

## FREDERICK II AND THE MOSLEM CULTURE

The starting point of any inquiry into the relationship between Frederick and the Arabic-Islamic culture goes back to the Arabic-Norman Sicily to which he was bound by the great Constance, by his infancy, by his early adolescence, and by his crown. Despite the fact that he was born by chance in the Marche region and had preferred to spend his adult years in the flat land of Puglia, where he died, it was in Sicily that he first formed the elements of his intellectual personality and culture. The first question to be answered, therefore, is: How much of the Arabian culture of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries was still alive in Sicily after the survival of both the Moslem domination and the political, religious, ethnical, and social crises by which the last Mohammedan influence upon Sicily had been completely eliminated under the last Norman kings?

It is well known how much of the Arabian language and culture and of Moslem faith and habits were still found in Trapani in 1185 by Ibn Giubair from Messina. However, four or five years after that date this

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tenacious ethnical and cultural survival had disappeared, despite the fact that it had been tolerated, if not favored, by the enlightened Norman leaders. It was about 1190 that the Moslem colonies of the large Sicilian cities had been dispersed and obliged to take refuge in the mountains. This happened first to the colony of Palermo, and, if a Spanish pilgrim had passed through the city during the early infancy of Frederick, he would have not been as much at ease as when, together with his Mohammedan friends, he used to attend Christmas service at the Church of the Martorana in order to admire the beautiful Sicilian women.

Liquidation of urban Arabism as a collective social element is not indicative, however, of the total extinction of the race and culture in individuals. Thus it is not only probable but definitely ascertained by Eastern and Western sources that Arabic-Moslem elements had played a role in the education of the young Swabian, even though our desire for the concrete has remained unsatisfied. A specific affirmative answer to the question asked by Kantarowicz as to whether some wise imam (religious leader, guide) may have been the Chiron of the orphan boy in Palermo is given by a Mohammedan historian of the twelfth century, who has been ignored by Amari and, according to whose account, "he was educated by the *cadi* (judge) of the Mohammedans"—probably an Islamic scholar who had remained in the Palatine circle even after the dispersion of the well-established Moslem colony of Palermo. Also during the Crusade to the Holy Land the local Mohammedans noticed that more than one among the pages of Frederick's court had answered to the appeal of the *muezzin* and, rising, had joined the ritual prayer. Among others was "his teacher of Sicilian origin with whom he was studying logic," and probably it was the same scholar, a sort of Palermitan Aristotle, who had trained Frederick in both the language and the culture of his own ancestors, at one time dominant in Sicily. Many Western sources assert that Frederick was able to understand and speak Arabic, but, strange as this may be, no source from the East mentions it expressly. A larger recognition of the philo-Islamic character of Frederick must be sought, rather, in many Arabian sources, where it was rightly linked to its Sicilian origin; and more relevant than any other source is the evidence given by Abulfeda of that great Shafiite *cadi* of Hamāt ad-din Muhammad ibn Salin, who in 1260 had been the Mameluke Sultan Baibars' ambassador to Manfredi in the "Terra Lunga" (or "Long Land," as the Italian peninsula was called in the oriental geogra-

phy of the time). From so direct a contact this ambassador acquired and reported his clear impression of the philo-Islamism of the last ancestors of Frederick, a policy used with understandable unilateralness of vision in the center of their struggle against the Pope.

