FREDERICK II HOHENSTAUFEN

WONDER OF THE WORLD

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CHAPTER I
A CONTESTED ORPHAN: THE YOUNG FREDERICK BETWEEN THE POPE AND THE SWABIANS (1194-1207)

Frederick II Hohenstaufen was born on St. Stephen's Day, 1194, in Jesi, central Italy. His father was Henry VI, son of Frederick I Barbarossa and Holy Roman Emperor, and his mother was Constance of Hauteville, daughter of Roger II and Queen of Sicily. Frederick was, in short, the heir to two royal houses and two very important figures, but his childhood was marked by instability and political conflict. When he was just two years old, his father Henry died suddenly at the age of 31, a death that sparked a heated conflict in Germany between those loyal to the House of Hohenstaufen (led by Frederick's uncle, Philip Duke of Swabia), and the supporters of Otto of Brunswick (a candidate close to the papacy). Although some German princes had already elected the child Frederick as the new King of the Romans, his mother, Constance, decided to safeguard her son by keeping him away from the political conflicts in Germany. Just a year later, however, Constance also died, and shortly before doing so she named Frederick King of Sicily and entrusted him to the new Pope Innocent III, who became his guardian and regent of the Kingdom of Sicily.

Innocent, engaged in an ambitious continental-scale political project, did not directly concern himself with the child's education, who indeed remained in Palermo, but entrusted him to the care of Gualtiero of Pagliara, chancellor of the Kingdom of Sicily, and four archbishops of Southern Italy, albeit with the order to be informed weekly about the child's cultural and personal growth. Said growth would have been a reason for wonder and appreciation not only for Innocent, but for many people around all of Europe. The first teacher of Frederick was, at least starting from 1201, Francesco Guglielmo, who probably taught him the basics of grammatics (and thus Latin) and literature.

(Crystallized Intelligence: Knowledge-Fluid Intelligence: Learning Ability)

In 1199 the Sicilian island was invaded by Marcovaldo of Annweiler, lieutenant of Philip of Swabia (Frederick's aforementioned uncle), in order to interrupt the papal regency over the kingdom of Sicily and to remove the guardianship of the child. Two years later Marcovaldo entered in Palermo and found the hiding place of the young king, but when he tried to take him out Frederick he jumped on his men and tried as best he could to stop them, and once he was blocked by force, in protest, he tore his clothes and scratched his face[1]. A reaction of unique dignity and determination for a child of only 7 years old.

(**Adversity Capacity: Perseverance)**

Papal control over the child returned only in 1206, the year in which Gualtiero di Pagliara defeated Marcovaldo's successor and also regained control of Palermo. During the years he remained under Swabian tutelage, however, the child's tutors remained the same, and in addition to the aforementioned Francesco Guglielmo, Gentile di Manoppello and even a Muslim imam alternated. The child's education was therefore excellent, and Palermo's multicultural

environment further fostered a multifaceted education for him[2]. Frederick studied Latin literature, natural sciences and also Arabic authors, like the geographer Ibn' Ildris.

(Crystallized Knowledge: Knowledge)

The constant political changes in Sicily and the opportunistic nature of the interests surrounding him led Frederick to have few real intimate relationships during his childhood.

(Adversity Capacity: Mental Fortitude)

During his adolescence, the king's education focused as much on studies as on physical training. At twelve, he was already able to handle almost any weapon, preferring the sword and armor. He loved horseback riding and practiced until nightfall. Before bed, he studied military texts and was considered to have the same knowledge as an adult, considered a precocious intellectual and a boy with excellent verbal and oratory skills[3]. Frederick was also fond of the game of chess.

(Adversity Capacity: Perseverance-Fluid Intelligence: Learning Ability/Cognitive Capacity-Crystallized Intelligence: Knowledge)

It's not easy to say how many languages and from what point onward Frederick spoke. It's likely that his native language was Sicilian vernacular, while he surely also learned Latin as a child. Given the presence of German soldiers and nobles in Palermo during some of his childhood years, it's possible that he learned German there, and he certainly did so during his trip to Germany between 1212 and 1214. It's also unclear whether his knowledge of French began during childhood (French was widely spoken at the Norman court in Palermo), but he certainly learned it as an adult, given that he read French texts. We have no solid evidence regarding his knowledge of Arabic, since the sources attesting to it are from after his death, although they are also of Arabic origin. It's nevertheless highly probable that Frederick had indeed learned the language, still spoken in some areas of Sicily and useful for diplomatic relationships with muslim diplomats. He also learned Greek, though not fluent, one of the very rare cases of medieval Western rulers to do so.

(Fluid Intelligence: Learning Ability/Cognitive Capacity)

Bibliography:

[1]Ernst Kantorowitz, *Federico II, imperatore* (*Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*), Garzanti, Milano 2017 (Berlin 1927), p.23

[2]*Ibi*, p.24

[3]Anonymous, *Letter in the Niccolò's of Pagliara circle*, around 1207

CHAPTER II
PUER APULIAE: FREDERICK'S RISE IN ITALY AND IN GERMANY (1208-1220)

Upon reaching 14, Frederick would have achieved the independence afforded by his majority, and thus Innocent III would have had to loosen the reins of his guardianship over the king. The Pope, however, intended to keep the young sovereign closely tied to himself and to the power of the Church, and for this very reason, in the summer of 1208 (just as his guardianship was about to expire), he arranged for him a marriage with the Princess of Aragon, Constance of Barcelona, fifteen years his senior. The goal was, first and foremost, to unite two feudal kingdoms of the Church, and, secondly, Innocent hoped that, with said strengthening of Sicilian-Aragonese relations, from a Mediterranean perspective, Frederick's potential claims to the imperial throne would be undermined. One of the Pope's primary political objectives was precisely to avoid uniting the crowns of Germany and Southern Italy.

