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## Project Description

### **The transition of power in the Kingdom of Sicily. Practices of conquest (1189–1208)**

In 1189, King William II of Sicily, a member of the Norman Hauteville family, died childless and thus without an heir. As a result, a dispute over the throne broke out between Count Tankred of Lecce, an illegitimate descendant of the Sicilian dynasty, and the Roman-German King Henry VI. The latter was married to Constance of Hauteville, William II's aunt. Tankred died in 1194 and Henry VI, now emperor, was soon able to assert himself against Tankred's underage son William III. He ruled the Kingdom of Sicily until his death in 1197. Thereafter, his wife Constance acted as regent for his underage son and future emperor Frederick II until her own death in 1198. Nominally, the guardianship subsequently passed to Pope Innocent III, but various actors whose positions of power dated back to the conquest process filled the relative power vacuum in the Kingdom of Sicily at least until Frederick II carried out his first independent acts of government from 1208 onwards.

The dissertation project examines the conquest process within these temporal boundaries between 1189 and 1208 during which the Kingdom of Sicily lost its independence and became part of the Roman-German Empire. Until now, medieval historians have mostly been interested in conquests as manifestations of a ruler's power to act, which goes back to an outdated form of historical representation that tended to personalise history. Instead, the project conceptualises them as progressive processes of negotiation and communication.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rike SZILL, *Eroberte im Mittelalter. Aspekte einer Geschichte historischer Umbruchssituationen ‚von unten‘*, in: *Eroberte im Mittelalter. Umbruchssituationen erleben, bewältigen, gestalten (Europa im Mittelalter 39)*, ed. Id. und Andreas Bihrer, Berlin/Boston 2023, pp. 1–18, p. 14 (citation originally in German, own translation).

The subject of the analysis are the cultural practices of conquerors and conquered. However, analysing them in case studies of individual aspects of the conquest process is “not an end in itself, but [...] attempts to break down the big questions, concepts and phenomena.”<sup>2</sup>

The aim of the project is to combine the actor and source perspectives 'from above' and 'from below' into a praxeologically informed cultural-historical investigation of the phenomenon of 'conquest' around the turn of the 12th to the 13th century. Therefore, all conquerors and conquered, i.e. “those [...] who, in the process of a change of ruler brought about by the use or threat of force and accompanied by border shifts, have to submit to and adapt to an order determined by the victors”,<sup>3</sup> are to be taken into account and explicitly not only the rulers. In this way, the multi-perspective phenomenon of 'conquest' is to be made visible using praxeological terminology as a concatenation of individual processes situated in time and space.

One focus is on the private charter source material, which has not yet been systematically analysed for the selected period. The first practice to be examined concerns the “political dating” of Sicilian private charters according to the reign of a ruler.<sup>4</sup> The conquest situation had a decisive influence on its form. This also applies to the renewal of such private charters after the dispute over the throne, which only occurred because the Kingdom of Sicily had been conquered. The practice of issuers inserting comments in their private charters justifying land sales with their own hardship in the context of conquest allows conclusions to be drawn about the consequences of war. In this context, it also makes sense to evaluate the evidence in contemporary historiography for devastation and plundering to identify the relevant practices of the actors responsible – both conquerors and conquered. A comprehensive analysis of private and royal charters as well as contemporary historiography should also make it possible to grasp the practices of conquerors and conquered in the context of the source concept of

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<sup>2</sup> Marian FÜSSEL, Praxeologische Perspektiven in der Frühneuzeitforschung, in: *Praktiken der Frühen Neuzeit. Akteure · Handlungen · Artefakte (Frühneuzeit-Impulse 3)*, ed. Arndt Brendecke, Köln / Weimar / Wien 2015, pp. 21–33, p. 31 (citation originally in German, own translation).

<sup>3</sup> Kordula WOLF, *Eroberte im Mittelalter, oder: Wer schreibt die Geschichte? Ein Resümee*, in: *Eroberte im Mittelalter* (cf. note 1), pp. 467–486, p. 471 (citation originally in German, own translation).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Heinrich FICHTENAU, „Politische“ Datierungen des frühen Mittelalters (first 1973), in: Id., *Beiträge zur Mediävistik. Ausgewählte Aufsätze. Vol. 3: Lebensordnungen – Urkundenforschung – Mittellatein*, Stuttgart 1986, pp. 186–285.

'fidelity', which is central to the justification of actions but rarely specified. This involves examining the services promised in an "oath of allegiance", the "concrete content of fidelity", the reward or sanction of fidelity and infidelity and the "various public orchestrations of fidelity".<sup>5</sup> Particular attention should be paid here to the practices of the Pisans and Genoese, with whom Henry VI concluded agreements on naval support for the conquest of the Kingdom of Sicily. Once the genesis of these agreements has been clarified, the extent to which they were honored by both parties will be examined.

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<sup>5</sup> Knut GÖRICH, Fides und fidelitas im Kontext der staufischen Herrschaftspraxis (12. Jahrhundert), in: Fides/Triuwe (Das Mittelalter 20,2), Berlin u. a. 2015, ed. Susanne Lepsius and Susanne Reichlin, pp. 294–309, p. 295–296 (citation originally in German, own translation).