According to other oriental sources, the young Emperor Frederick is presented as a friend of the Mohammedans and even as one born among them. Yet his first political contact with the Arabian and Islamic world was anything but friendly. He was, in fact, a notorious liquidator of Sicilian Islam, and he eradicated it to the last root and with such duress that his activities resounded even in the East. The guerrilla war, for instance, to subdue the last Mohammedan groups of rebels in the Mazara Valley and particularly in the rocky regions of Jato and Entella, is a memorable episode of the emperor's policy in Sicily. It took place in 1222–23 with the resistance of the “Mirabetto” or Ibn Abbad and his clan, revived sporadically in the two following decades, and reappeared for the last time in 1243–46, when the last rebels were deported to Lucera. The history of this agony of Sicilian Arabism is little known except for scattered news from Western chroniclers and through an Eastern source with original and interesting particulars that was translated and published by Amari in the second appendix of the *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula* (“Arabic-Sicilian Library”) but was not used in Amari's history. This source is the *Tariḫ Mansuri* of an unknown Ayyubite chronicler of Syria, a contemporary of the events, very well informed about the Crusade of the Swabian *Imberatur* as well as on what had happened in Sicily according to Mohammedan refugees. From this source we know of the dramatic episode of the surrender in 1223 of Ibn Abbad to Frederick, who was so cruel as to stab Abbad with his spur and send him to die together with his two sons. This report links with the information given by Ibn Said (the chronicler who had mentioned the Mohammedan teacher of the young prince) about the reprisal—a bloody ambush at Entella—organized against the imperial troops either by the daughter or the son-in-law of the executed chief. Another report concerns the arrival in Harn in Mesopotamia, at the court of the Malik al-Kamil, of a Mohammedan refugee from Sicily—probably the source also of the preceding information—who implores the intercession of the Ayyubite sultan against the policy in Italy of subjection and deportation that the emperor had adopted toward the Mohammedans still living in Sicily. This happened in 1230, when Frederick returned from the Crusade and during his interconfessional idyl with the Malik al-Kamil,

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who, at the insistence of the exiled, asked the emperor either to leave in peace the Mohammedans living in Sicily or to let them emigrate to Egypt. It seems, however, that this move did not succeed.

In order to solve the problem of the contradiction between the sovereign's attitude, in favor of Arabism and Islamism when he was in the East, and as the persecutor and suppressor of Arabism and Islamism from his more ancient Italian headquarters, it is necessary to make a sharp distinction between the cultural and political interests motivating Frederick's thought and action. These two policies could sometimes coincide, and in a large sense we can say that they did so in the combined operations of Frederick and Manfredi, as revealed with substantial precision by the ambassador of Baibars. In the case, however, of the last Mohammedans of Sicily, politics and culture did not coincide, and the former had, as always, absolute priority with the emperor. Whatever his intellectual and sentimental sympathies for Arabism in general, and particularly for Sicilian Arabism, that Arabism was only a survival of the past, a troubling force not easily yielding to the imperial authority, even if the Mohammedans had accepted the accomplished fact of their total spoliation of land in favor of the clergy, the Christian feudalism, and the colonialism that had developed during the Norman century. They were particularly reluctant to be drawn into the strong fiscal administrative mesh of the imperial bureaucracy. The social and cultural values of these remaining Mohammedans were very low because the intellectual Arabic-Sicilian elite had long since disappeared as a social force after the early Norman conquest, a large migratory group having gone to North Africa, Egypt, and Spain. This emigration had been increased by the anti-Mohammedan revolts of 1154 and 1189, and the people who had not left Sicily in the early part of the thirteenth century were mainly of a low social level and considered "already as strangers and enemy aliens to the country," as defined by Amari. They included pillagers and thieves, with the single exception of Ibn Abbād, who is described by *Tarikh Mansuri* to be of high moral and intellectual caliber (who seems to have been, actually, not a Sicilian but an immigrant to Sicily from Tunisia).