In August 1209, Frederick and Constance were married, and the king assumed effective government over the kingdom. His wife had brought 500 Spanish knights as a dowry, and the fifteen-year-old Frederick immediately set about organizing their military deployment. His goal was to immediately restore effective control of the kingdom and strengthen his position. For these reasons Gualtiero of Pagliara lost his influence at court, the royal influence election of the archbishop of Palermo was partially repristinated and the archbishop of Bari, Berardo of Castaglia, a close ally of Frederick, was nominated chancellor of the reign. These actions were made in purpose to diminish the papal influence in Sicily and although Innocent III tried to protest, he later accepted them[1].

(Adversity Capacity: Perseverance-Strategy: Building-Social Engineering: Influence Building)

Frederick's intention was to use the five hundred knights to subjugate the royal continental territories (Calabria, Apulia, Basilicata, and Campania), but shortly after the wedding, a malaria epidemic struck the sovereign's camp, and he and his wife were forced to take refuge in the countryside to escape the disease that decimated his army. Thus, the plans were initially shelved, also because bigger problems were coming near.

Otto IV of Brunswick (remember? the papal candidate for the imperial throne) had won the decade-long contest against Philip of Swabia a year earlier after the latter's unrelated assassination. Following his coronation, however, he broke his promises to the papacy and organized an expedition to Italy to subjugate the entire region to the German Empire. After descending into Lombardy, he even attacked the South with the intention of also occupying the Kingdom of Sicily, invading Campania and Calabria. Frederick fortified the defenses of Messina, the Sicilian city overlooking Calabria, but his army would have been difficult to counter the imperial armies. Salvation for the young king came when Innocent III, having lost all possibility

of negotiating with Otto IV, excommunicated the emperor and fomented an insurrection among the German princes against him (the very man who had facilitated his rise to power!)
Innocent did not stop there, but promoted Frederick as the new imperial candidate for the throne. Although he feared the possibility that the boy would unite the empire and Sicily in the future, his threat was just in potential and certainly less dangerous than Otto's immediate invasions. The King of France, Philippe Augustus, in turn supported Frederick's candidacy in order to weaken Otto, who was also the nephew and ally of the King of England, John Lackland. Within a year, Frederick was effectively launched into the complex geopolitical chessboard of Europe as a new pawn in the game of Franco-papal interests, and, at least for the moment, he accepted the position, albeit with his indomitable and proud spirit.

(Adaptability: Environmental)

In 1211, among other things, Frederick gave birth to his first son, Henry, who was appointed co-ruler of the Kingdom of Sicily at birth. After leaving his son in the care of his wife, he began an expedition up Italy to reach Germany, where the princes rebelling against Otto awaited him as the new ruler. Otto, as for himself, had fled to Germany and was preparing for the final clash with Philippe Augustus. In November 1211 the princes of German nobility elected Frederick as new king of the Romans, while in the next months, while coming to Rome during his journey, Frederick finally met Innocent, to whom he pledged vassalage as King of Sicily and to whom he promised that he would not combine the titles of Emperor of the Romans and King of Sicily. Innocent gave him money and the honour he needed, and then he continued his path to North Italy and from there to Germany.

(Social Engineering: Influence Building)

When he reached the Alps he was informed that the Brenner Pass was guarded by troops loyal to Otto, so he changed course and crossed the mountains via the St. Gallen Pass, reaching Constance, where he obtained the support of the local bishop[2]. In order to strengthen his alliances in Germany, after entering Constance Frederick signed the Golden Bull of Sicily, a document with which he confirmed to the lords of Bohemia the assumption of their territories to the title of kingdom. He also allied himself with the bishop of Speyer, Conrad III, promising him the bishopric of Mertz in exchange. The concessions to the King of Bohemia and Conrad were just some of several that the new ruler distributed to the German feudal nobility in exchange for military support and loyalty, receiving the funds to do so from his ally France.

(Strategy: Adaptability-Field Crafting-Info Gathering-Social Engineering: Influence Building)

Frederick's welcome from the German princes and people was enthusiastic; he was seen as the legitimate heir of the House of Hohenstaufen, returning to take his rightful crown (Otto had never been loved, and even less so after his plundering of Swabian territories). Swabia, the homeland of his house, opened its doors to Frederick, and from there he reached Frankfurt, where he was re-elected King of the Romans and subsequently crowned. Naturally, papal propaganda and support had also played a significant role in ensuring such a rapid and

triumphant rise, while from a military standpoint, Philippe Augustus would soon defeat the combined armies of Otto and the English at Bouvines, allying himself with Frederick's Empire.

(Social Engineering: Charisma/Influence Building)

In July 1215, one of the very last strongholds of Otto's followers, the symbolic city of Aachen, was conquered by Frederick, who was crowned there once again as King of the Romans on the 25th of the month, in a ceremony with clear Carolingian overtones. It was the feast of St. James, patron saint of crusaders, and Frederick announced that he would undertake a crusade to the Holy Land. This announcement was not only linked to the traditional crusading commitment that the Hohenstaufen house had always guaranteed, but also to the desire to confirm the relations and support of Innocent III[3]. The power of Frederick was still unstable at that moment indeed, not only in Germany, but the full effective control over the South was not achieved either. Two days later he attended a ceremony for Charlemagne, recently sanctified under political pressure from his grandfather Frederick Barbarossa, in order to give public proof of the continuity of the Swabian ideological vision.

