



Analyze the Full Life of Frederick II

Xuzi Wu

International High School, Nanjing Foreign Language School, Nanjing, 210023, China
dogedevenezia@foxmail.com

Abstract. The text, Constitutions of Melfi has shown that the Constitutions has many innovations compared to its predecessors, and furtherly made up the basis of further development of Sicilian absolutism; it also reflected some historical backgrounds in the period when it is issued, such as foreign control of the kingdom, and took practices to try to solve them.

Keywords: Frederick II, Constitutions of Melfi,

1 INTRODUCTION

The Author of this constitution is Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor between 1220 and 1250. His early ages involve a severe authority loss in his kingdom, the Kingdom of Sicily, as there is nobody at present to control the power [1]. It is somewhat believed that this young age shaped him to be eager for centralization of power in Sicily.

After his declaration of age, Frederick consolidated his power within several years, defeating the locals as well as some foreign intervening powers. However, this part of time also saw a deterioration of relations for him with the pope; his struggle with the pope will continue throughout his reign.

In 1231 he issued the Constitutions of Melfi, the text mainly concerned in this paper. this and the other practices before the constitutions are all the efforts that Frederick did to try to Centralize the kingdom; these efforts would continue on along with his war with the Lombard League, towards his death in 1250.



Fig. 1. Frederick II

2 Background Information about the text

The text, Constitutions of Melfi, was announced in 1231. 92 years before the Constitution, in 1139, the Treaty of Mignano secured Roger II's control of the throne; this marks the start of the early consolidation of crown power in Sicily. Roger published a series of laws, ending with the Assizes of Ariano. This is a completion of his laws, much like the Constitutions of Melfi, and covers many aspects of his rule [2].

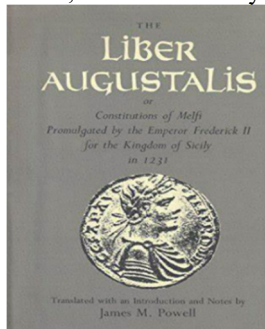


Fig. 2. Constitutions of Melfi

Roger's rule started the centralization of power in the Kingdom, until 1197 when Frederick II was crowned. For a country that is used to high crown power, the young king creates a power gap, that the Pope, his regent [3] could not take control [4]. The kingdom falls into anarchy with three people struggling for power over this 10-year period, before stabilizing in the hands of Walter of Palearia, the Chancellor of the Kingdom [5]. However, neither Walter nor young Frederick at that time could stop the power to slip back to the local aristocrats.

In 1220 when Frederick is crowned the Holy Roman Emperor, more problems grew. The pope Innocent III dislikes the Emperor to be at both sides of Italy, and wished the Kingdom of Sicily to be separated from the Empire [6]. At first Frederick promised to give up Sicily in favour of his son Henry, but later decided to keep control of the Kingdom [7]. In this period, the Papal States started to organize a feudal army [8], which extended its influence across the Apennine Peninsula, including the Kingdom of Sicily. Obviously, Pope's influence does not help to integrate Sicily into a unified country.

The text took its place in this point; like what happened 92 years ago, Frederick settled his position in Sicily in the 1230 Treaty of San Germano with the Pope; He did started to centralize the power early on, starting with the Assizes of Capua in 1220 and continuing with the Diet of Messina a year later [9]. This makes the Constitutions of Melfi playing a role similar to the Assizes of Ariano: a summation and a reform of all the previous laws and practices the King has pursued. And, it ended up taking the place of the Assizes of Ariano as well: a restart of the centralization of power to the King.

3 Summary of the Content

The third book of the Constitutions, which is what's mainly concerned in this paper, is divided into a total of 94 titles(items). These items are written not only by Frederick, but also some by the former kings, Roger II and William II. In such case, some of the early titles written by Frederick could be seen as a supplement and a revision of the topics already discussed by the former kings. These topics include Royal property, Clerical order, Dowries, Aids, Marriages and Ecclesiastical property. For example, he ordered any property gained unlawful to be redirected to the crown in title IV, and prohibited the clergy to appoint any *Adscriptiis* as this may damage the royal power; this may suggest that in the past 20 to 30 years these things have been done in a wide range that have even damaged crown authority.

On the basis of these topics, Frederick furtherly added specific instructions on the inheritance and disposal of fiefs, people and other possessions owned by either lords or the king himself. In addition, in title XXVI Frederick recognizes women's inheritance to lands, but only under the circumstances that there are no legal male heirs.

The rest of the book, starting from title XXXII, gives details about rather minor topics, such as Construction of castles, Fugitive slaves, Medical practices, Regulations for merchants, Animals, Coinage, Knighthoods and other topics concerning mainly social, not high-class, problems.

In this part most of the topics was written by Frederick, and contains more social issues which former kings rarely mention. These topics competed the law to show more administrative aspects, which made it different from earlier laws and assizes.

4 Terminology

Diet: a formal deliberative assembly of princes or estates; any of various national or provincial legislatures.

Assize: a judicial inquest; an action to be decided by such an inquest, the writ for instituting it, or the verdict or finding rendered by the jury [10].

Regalia: royal rights or prerogatives; the emblems, symbols, or paraphernalia indicative of royalty.

Adscription: the quality or state of being added, annexed, or bound
(Adscriptii: serfs or estates that were annexed)

Fedeles: *fīdēlis* in latin; meaning believer; devotee; or followers of a religion [11].