Toward these strangers, considered as rebels and as a source of social unrest and economic danger for Sicily, Frederick could not be indulgent. He acted, therefore, as harshly as previously, with strong legislation to repress the heresy wherever it might menace his imperial authority, despite the fact that he was considered a free-thinking sovereign

and even a “heretic” by his adversaries, one of them having called him “the most intolerant emperor of mediaeval ages.” The suppression of such a revolt was thus radical and implacable, but, as soon as the reason of state ceased to prevail, the philo-Islamic and philo-oriental sympathy of the emperor expressed itself toward the same deported people of Sicilian Islam to the point that, when the rebels of Iato and Entella and their children established themselves in Lucera, this last orderly and faithful Mohammedan group of the Italian Middle Ages was reorganized on the beloved Tavoliere of the Puglia region and had a chance to become the “old guard” of the Swabians in the dramatic decline of their power in Italy. Unfortunately, we know almost nothing of the intellectual life of the Saracens of Lucera, but we have reason to believe that it was modest, if not completely absent, and this is confirmation that Sicilian Arabism had been already deprived of its best cultural strength before its last displacement to the Continent.

In the meantime, while this gradual internal migration which lasted twenty years was taking place, Frederick had an opportunity for a personal oriental adventure with the Crusade and was able to integrate, by means of a direct contact with the Arabic-Islamic world of the East, the familiarity acquired in his Sicilian environment. It is true that he embarked on this expedition with very little enthusiasm, under the pressure of papal excommunication, and with only the political aim to re-establish a *modus vivendi* with the church in order to consolidate his position of supreme Christian monarch with the prestige of liberator of the Holy Sepulchre. However, even if he was impelled by neither sincere religious zeal nor love for a distant land, he was able, nevertheless, to utilize in an admirable way the initiation to the East of his earlier years in the diplomatic rather than warlike play directing his Crusade. It is not our task to recall that episode here, even in broad terms. We should bear in mind only that Frederick was able to enter with great ability into the complex play of the Ayyubite politics of the rivalries and suspicions among the successors of the Saladin and thereby gain the prestige (in the words of the same Orientals) that was extremely necessary for the re-establishment of his position in the Christian world of the East. Without war he obtained—as reported by the Malik al-Kamil—the partial and precarious possession of Jerusalem together with a piece of land with access from the coast that sufficed for him to be crowned there as king and thus “save his face” toward

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friends and enemies. After a few months of residence in the East (from the fall of 1228 to the spring of 1229) he went back to Italy, where his more important interests and duties required his presence. His passage on the eastern political scene and the revelation of the genuine Moslem East were for him like a meteor. We need not ask ourselves here what kind of impression he gave of himself and what his reaction was in order to integrate or confirm his previous experiences.

The Easterners could not but appreciate this singular and disconcerting personality, at the same time friend and enemy, so different from any other of the sovereigns who had come to the Crusades and whom they had known merely as Westerners. This man, who could probably speak their own language, who was surrounded mostly by Mohammedans, and who seemed to be familiar, as we will see later, with the traditional Islamic science, was able to alternate diplomatic negotiations with questions of logic and mathematics, physics and metaphysics, so that the Malik al-Kamil had to resort for their solution to specialized experts of his court. All that could not avoid striking the curiosity and the imagination of the Mohammedans. Probably al-Kamil had very few direct contacts with Frederick, and the diplomatic negotiations—as reported by Eastern sources—took place through the channel of one of his dignitaries, Fakhr ad-din, who handled them by means of many colloquies and parlays. Of course we would like to have a precise echo of the Ayyubite diplomat's impression of his royal Frank partner, who would even have knighted him after the successful result of the negotiations. To us have come instead impressions of a more modest but not less direct source from the people assigned to the Mohammedan sanctuary "della Rocca" ("of the Rock") in Jerusalem (the so-called Mosque of Omar), which was excluded, together with other holy Islamic places, from the concession agreed upon but which the emperor had been allowed to visit. To those humble but wise observers is due a series of anecdotes assembled *in loco* by the chronicler Ibn al-Giawzi. They are very expressive because, in their spontaneity, they coincide with the popular "Eastern" picture of a skeptic on matters of confession and faith and of a mocking and sometimes even Mephistophelian Frederick. If the strange "red-haired, bald, shortsighted" visitor had been a slave, he would not have "been worth two hundred dirham." This was the unromantic portrait made of him by those Orientals in contrast to the very different one given by his own son, as being "blond and handsome and of gentle look." He seems at the