(Psychological Warfare: Reinforcements-Social Engineering: Influence Building/Communication-Deception: Acting Skills)

In November and December 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council was held, called out and presided over by Innocent III, which confirmed Frederick's title of King of the Romans and declared the beginning of the Fifth Crusade, which in theory was to see Frederick himself as its champion.

The coronation as Roman Emperor was yet delayed because Frederick was still delaying the separation of the Kingdom of Sicily from the Holy Roman Empire.

Fortunately for Frederick, Innocent III died in July 1216. While he, a formidable politician and at the height of his power, remained alive, Frederick had respected the agreements with the Church and had proven relatively meek. The appointment of the new pope Honorius III, however, opened potentially better avenues of opportunities, given that the new bishop of Rome lacked the political depth and firmness of his predecessor.

In April 1220, Frederick, ready to return to Italy, granted the German bishops the document *Confoederatio cum principibus ecclesiasticis,* which guaranteed them a wide range of privileges (from minting coins to building their own fortifications). These concessions, although they diminished the emperor's direct control over Germany, allowed Frederick to focus his energies on the Kingdom of Sicily, and potentially later on the crusade, in the following years.

(Strategy: Castling)

Frederick began new negotiations with Rome to finally secure the imperial coronation. In exchange, he promised Honorius III that he would renounce the title of King of Sicily, formally appointing his son Henry as sole ruler. This compromise was obviously based on mere theoretical formalities, since Frederick would naturally continue to govern southern Italy as well. However, the renewal of promises regarding the crusade and submission to Rome, in addition to the assurance that the two thrones would remain separate were sufficient, after four years of mediation, to convince Honorius III[4].

(Strategy: Adaptability-Social Engineering: Communication)

In November 1220, Frederick was named Holy Roman Emperor and crowned by the Pope in St. Peter's Basilica. On that occasion, he reaffirmed his intention to launch a crusade for the following year, and also affirmed that he would respect the Church's orders and commit himself to fighting heresies (the great crusade against the Albigenses, launched by Innocent III, was not far behind in the memories).
(Deception: Acting Skills-Tactics: Boldness)

Bibliography:

[1]Hubert Houben, *Federico II, Imperatore, Uomo, Mito* (*Kaiser Friedrich II, 1194-1250. Herrscher, Mensch und Mythos*), Il Mulino, Bologna 2009 (Stuttgart 2008), pp. 20-21
[2]*Ibi*, pp. 22-23
[3]*Ibi*, p.24
[4]*Ibi*, p.25

CHAPTER III
THE IDEAL KING: THE RULE OVER SICILY AND THE FIRST CLASH WITH THE POPE (1220-1227)

After his coronation in Rome, Frederick returned to the Kingdom of Sicily after an eight-year absence, in a much stronger position than the one from which he had departed, still seventeen. Within eight years, he had achieved independence for his kingdom, the crown of King of the Romans, witnessed the fall of Otto, the alliance with France and the papacy, the death of his former guardian, and had even been named emperor.

On December 20, upon arriving in Campania, Frederick promulgated the Assize of Capua, a series of programmatic laws that demonstrated the centralizing and determined intentions of his rule. All castles built after 1189 without royal approval were to be demolished, and all decrees passed during the interregnum of his childhood and his mother's reign were to be reexamined and amended. The aim was to eliminate the privileges that the kingdom's nobility had wrested from royal power during those years of political instability. A few months later, Frederick also promulgated the Assize of Messina, which introduced Roman law, as revised by the University of Bologna, as the kingdom's legislative system. A second part of the document also respected the recommendations of the Fourth Lateran Council and banned blasphemy and gambling, and stipulated that Jews and prostitutes were required to wear distinctive clothing in public. The fact that this second part of the document will not be included in the definitive Constitution of Melfi (1231) suggests that it was intended mainly with the aim of placating papal criticism, which had attacked the promulgation of the Assize of Capua[1].

(Crystallized Intelligence: Knowledge Application-Strategy: Adaptability-Deception: Sophystry/Misrediction-Social Engineering: Leadership)

Meanwhile, Honorius continued to pressure Frederick to finally leave for the crusade. Six years had already passed since he had taken the cross in fact. The emperor, however, had little interest in embarking on an overseas war without first sufficiently strengthening his dominion over his vast territories, furthermore he didn’t have the same hatred feeling that many crusaders shared against Islam. For these reasons, he had always managed to delay his departure, one way or another, for many years.

(Deception: Sophystry/Acting Skills-Tactics: Boldness)

In August 1221, he had agreed with Honorius III that he would depart in the spring of the following year, but a serious incident occurred that made this further delay harshly criticized. In 1217, a crusade, the fifth, had indeed set out without Frederick, led by nobles from all over Europe. Due to the shortage of men, caused by the defection of Frederick himself and the King of Hungary, the crusaders had decided on an expedition against Egypt to cut the Islamic supply lines, and despite initial successes, in 1221 they were swept away by the sultan's forces, while they awaited in vain the arrival of Frederick and his army.

