relationship to an oversimplified partnership across what were in fact very different registers of cooperation (e.g., representation, appointment of the *podestà*, victory, and submission) and modeled two time structures, namely, the period of the emperor and that of the communes, with very few connecting points. Dramatic scenes and familiar patterns characterized the depiction of conquests and defeats. Frederick's disaster outside Parma and the destruction in 1248 of his pretentious imperial establishment at nearby Victoria were readily interpreted as the beginning of the end.

In chapter 6 the author carefully approaches the person of Frederick II and his image—positioned between glorification of the Staufens and curial hostility toward Frederick II, between emperor of peace and apocalyptic persecutor—in order to reveal the clichés of traditional praise of rulers and distorted list of vices, of imperial propaganda and sermon exempla. The analysis covers individual scenes of the sovereign's appearance, the display of emotions as part of princely representation, and the significance of numerous anecdotes (which were generally regarded either as examples of hubris and downfall or, more rarely, as precursors of the early Renaissance novella). The endless tales about Frederick's origins and descendants and about his inability to retain his entourage and the loyalty of confidantes provide much material for dramatic episodes and defamations. So do the very stylized, extremely contradictory representations of the ruler's death, exemplary either for its wickedness or its piety. Even the attempts at portraying Frederick II are characterized by various roles and contradictory types, which result in a confused image expressed through positive and negative clichés without any real personal elements.

On the whole, the author impressively illustrates the inner workings of medieval historiography and their effects on the transmission and diverse reception of opinions and images. Sommerlechner is able to demonstrate, on a quantitative rather than qualitative level, how writers failed to make Frederick II a comprehensible figure. She attributes this failure to the fact that the emperor brought the traditionally linear-structured view of history to a crisis, so that flexibility and new historiographical forms became necessary in order to do justice to his complexity. The world chroniclers responded with three static models incapable of much development, namely, an image of the ruler with faults (Vincent of Beauvais), the ruler's life presented as an agglomeration of mistakes (Martin of Toppau), and the exemplum of rise, arrogance, and fall (Jacob of Voragine). The historiography of the communes, more oriented toward the contemporary, presented Frederick as an outsider and antagonist. Regional historiography emphasized lack of continuity and deficiencies in the ruler's character. Given the confused situation, writers were forced to deliver individual interpretations and, with the mediation of their ideas, to adapt imperial and papal propaganda in a subtly differentiated manner, be it through a focus on specific documentation,

an analysis of the content, or the adoption of catchwords and images. It seems almost impossible to reach the personality of Frederick II through these pretenses and clichés, given that topoi and contradictions challenged poets and historians to such a degree that they even invented scenes and anecdotes. Thus Frederick II remains without a personal profile.

I believe this study will become an indispensable reference work, both for the study of the person and politics of Frederick II and for research in medieval historiography, especially of the Holy Roman Empire and Italy. The substantial bibliography of the historical sources consulted will serve as an excellent point of reference, with precise details regarding contents, editions, and literature. Because of its sheer size and rather dry language, the book is no easy read; it can, however, be strongly recommend as a useful research tool.

INGRID BAUMGÄRTNER, University of Kassel