onset to have expelled, in rough manner, a Christian priest who had surreptitiously entered the sanctuary for purposes of either begging or evangelizing, an act he might have intended as a political courtesy. On the other hand, the questions he asked his guides and the comments he made were such that the good Mohammedan custodians reached the conclusion that "from the way he talked it was evident that he was not a materialist, and that he made of Christianity a simple joke." This was a judgment that would have delighted Pope Gregory, Pope Innocent, or Brother Salinbeni, had they been able to utilize Ibn al-Giawzi to reinforce their attacks on Frederick.

Another report of Frederick's visit confirms his courtesy toward the Mohammedans but does not include reference to the freedom of Moslem worship in Italy, since the emperor, in censuring the suspension of the call of the muezzin courteously ordered during his visit to the sultan, concludes (as in the original source of the extract from the *Arabic-Sicilian Biblioteca*): "If you came to my country, I would not stop the sounding of the bells for you," rather than "You will see that the Mohammedans observe equally your ritual," which for Amari was an integral part of the statement. This, however, does not exclude the fact, well documented by Orientals and Westerners, that the chanting of the muezzin resounded effectively during all the thirteenth century, in Sicily first and then in Lucera.

When Frederick, in April, 1229, left Acri for Italy, he was leaving behind a political situation concerning which he, certainly, had no illusions. However, more lasting than the ephemeral compromise about Jerusalem (reminiscent of modern efforts at partition of the Holy Land) was a personal link of sympathy and esteem that continued in his relationship with his Ayyubite hosts, who survived as long as he himself did after this oriental adventure. The two letters in graceful Arabic which he addressed to his friend Fakhr ad-din as soon as he returned to Italy (preserved by the *Tarikh Mansuri*) certainly show not only a nuance of oriental rhetoric but also the freshness of separation, indicative of a friendship almost oriental. But his true rapport with the Malik al-Kamil survived for a long time, until Malik's death in 1238 and even afterward, with his son and successor. These Orientals must have remarked and appreciated in Frederick's personality not only the "materialist" who scandalized the pious imam of Jerusalem, but the scholar, the perfect knight, and the Frank sovereign who seemed to be a connoisseur and an admirer of the oriental civilization.

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It is not difficult to specify the elements of such a civilization that he had known more directly during his stay in the Holy Land and that had captured his soul. To begin with, the element least congenial for us but more in line with the mentality and character of Frederick was the oriental absolutism, as in Egypt and Syria, which must have appeared to him as an enviable model of sovereign power without any of the difficulties of communal privileges and autonomies. This thorn in the flesh of the imperial absolutism was ignored by the oriental world, whose rule was then based upon a system of military feudalism for which only a strong personality like that of Norandin and Saladin, the Malik al-Adil and al-Kamil, was necessary. On the other hand, that old enemy of the empire, the papacy, did not exist in the fortunate Orient, deprived as it was of an organized church and of a supreme pontiff, and without spiritual weapons that could be combined with material arms for the establishment of a primacy in conflict with the sovereign power of the emperor. There did exist, however, an institution in a certain way comparable to the papacy of the West, the caliphate, which from its origins as supreme Islamic monarchy had been reduced to a decorative survival and to a merely spiritual unity of orthodox Islamism. But, from his short stay in the East, Frederick had been able to realize that a strong power need have no fear of that dying institution. On the contrary, a possibly authentic anecdote whose oriental source I have not been able to find relates that, when his Mohammedan hosts explained to Frederick the nature of their innocuous "Eastern papacy," which was founded upon the lineage from Mohammed (in reality they were the last Abbasidi of Baghdad on the eve of being liquidated by the Mongols), the Swabian is said to have declared that such a hereditary primacy was more logical and respectable than the Roman pontificate, for which even a man of very low birth could be elected. This is the aristocratic doctrine of nobility by blood that Dante attributes in his "Convivio" to Frederick. If he had known a little more about Islamism, he would certainly have pronounced himself in favor of the *sciita Imam* rather than the sunnite caliph<sup>1</sup> as the only mystic depository of both powers, the spiritual as well as the temporal. And who knows if he may not have regarded with political sympathy as a perfect sovereign the "grand master of the assassinations," the feared "old man of the mountains," who at his wish would have cast into the abyss his fanat-