Honorius then threatened Frederick with excommunication, but once again, incredibly, he managed to negotiate diplomatically with the Pope and in a direct meeting in 1223 he promised that he would organize a massive expedition in 1225. As a sign of his good intentions, Frederick married Isabella of Jerusalem, daughter of the last Queen of Jerusalem, even though she was only thirteen years old. His wife, Constance, had died in 1222, and little Isabella also died very young, at just sixteen in 1228, soon after giving birth to the couple's son, Conrad. Frederick was then able to appoint himself regent of the kingdom of Jerusalem.

(Social Engineering: Communication-Strategy: Building-Social Engineering: Influence Building)

In 1223, however, Frederick's attention was focused on suppressing the revolts in Sicily. The Arab population, already in opposition to the royal government for years, had rebelled, occupied the city of Agrigento, and captured the local bishop. The emperor's response was immediate: one by one, he attacked and destroyed the Islamic strongholds on the island (Jeto, Corleone, Entella, etc.), then marched on Agrigento, besieged it for three months, and, once captured, massacred the leaders of the revolt. Imperial fleets also surrounded the island of Malta to prevent the local Islamic community from aiding the rebels. Islamic resistance, however, was extreme, and the repression of the first outbreak sparked new ones on the island, which were fought for a year and a half, until the spring of 1225. Frederick directly coordinated the military operations against the Saracens, and by the end of the campaign, the Muslim forces were greatly weakened. At that point, Frederick negotiated with them, and instead of exterminating them, as some had wanted, he decided to deport them from the island, promising them the administration of the city of Lucera, in Apulia, where they could live peacefully and continue their religious traditions as long as they remained loyal to the king[2]. The deportations of Muslims represented the definitive end of the Arab presence on the island. The Islamic community of Lucera would eventually always remain faithful to Frederick and provided significant contingents of archers for the emperor's armies.

(Strategy: CastlingAdaptability/Logistics-Counteraction: Trap Evasion-Psychological Warfare: Demoralization/Reinforcements)

Meanwhile, state reforms were proceeding apace. Frederick promoted the return of a strong, locally present bureaucracy, dispatching royal officials to all the provinces. He minted the *denarius*, a silver coin that not only integrated the Kingdom into the European coinage (largely based on silver), but also, by ordering the exchange of all old gold and silver coins owned by the population for it, generated a significant financial boost for the state coffers.

(Fluid Intelligence: Problem Solving-Crystallized Intelligence: Knowledge Application-Reasoning: Abstract)

In 1224, Frederick founded the first non-ecclesiastical university in Europe in Naples *ex novo*, in order to educate his own future intellectuals locally without having to go to Bologna, the main Italian university.

(Fluid Intelligence: Problem Solving)

In the spring of 1223, Freddrick had led an expedition against Thomas of Celano, an Abruzzo nobleman who had attempted to oppose the centralized reforms. With the victory over him and the concurrent success against the Saracens, control of southern Italy could be considered complete. Frederick's next goal, which he had always desired, was now the diminution of papal power in Central Italy and the eventual subjugation of the North, so as to extend the control of his crown over the entire peninsula and form a truly universal empire, stretching continuously from the North Sea to Sicily. This, however, irremediably meant a clash with the papacy and the Italian communes, the same forces that sixty years earlier had stopped the imperial projects of his grandfather Frederick Barbarossa. Precisely because he was well aware of his ancestor's failed experience, Frederick attempted to face these two adversaries separately.

(Planning: Aim/Formulation)

The conflict with Honorius III had begun, as mentioned, with Frederick's constant delays regarding the crusade, but not only that: the emperor had begun to exert increasing political pressure on the appointment of bishops in Sicily. In five vacant bishoprics, he even expelled the provisional papal legates and imposed his own representatives, in addition to confiscating church property. He had also asserted claims to the Duchy of Spoleto and the March of Ancona (the modern regions of Abruzzo and the Marches), at the time under papal control[3].

(Strategy: Building)

However, attempts to confront the Pope were interrupted in the summer of 1225 due to political developments in Northern Italy. There, a year earlier, Frederick, as emperor, had issued a series of harsh laws against Lombard heretics, aiming to position himself as protector of the Church and to increase the bishops' power over the autonomous municipalities. Tensions between the cities and the empire grew, and Frederick was forced to come to terms with the Pope, although he was also able to once again postpone the start of his crusade until 1227.

(Psychological Warfare: Reinforcements-Strategy: Adaptability)

On Easter Sunday 1226, Frederick convened an imperial diet in Cremona (a historically pro-imperial city) to organize the departure of the crusade and request military aids from the municipalities. In response, alarmed by the requests and already wary of Frederick's centralizing policies, they revived the Lombard League, the coalition of free cities that had defeated Barbarossa in 1176. Frederick attempted to negotiate with them, but both sides essentially distrusted each other and were on a war footing. When Verona, a League city, blocked the German armies led by Prince Henry (Frederick's eldest son) from entering Italy, and the League itself refused to attend a summons from the emperor, war seemed imminent. Frederick, however, wishing to avoid a long and destabilizing conflict in the North, therefore asked Honorius III to mediate between the two sides. The Pope, after months of negotiations, finally managed to reach a compromise: the emperor was to be more lenient with the communes, and they worked to secure 400 knights for the crusade. Honorius died around that same time, in 1227, and Gregory IX, nephew of Innocent III, was elected in his place, a pope who would prove surely more hostile to Frederick than his predecessor.