Dowry: the money, goods, or estate that a woman brings to her husband in marriage

Vassal: a person under the protection of a feudal lord to whom he has vowed homage and fealty; a feudal tenant

Fugitive: running away or intending flight

Constitution: a codified collection of laws

5 CONCLUSIONS

As discussed before, the Constitutions of Melfi is a major timepoint in the process of centralization in Sicily. However, there is still to argue about the exact role this constitution, along with Frederick II, played.

To start with, there is a need to further evaluate the text itself. In the Constitution, Frederick added and modified many topics on the basis of a number of laws written by king Roger II and William II. These new topics show more of an absolutism idea, granting the crown more power to control different social classes, and deprived some power from the ordinary social members. The latter can see its example in one title where everyone is prohibited to carry weapons or to wear armor unless they are under the commands of the king [12]. Although such topics failed to control the frequent rebellions in the kingdom completely, they certainly limited them to a certain extent, and as a result strengthened royal power throughout the kingdom.

The Constitution together shows many aspects we can find in later royal absolutism countries that do not usually appear in feudal system. These aspects are also the ones that differentiated the Constitutions with the Assizes of Ariano, or any other feudal law collections in Medieval Europe. One is that it approved the supremacy of written law over other sorts of practice, which is a precedent at the time [13]. As a supplementary, it is also said that the Constitution is the first codified set of law since Justinian I in Byzantine [14]. Compared with the Assizes of Ariano, the Constitutions show more of a documented breath; the Assizes is not that rigor and organized in this comparison, nor were any of the Sicilian precedents of the Constitutions. Thus, some conclusions may be drawn that the Constitutions not only shows the regasp of power in the early 1200s, but also marks a new era for the centralization of the Kingdom of Sicily. To further strengthen this conclusion, another fact could be given that the Con-

stitutions and its later modifications made up the foundations of Sicilian laws and remained so until 1819 [15].

Another noticeable point is that a number of titles restricted the power that is usually under foreign control, such as merchants and clergy members. The Constitutions redirected many of the powers to the kingdom, which in another way diminished foreign powers in Sicily. This is exceptionally significant considering the fact that Genoa and Pisa has nearly economically colonized the Kingdom and held much power, even including some appointments of the counts [16]. Thus, the king put restrictions on these powers, as well as supporting the Republic of Venice, their competitor, and Amalfi, the Kingdom's local port [17]

The pope, on the other hand, is another major foreign power in the Kingdom, and is usually hostile in the Hohenstaufen reign, as the Papacy would like to see a non-German monarch to rule the kingdom. Luckily, after the War of the Keys, the pope temporarily gave up to throw Frederick off the throne, which gave him a chance to crack down on the clergy in this period. In the Constitutions these practices were done, such as retrieving the power of appointment of the clergy.

All in all, these points together have shown that the Constitutions has many innovations compared to its predecessors, and furtherly made up the basis of further development of Sicilian absolutism; it also reflected some historical backgrounds in the period when it is issued, such as foreign control of the kingdom, and took practices to try to solve them.

6 Reference

1. Gunther Wolf, "Frederick II", Encyclopedia Britannica, Accessed 26 March, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-II-Holy-Roman-emperor>
2. John Julius Cooper, "Roger II", Encyclopedia Britannica, Accessed 25 March, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Roger-II>
3. David Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1992), 93.
4. Gunther Wolf, "Frederick II", Encyclopedia Britannica, Accessed 26 March, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-II-Holy-Roman-emperor>
5. Norbert Camp, "FEDERICO II di Svevia, imperatore, re di Sicilia e di Gerusalemme, re dei Romani", Treccani, Accessed 26 March 2022. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/federico-ii-di-svevia-imperatore-re-di-sicilia-e-di-gerusalemme-re-dei-romani_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/federico-ii-di-svevia-imperatore-re-di-sicilia-e-di-gerusalemme-re-dei-romani_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)
6. David Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1992), 93.
7. Gunther Wolf, "Frederick II", Encyclopedia Britannica, Accessed 26 March, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-II-Holy-Roman-emperor>
8. David Nicolle and Angus McBride, *Italian Medieval Armies 1000-1300* (Osprey Publishing, 2002), 7.
9. Ernst Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second: Wonder of the World 1194-1250* (Head of Zeus Ltd, 2019), 87-91.
10. s.v., Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary. accessed April 9, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>.

11. s.v., “fīdēlis”, Latin-English Dictionary. accessed April 9, 2022, <https://www.online-latin-dictionary.com/latin-english-dictionary.php?lemma=FIDELIS100>
12. David Nicolle and Angus McBride, *Italian Medieval Armies 1000-1300* (Osprey Publishing, 2002), 18.
13. Malcolm Barber, *The Two Cities: Medieval Europe, 1050-1320* (Psychology Press, 2004), 211.
14. Gunther Wolf, “Frederick II”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Accessed 26 March, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-II-Holy-Roman-emperor>
15. James R. Sweeney and Stanley Chodorow, *Popes, Teachers and Canon Law in the Middle Ages* (Books on Demand, 1989).
16. David Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1992), 103.
17. James M. Powell, *Economy and Society in the Kingdom of Sicily under Frederick II: Recent Perspectives*. (*Studies in the History of Art* 44, 1994), 263–71. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42621914>.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