1. *Sciita Imam* is the officiating Mohammedan priest of the ancient type; *sunnite Khalif* is the successor of Mohammed who accepts the orthodox tradition as well as the Koran.



ical followers in the presence of the astonished Frank ambassadors? Certainly, we are here very far from the Frederick so much beloved by the enlightenment but perhaps closer to the authentic Frederick of history.

Let us not stop too long on the more apparent but most extrinsic of the oriental customs adopted by the emperor before and especially after his stay in Palestine. The continuation of the Arab-Norman civilization of Sicily is enough perhaps to explain the most picturesque aspects of Frederick's court with its oriental tendencies: the pages (*ghulmān*, *fityān*) whose faith, language, and customs were Mohammedan, the slave women or maid-servants working in the royal factory for home-spuns and textiles (a heritage of the Arab *tirāz*, or art, whose existence in Sicily has been questioned but which is certainly common to the Saracen courts of the Mediterranean), and the female singers, who added gaiety to the banquets, baths, and seraglios at the fairs.

It is well known how much this exoticism, which had been reinforced rather than created *ex novo* from the experience of the Crusade, had helped the papal and Guelph polemics in giving ground to the accusation against Frederick of formal adhesion to the Saracen faith, to oriental dissolution and the like. He challenged this accusation by giving innocent explanation of its more suspicious circumstantial evidence (the slave women of the harem were simple artisans, the singers supplied only aesthetic pleasure), which probably is near the truth, while the fantasy and the animosity of his defamers are often beyond reality. There is no doubt that he probably considered the materialistic civilization of the East, more rich and refined than the Western civilization of his time, as a value to be assimilated and imitated, and that he was certainly aided in this feeling by an indifference toward the religious problem that remains one of the salient aspects of his complex personality. At the same time it is equally true that the same confessional indifference did not allow him to project his sympathy for Eastern civilization to the point of intellectual or sentimental acceptance of the Islamic religious faith, which had elements repugnant to his "materialist" as well as to his Christian view of life. We have already seen the Mohammedan reaction to him, and, from that point of view, not at all less characteristic is the fact that in the West the pamphlet entitled *De tribus impostoribus* was attributed to Frederick. It is obvious that the third impostor is Mohammed, and at the core of the Islamic civilization the orthodoxy of this "Sultan of Sicily" would have been

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just as suspect as it was in the Christian faith, from which—for mere motivation, as well as for more profound spiritual exigencies—he wished until the end never to be separated, dying a Christian death in Castel Fiorentino.