(Social Engineering: Communication-Strategy: Adaptability)

In September 1227, Frederick assembled an army and finally set out on crusade, but an epidemic struck his fleet, sickening him and killing some of his dignitaries, forcing him to return to Italy after a week. Gregory IX, seeing this as yet another betrayal of his promise, excommunicated Frederick. Excommunication not only prevented one from receiving the sacraments, but also released all subjects from the obligation of obedience to the sovereign, effectively undermining the foundations of royal power. Frederick's attempts at mediation were to no avail, and he then attacked the papal political leadership, further denouncing the abuses the Kingdom of Sicily had suffered during the regency of Innocent III years earlier. The Pope responded by cursing Frederick. Frederick could no longer delay, and despite knowing that the Pope would take advantage of his absence, once he recovered, he arranged for his departure for the Holy Land. Aware of the dangers his power would have faced with him away, he appointed Rainald of Urlsingen, Duke of Spoleto, as imperial lieutenant in Italy, after which he confirmed Henry and the infant Conrad, recently born to Isabella of Jerusalem, as his heirs[4].

(Strategy: Castling/Logistics-Field Crafting: Risks Calculations-Counteraction-Tactical Response)

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[1]Hubert Houben, *Federico II, Imperatore, Uomo, Mito* (*Kaiser Friedrich II, 1194-1250. Herrscher, Mensch und Mythos*), Il Mulino, Bologna 2009 (Stuttgart 2008), p.27

[2]*Ibi*, pp. 28-29

[3]*Ibi*, p.31

[4]*Ibi*, pp. 33-34

CHAPTER IV
GOD'S CHOSEN EMPEROR: THE SIXTH CRUSADE AND THE UNIVERSAL POWER (1228-1239)

Frederick hoped that success in the Holy Land would lead to the lifting of his excommunication and thus a reduction in the political crisis caused by his absence[1]. His intentions for the crusade, however, were not limited to the liberation of Jerusalem; he also had strategic objectives in the Middle East. Frederick, in fact, landed in Cyprus before Palestine. The island was under the control of the regent John of Ibelin, given the minority of King Henry I, and the emperor's intention was to subject it to his feudal control, as his father Henry VI had also planned to do. Negotiations with John of Ibelin, whose support could also be important for the crusade (given that he owned significant assets in Syria and Palestine), led to six weeks of mediation. At the end of these, Frederick reached a compromise: the kingdom would recognize the emperor's feudal rule, would hand over two hundred knights to the crusading army, and John would guarantee his support for the crusade; in exchange, Frederick promised to reduce the taxation imposed on the island[2]. Having achieved this success, in October 1228 the crusader army landed at Acre, *de facto* capital of the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

(Planning: Formulation/Aim/Process-Strategy: Logistics/Building-Social Engineering: Communication/Persuasion)

Frederick's crusading commitment had not softened papal opposition at all: Gregory IX ordered the Patriarch of Jerusalem to promulgate the excommunication in Palestine as well, and ordered the monastic-military orders (Templars, Hospitallers, etc.) not to lend aid to Frederick. Only the Teutonic Knights, the monastic-military corps of exclusively German ethnicity, decided to disobey papal orders and remain at the side of the crusading army.

In any case, the emperor arrived in Palestine with an optimistic outlook. He considered an armed conflict against the Muslims a needless weakening of his forces and an excessive expenditure of energy that would have prolonged his stay overseas. For this very reason, diplomatic negotiations with the Sultan of Egypt, al-Malik al-Kamil, Saladin's nephew, had begun even before the fleet's departure. Frederick and al-Kamil already enjoyed excellent relations, facilitated by the proximity of their Mediterranean dominions (southern Sicily and Tunisia were much closer than the former to the northern provinces of the German Empire) and by the like-minded personalities of the sovereigns, both undoubtedly different in mentality from many of their contemporaries. Al-Kamil had in fact attempted to pursue diplomatic channels to prevent the aforementioned Fifth Crusade, without success. Before the fleet left Brindisi, however, Frederick had received, after several weeks of negotiations, the promise that the sultan would hand over to the emperor the holy places of Christianity, including Jerusalem (with the exception of the Temple Mount), in exchange for support against his rebellious brother in Palestine and Syria. Frederick's influence over al-Malik was also due to the relationships he had built in the territory: not only among Christian forces, but also with Islamic ones, such as the Assassin sect.

(Fluid Intelligence: Problem Solving-Planning: Aim/Formulation/Versatility-Strategy: Adaptability/Building-Social Engineering: Communication/Influence Building-Adaptability: Environmental-Psychological Warfare: Abusing Insecurities)

Months later, by the time of his arrival in Acre, the situation had changed and become more complex. Al-Malik had already defeated his rebellious brother and was therefore less inclined to grant all the promises he had initially made. Frederick, however, needed rapid success, as the situation in the Kingdom of Sicily was deteriorating: the papal armies had invaded his territories, and the Pope was inciting the nobility to rebel and depose the king.

Negotiations with al-Malik lasted five months, but finally, in February 1229, an agreement was reached, in what was perhaps the greatest diplomatic success of the entire late Middle Ages. Al-Malik pledged to give to Frederick Jerusalem (with the exception of the Temple Mount, where Christians were still permitted access), the cities of Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jaffa, the barony of Tyre in Lebanon, the city of Sidon, and a territory that allowed direct access to Jerusalem from Acre. The sultan also allowed the Christians to fortify all these granted lands, while he promised not to build new castles on his own. A ten-year truce was also proclaimed between the two factions. With the exception of the first, no crusade had ever achieved similar results, not even the third led by the Lionheart[3]. For Frederick, such a success was the proof that God was on his side once again. Despite the positive outcome of the diplomatic action, both the Pope and the Patriarch of Jerusalem criticized Frederick's peaceful methods and the results obtained, considering them incomplete.