And now that we have touched on the obvious and picturesque element, we reach the center of his relationship with the Moslem culture in its scientific and intellectual aspects. The interest Frederick had toward this culture, as far as it is possible to deduce from surviving testimonials, essentially embraces two fields, that of techniques and mediation through the Arabian culture and that of philosophical thought and ancient science. Neither interest was peculiar to him, both being common to most enlightened minds of his time wherever the establishment of intellectual contacts with the Eastern world was possible (naturally, I think first of Spain). However, in the restless vivacity of his talent, in the biographical information about him, and in the imposing structure of his complex personality is to be found their singular importance. The oriental technique that interested him most was that of falconry, which served his hunting passion. As is well known, he had studied the art of training hawks from the theoretical angle, and he enriched the art with the only scientific work we have inherited from him, his *De arte venandi cum avibus*. For the preparation of this work Frederick himself assembled and had assembled oriental material such as the treatise of his Mohammedan falconer Moamin, which Theodore translated from Arabic into Latin and the emperor himself revised and corrected during the siege of Faenza. Other contributions on venatorial techniques are referred to in the prologue to his own essay. As far as true and proper science is concerned, such as astronomy, astrology, optics, mathematics, and metaphysics, we will encounter a well-known group of Frederick's consultants and cultural correspondents who, as mediators between the Eastern and the Western worlds, were closely studied by Haskins and De Stefano. The most important intellectual personality of the group is Michael Scott, as the liaison between the entourage of Frederick and the center of translations in Toledo, where, in the previous century, Gerard of Cremona and other famous interpreters of ancient Arabic science had already worked in this field. From Toledo, where he had worked from 1217 to 1220 on the translation of Alpetragius, Scott moved to Bologna and, an appointee to the court of Frederick from 1227 until his death in 1235, translated from Arabic works of Aristotle

with comments by Averroës or the zoölogical sections in the re-elaboration of Avicenna. Certainly of Oriental origin is Master Theodore, another philosopher and astrologer of the court, who in 1236 was sent to Frederick by al-Kamil of Egypt and who was very active as secretary-translator and ambassador for Eastern affairs as well as distiller of drugs and syrups.

Other secretaries and translators in Frederick's circle are John and Moses of Palermo, various people of Arabian origin, and Sicilian Jews who were well qualified by birth and education to be useful in cultural exchange. But, in addition to these many medieval Orientalists or semi-Orientalists, true Orientalists and scholars of strict Arab-Mohammedan science appear to have been in scientific rapport with the emperor. With them Frederick, either directly or by means of messages and "questions," discussed technical problems of mathematics, physics, and philosophy. We have mentioned the mathematician Alan ad-din al-Hānafi who was al-Kamil's expert in Syria for the solution of scientific problems submitted by Frederick. In an unpublished work by an Egyptian scientist of the twelfth century there are traces of questions in the field of optics that the emperor had submitted to Mohammedan scholars, but we do not know whether or not this took place during the Crusade. Most important of all are the "Sicilian questions" in cosmology, psychology, and metaphysics, linking the name of the Swabian to that of the Caliph Almoha Almohade ar-Rashid (1232-42) and of the philosopher and Spanish mystic ibn-Sabin (1217?-69). Four or five questions about the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity of the world, on the aims and presuppositions of the metaphysics, the categories, the nature of the soul, and, it seems, also on some anthropomorphical expressions of the Koran were submitted under the order of his sovereign by ibn-Sabin to the oriental scholars, together with an ample dissertation full of scholastic bombast and ironical attacks on the infidel "King of the Romans." The answer offers a long exposition of peripatetic Moslemized doctrines, embellished at the end by Islamic mysticism (Suffism), but we do not know if it ever reached Frederick, whether or not it was interpreted to him (since we do not believe that he could have fully understood the original version), and what insight he might have gotten from it, should the problems have had real personal and speculative interest for the emperor. We say this because we cannot silence our impression that similar questions were probably formulated at times

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more for the intellectual display and to embarrass the correspondents than to satisfy urgent interest.

Now, taking a bird's-eye view of this culture and of the Arabian science so dear to Frederick, we notice that their limits coincide with that culture in which the Western world was highly interested at the end of the Middle Ages and in the early Renaissance. Both natural sciences and metaphysics were really not autochthonous products of the oriental mind but elaborations of an ancient classical heritage, accepted and developed by the Moslem East during the most fruitful centuries of its intellectual activity. However, this ancient cultural heritage did not pass to the East in its pure form, in the original texts, and in an exact hierarchy of values that could convey in their historical physiognomy the great figures of ancient thought and science, so that the work of eminent scholars could be distinguished from that of epitomists and epigonists; but both culture and science, through the complications and contaminations of late antiquity, reached the East all confused, so that Plato was mixed up with Aristotle and Plotinus, the true Aristotle with his neo-Platonizing commentators, and the authentic Hippocrates, Euclid, and Ptolemy with a whole series of pseudo-epigraphic works attributed to them. The Islamic East, in welcoming that patrimony, was obliged to submit it to further revision in order to conciliate it with its own religious revelations; and, as far as physical, mathematical, and natural sciences were concerned, it often had to submit the bequest to an advanced experimental investigation that marked a true step forward in comparison with ancient times. The most prominent minds of the Latin West, from the Toledian translators to Alphonso the Wise and our Wise Hohenstaufen Emperor, the genial son of Apulia and Sicily, were fascinated by this scientific-philosophical patrimony in which shone the genius of ancient Greece. However, while the predecessors and contemporaries of Frederick had derived essentially from Spain, a melting pot of the two civilizations, and through Spain therefore they had tried to approach Eastern culture, the emperor was perhaps the first, and certainly the most questioning, person regarding Greek-Arabian science, whom the vicissitudes of life, the means, and the field of action permitted the absorption of that patrimony directly from its Eastern sources. The first source for him was Sicily itself; later, Syria and Palestine; and, still later, Egypt and Africa, through the friendships he had been able to establish. Thus precious elements of experimental Greek and Islamic science, astronomy, and mathematics,

as well as physics, zoölogy, and medicine found a way into his culture. At the same time he was influenced by the tenacious superstructure of science (which we recognize as such but which for that era was equally authentic science), of astrology, alchemy, and magic that accounted for Michael Scott's inclusion in Dante's *Inferno*, while the enemies of Frederick considered him as the shadow of the excommunicated emperor. In other words, he was influenced by that "phantomatic Mediterranean world of the late antiquity open to the influx of the East," as Kantorowicz defined it and from which modern science has developed, with the toil of centuries and with its heroes and its victims.

Consequently, the East gave to the Swabian emperor all that was most vital in its good and in its evil: the best and most characteristic fruit of the productive phase of its civilization. That phase was at its end exactly in the thirteenth century, and the great Arabian science of the previous four centuries, like all the spiritual life of the Islamic world, was about to rigidify in a progressive narcosis, from which she would awaken only by contact with modern Europe. Before falling asleep, she passed the torch to the West, and Frederick can well be considered as one of the representative runners in this marathon of civilization.

Until now we have spoken of Arabic-Mohammedan institutions, religion, and science. It remains then to inquire into what kind of knowledge Frederick may have had of Arabic poetry—on the level of the most simple, autochthonous, and original aspect of Moslem culture, which in science, as we saw, had merely elaborated a foreign heritage. We do not conceal the delicacy and uncertainty of the problem. The possible contacts with Arabian poetry on the part of a person who was a poet in his own right, one who composed and witnessed in others of his circle the composition of the earlier rhymes of our vulgar Italian, is a highly suggestive theme but—and I say this quickly—it can give us, as things stand, nothing but a suggestion. First of all, the knowledge he may have had of Arabian poetry has to be proportioned to his direct knowledge of the Arabic idiom, because to date we have no indication whatsoever of translations in this field. And such linguistic knowledge on his part, uncertain in its rudiments and perhaps also in the common use of spoken Arabic, must not, we feel, be exaggerated to the point of assuming him able to understand fully and enjoy the subtleties of cultivated classical poetry. The two letters in Arabic addressed to the emir Fakhr ad-din, in a highly ornate style and embellished by quotations

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from al-Mutanabbi and other classical poets, are probably the work of some oriental secretary; and we do not know how much of the correction in the translation of the emperor's treatise on falconry had been made with the aim of being faithful to the original and how much with the purpose of technical precision in the subject. On the other hand, we must consider that the last voices of Arabian poetry in Sicily had become silent at the time of Roger and that three-quarters of a century elapsed between the time of these echoes and the Sicilian poetic school. Thus everything seems to speak against the hypothesis of a knowledge and direct imitation *in loco* from one idiom to the other.