(Planning: Process-Strategy: Building/Adaptability/Castling-Social Engineering: Communication/Persuasion-Adversity Capacity: Stress Tolerance)

On March 17, Frederick entered Jerusalem triumphantly, and a few days later, on a Sunday, he was crowned King of Jerusalem in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This did not happen during Mass, as the king was still excommunicated and thus unable to receive the sacraments. Indeed, once he learned of the news, the Pope ordered the Patriarch to place the entire city of Jerusalem under interdict. That same day, however, Frederick sent official letters to the Pope, the King of England, the King of France, the great nobles of his kingdom, and his son Henry (whom, we recall, he had left behind as King of Germany), in which he announced the success of his expedition and the reconquest of the Holy Land, indirectly presenting himself as new champion of Christianity.

(Psychological Warfare: Reinforcements-Social Engineering: Communication)

Disappointed by the interdict imposed on Jerusalem, Frederick returned to Acre, where he was harshly criticized by the patriarch and the Knights Templar, who even went so far as to cause military tensions with the emperor's army. Ingratitude for his successes prompted Frederick to soon leave Palestine, also because he intended to quickly return to Italy and defeat the papal armies besieging Campania. He was therefore forced to abandon a planned expedition to Cilicia, a region he had hoped to subjugate as he had done with Cyprus[4].

(Planning: Formulation)

In early summer 1229, the emperor returned to Brindisi. The situation in southern Italy had recently worsened even more following the spread of the false rumor, created by the pope, that Frederick was dead. The return of the sovereign, strengthened by his crusading army and the cities still loyal to him, quickly crushed the papal forces deployed in Campania and Apulia, pushing them beyond the borders of the kingdom. To those who had sworn allegiance to Gregory IX or who had supported him, Frederick reserved an exemplary and vengeful treatment that served as a warning to his adversaries: he destroyed the cities of Sora and San Severo to the ground and confiscated the assets of the Abbey of Montecassino, after which he declared his intention to march into Northern Italy and subsequently into Germany, to re-establish his direct control over all his dominions.

(Psychological Warfare: Demoralization/Inducement-Counteraction: Tactical Response-Planning: Formulation/Aim)

Frederick, however, had no intention of attacking the papal dominions and declaring war on the Roman Curia, since his goal was still to obtain the revocation of his excommunication and the reconciliation of Gregory, which was essential for true stability in his territories. At the same time, the pope lacked the military forces to defeat the emperor. It was therefore inevitable that negotiations would return to diplomatic channels. Gregory IX imposed difficult conditions: complete autonomy for the churches of southern Italy from the king and their exemption from taxes, as well as the cession of two cities and seven castles along the border between the Papal States and the Kingdom of Sicily. Despite this, Frederick granted the pope his requests, eager to end the dispute against him and focus on subjugating the North. In August 1230, the two factions signed the Treaty of San Germano, officially revoking Frederick's excommunication. To seal the renewed collaboration between the Papacy and the Empire, on September 1, Gregory and Frederick, along with the Master of the Teutonic Order, met for a public lunch.

(Fluid Intelligence: Problem Solving-Strategy: Adaptability-Social Engineering: Communication-Adaptability: Environmental)

Before leaving for the North, Frederick remained for about a year to organize the administration of Southern Italy, which he so much loved, even more efficiently. In 1231, he issued the Constitution of Melfi, the definitive evolution of the Assizes of Capua and Messina of ten years earlier, which gave the Kingdom of Sicily the most comprehensive legislative codification ever drawn up in Europe since the time of Emperor Justinian. It incorporated elements of Frederick's royal and imperial ideology, which presented the sovereign as an individual chosen by God to rule over men and defend the Church, the only true man capable of eliminating the natural human tendency toward fratricidal strife and chaos. During the same period, Frederick initiated an economic reform aimed at increasing agricultural production and encouraging exports. To increase the efficiency of state-owned land production, he replaced state-owned farms, managed by private individuals on behalf of the king, with large agricultural enterprises that answered directly to the central government. To increase trade, he established seven fairs in seven cities, and finally built new ports and warehouses to facilitate maritime trade. He also improved roads and urban infrastructure (he even founded new cities). Thanks to taxes on exports and

warehouses, the crown not only gained revenues from increased agricultural production but also obtained ever-increasing revenues from trade. Despite the ever-increasing revenues of the state coffers, the constant wars that Frederick fought in the following years pushed him to further increase taxes on the population. However, to limit waste due to bureaucratic corruption, the king established new commissions of inquiry to investigate suspicious cases[5].

(Crystallized Intelligence: Knowledge-Knowledge Application-Strategy: Building/Castling/Foresight-Reasoning: Abstract)

Mindful of the dramatic and chaotic events that had occurred during his childhood and adolescence, many of the taxes financed the defensive system of the Kingdom of Sicily, heavily strengthened by Frederick, as evidenced by the various castles he built in the region, which not only defended and administered the territories, but served as a direct symbol of the sire's authority and power.