At least two compositions attributed with considerable certainty to Frederick, and all or almost all of the most ancient lyric production composed around the Sicilian *regale solarium*, are known to be connected to the forms and spirit of Provençal poetry. And here the East would enter indirectly if the "Arab thesis" of Ribera, Nykl, and Menendez Pidal on both the formal and the conceptual influence that Arabian poetry exercised through the Pyrenees could be accepted in full. My modest, personal opinion is positive about the metrical influences (from the *Saj*—a sort of blank verse—of the vulgar Arabic of Spain to the strophe of the troubadours, to the Gallican canticle, and to Jacopion eulogy) but skeptical about the conceptual influence through which the idea of courteous love expressed itself in Rumania from direct knowledge of erudite Arabian poetry. And now, returning to our specific theme, the statement can be made that Frederick could certainly have known some residuum of popular strophic Arab-Sicilian or perhaps Spanish or oriental poetry, but absolutely nothing of this nature has come down to us, not even an explicit affirmation of its existence. On the other hand, he may have had, in a degree and in ways indeterminable for us, some direct experience of a non-strophic Arabian classical poetry of love, in which the conception of love was considered as service, dedication, and vassalage and which had already been canonized in the East at the end of the eighth century by Abbas ibn al-Ahnaf, the minnesinger of the Baghdad of Harun ar-Rashid, and had been continued in the East, as well as in the West, as poetic tradition in Arabic. More prudent and probable, however, is to persist in seeing in the poetry of the troubadours the direct antecedent of the vulgar Sicilian poetry that in the first decades of the twelfth century had already crossed the Alps and thus influenced the intellectual and social life of northern Italy. The search for an "Arab" Frederick up to this point does not allow us to forget that he was subject to many other

forces and that certainly his polyhedral personality does not exhaust itself in the oriental philo-exoticism. That afterward the Provençals turned to the developing Italian lyric of the north and even more to that of the southern part of the peninsula, accepting poetic form and spirit in part derived from beyond the Pyrenees, is a possibility that, as Arabists, we cannot exclude, but which cannot be generalized and taken for granted. Anyway, this possibility would give us only an indirect influence between the East and the incunabula of Italian poetry.

We fear that in this discussion we may have somewhat artificially isolated an element of the practical and intellectual life of the great Swabian. His imposing figure, by no means clear of shadows, and not so free from the restrictions of his own time as he appeared to romantic historiography, becomes truly great in a multiplicity of interests, passions, bonds with his own era, and anticipations of the future that well justify the assiduous historical research which flourished again in 1950, on the occasion of the centennial celebrations. Among the many authoritative voices resounding in Italy, our modest one is justified in view of the role played by Eastern civilization in Frederick's life from his cradle to his grave. As the unknown Mohammedan Chiron revealed to the child in the royal palace of Palermo the faith and the culture that had dominated in Sicily for three centuries, so that ancient Palermitan mosque-cathedral welcomed him at the end of his journey, wrapped in precious Arabian draperies embroidered in titles of oriental sovereignty. There has rested for seven centuries the one who was *al-Imbratur* for the Eastern Arabs but *as-Sultan* for many Western friends and enemies, as we can read in the Arabian letters on his burial garment. Sultan in pomp, in caprice, in despotic brutality and debauchery of life, but also Sultan like an al-Mamun of Baghdad or an Abd ar-Rahman of Cordova in his magnanimous thirst for knowledge, in his patronage of culture, and in his restless intellectual curiosity. There is no achievement of romantic historiography that can deny these qualities in a superlative degree to the last "vento di Soave,"<sup>2</sup> and they are enough, even if there were nothing else, to insure for him our admiration and sympathy.

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2. "Soothing wind from the east," commonly known as "sirocco."

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