(Strategy: Castling-Psychological Warfare: Reinforcements)

Frederick was finally able to focus on reestablishing his power in Northern Italy. When he announced his intention to hold an imperial diet in Ravenna for the winter of 1231, the Italian cities responded by blocking the Alpine passes, effectively preventing the German army from reaching the emperor. Frederick responded harshly, placing the communes under interdict, and, to prevent the pope from siding with his adversaries, he promulgated new and even harsher laws against heretics. In the meanwhile he allied himself with the Republic of Venice.

(Strategy: Building/Castling/Foresight-Tactics: Timing-Counteraction: Trap Evasion/Tactical Response-Psychological Warfare: Demoralization)

Just when a new conflict seemed about to break out, the Pope once again acted as mediator between the municipalities and the emperor: the cities would once again swear loyalty to Frederick, while the latter would accept the formation of a new Lombard League. The two sides agreed on the proposal and the war was avoided.

Having overcome, even if just partially, the submission of the Lombards, Frederick advanced further, returning to Germany after many years, determined to curb the policies of his son Henry and present him with an ultimatum. In fact, over the course of his last years, Henry (king under the name Henry VII, later revoked) had begun to increasingly disobey the orders of his father's councils, which were supposed to be the de facto administrators of Germany. Unlike his younger self, Frederick had no intention of entrusting his eldest son with royal power, even though he had now reached adulthood. Henry, for his part, likely harbored resentment toward his father, who had abandoned him in Germany when he was still a child and who never took care of him, indeed had even prevented him from exercising his title despite reaching adulthood. In particular, Henry had attempted to place the German princes under tighter control, although they were theoretically protected by diplomas awarded by Emperor Frederick himself. When Henry came to attack and militarily defeat the Duke of Bavaria, Frederick intervened, reestablishing the previous order, and on other occasions he had responded positively to requests for aid from the Teutonic nobility. Tensions between father and son further increased when Henry attempted to divorce the wife his father had chosen for him when he was still a teenager, the Duchess of

Austria, to marry the heir to the throne of Bohemia. On that occasion too, Frederick, needing the support of the Austrian duchy, put a damper on his son. However, when Henry again disobeyed his father's instructions, declaring the citizens of the city of Worms free from the control of their feudal lords, Frederick, at this point definitely tired of his son's rebellious actions, summoned him to the new Imperial Diet in Aquileia. In 1232, Henry was forced to publicly swear fealty to his father, vowing that he would no longer resist his political choices and declaring that he would be excommunicated if he did not fulfill his duties. However, once he returned to Germany, his habits did not change, and the German princes once again turned to Frederick for support. In 1235, the emperor returned again to Germany, this time leading an army, to settle the matter once and for all. Frightened, Henry attempted to ask for his pardon, but once he realized that conflict was inevitable, he openly rebelled against his father and was subsequently excommunicated by Gregory IX. The ensuing war was barely fought, as Frederick's advance was unstoppable and supported by the entire German nobility. Henry, fearful, once again submitted and begged his father for forgiveness, but he only granted him the *gratia* (that is, he avoided the death penalty, which was foreseen for treason), had him deposed and then arrested. In the following years, Henry was held semi-prisoner in various castles in Southern Italy, until, in 1242, he committed suicide by throwing his horse into a ravine. The entire conflict, and even more so his son's suicide, deeply saddened the emperor, as evidenced by many letters he sent to his other sons and daughters.

(Adversity Capacity: Mental Fortitude-Social Engineering: Leadership)

During his stay in Worms, Frederick remarried for the third time, to Isabella of England, sister of King Henry III, in order to gain political ties with the Plantagenate dynasty, closely related to the Welf dynasty, historically hostile to the Hohenstaufen (Emperor Otto IV had belonged to the Welf dynasty). The aim was to make peace with them once and for all, and to seal this, he gifted William I, the last descendant of the house, the town of Lunenburg before the wedding. The wedding was celebrated in a sumptuous manner to demonstrate the wealth and power of the crown. During this period he established a new imperial judicial court for Germany modeled on the new courts he had recently created in Sicily[6].

(Crystallized Intelligence: Knowledge Application-Strategy: Building-Social Engineering: Influence Building-Psychological Warfare: Reinforcements)

The time for peace, however, had not yet arrived, as Frederick announced a new military expedition into Northern Italy, once again to further subjugate the communes. Again with the aim of placating the Pope and avoiding an alliance between him and the Lombard cities, Frederick attended the translation of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, who had been canonized a few years earlier by Gregory IX, going in procession wearing a simple gray tunic. He made donations to her new burial and asked the Franciscans who guarded it to pray for him and the saint.

(Strategy: Castling-Counteraction: Trap Evasion-Psychological Warfare: Reinforcements)

Before leaving, Frederick confirmed to the Teutonic Order his missions of evangelization and colonization of the Baltic territories, where the chivalric order was creating a veritable state from Latvia to Estonia, presenting itself as a benefactor and once again defender of Christianity. The

goal was also to extend his authority, to which the Teutonic Order responded, beyond the borders of his own empire, as it had already done with the feudal subjugation of Cyprus.

(Strategy: Building-Psychological Warfare: Reinforcements)

When Frederick declared a new imperial diet in the city of Piacenza, the discontented of the Lombards returned, and the Lombard League was formed once again. Gregory IX feared a clash between the municipalities and the emperor and attempted to mediate again, but this time Frederick ignored his advice and began his military actions by dispatching five hundred knights to the Po Valley to prepare for his arrival. Meanwhile, the papal legates had convinced the city of Piacenza to reject imperial authority and side with the League, angering Frederick. The cities, meanwhile, unanimously rejected the sovereign's demands, and Gregory in turn hardened his position against the conflict. A clash was then inevitable: Frederick entered Italy with his army and began a series of military operations in the Northeast (present-day Veneto), achieving initial successes and defeating the city of Vicenza. His efforts, however, were diverted after a few months, in February 1237, to Austria, where the local duke had rebelled against him.

(Strategy: Building/Logistics-Tactics: Execution)

Within two seasons Frederick reached Austria, subdued the duke and organized a new diet in Vienna, in which he had his second son Conrad elected as new king of Germany, ensuring the succession to the throne and placing him under the tutelage of the Archbishop of Mainz, Sigfrid III.

(Strategy: Building/Castling)

In September 1237 Frederick was back in Italy, now with an even larger army: 2,000 knights and over seven thousand infantry, joined by other men from Italian cities loyal to the emperor and an army of a further 6,000 men from the Kingdom of Sicily, for a total of around 15,000 soldiers, a decidedly remarkable number for the late Middle Ages.

(Strategy: Logistics)

Frederick then began his offensive. He first headed for Mantua and Bergamo, but both cities, frightened, submitted to the emperor and allowed his army to pass. His objective was then Brescia, the second most powerful city in the League after Milan. On the way there, however, the imperial army was blocked at the castle of Montichiari, where a handful of League forces managed to hold out long enough for the main Lombard army to reach Brescia to defend it.

The League's army had positioned itself in a favorable position along the Oglio River, sufficient to deter the emperor from either attacking Brescia or attempting a pitched battle. The two armies awaited the other's action for fifteen days, but Frederick's fear of running out of supplies prompted him to attempt a diversionary strategy to move the battle site. He therefore smuggled the false news into the Lombard camp that he was retreating to Cremona for the winter, when in reality, having cleared the camp, he headed toward the town of Soncino.

(Planning: Formulation-Strategy: Foresight/Logistics/Building/Adaptability-Deception: Misrediction/Buffing-Field Crafting: Setting Traps-Manipulation: Mass/Indirect/Logical)

The Lombards fell into the emperor's trap and abandoned their positions. Meanwhile, the army of Bergamo (the city had definitively sided with Frederick by this point) was ordered to take up

positions near the town of Ghisalba, above the Lombard army, while a small garrison near Civitate del Piano raised League standards to deceive the enemy and draw closer. They then warned the imperial army with smoke signals when the Lombards crossed the Oglio river.

(Planning: Process/Coverage-Strategy: Building-Tactics: Execution-Field Crafting: Setting Traps/Info Gathering-Manipulation: Direct-Deception: Misrediction/Info Control)

In less than a day, the imperial army advanced 18 kilometers and attacked the League's forces, which had just crossed the river and were in an unfavorable position. The impact of the imperial vanguard was such that it broke the Lombard ranks, composed by the soldiers of Piacenza and Milan. The Lombard commanders ordered a retreat toward the town of Cortenuova, where they could defend themselves around the Carroccio, the war chariot that symbolized the great victory they achieved in the Battle of Legnano against Frederick Barbarossa in 1176. It was then, however, that the forces of Bergamo descended from the North toward Cortenuova, encircling the Lombards. It was only the heroic resistance of the Phalanx of the Strong, composed of Milan's young nobility, that prevented the town's defenses from being broken before nightfall, when the fighting ended. Frederick ordered his men to attack at first light, and the Lombards, aware that they could not withstand a new imperial assault, attempted to flee during the night, but this was made difficult by the swamp that had formed in the previous days due to the rains. At dawn, Frederick entered Cortenuova and captured the Carroccio, after which he ordered the pursuit and destruction of the fleeing Lombard army. The army of Bergamo, expert in the area, outmaneuvered the Milanenese and Brescian forces, trapped by the flooding the Sorio and Oglio rivers. The Lombard forces were thus massacred or drowned while attempting to flee into the river, leading to the destruction of their entire army.

(Planning: Process-Tactics: Execution/Timing-Field Crafting: Setting Traps)

Frederick's enormous success opened to him the doors of many Italian cities, which submitted with the exception of Piacenza, Milan, and Brescia (which considered the emperor's conditions too harsh). Frederick returned to Cremona triumphantly and paraded his army through its streets, carrying the Carroccio as a trophy, which was then sent to Rome as a warning to both the Pope and the Guelph party. Some Lombard leaders were instead captured, tried and executed

(Psychological Warfare: Reinforcements/Demoralization/Inducement)

Subsequent peace negotiations with the Lombard League were conducted with difficulty and ultimately stalled over one specific point: Frederick had no intention of leaving the exercise of justice to the municipalities, which, according to his ideology, could only belong to the sovereign, guaranteed by divine will. The Lombard cities' stubborn refusal to recognize this right, despite having accepted all the emperor's other conditions, led to the continuation of the war. Unlike his grandfather Frederick I, the emperor had no intention of making compromises and considered himself powerful enough to completely subdue his enemies[7].

(Adversity Capacity: Perseverance)

In May 1238, the emperor recalled new troops from Germany, and the following month, to strengthen his ties with the nobility of northeastern Italy, he married his daughter Selvaggia to Ezzelino da Romano, his Italian lieutenant in the region.

(Social Engineering: Influence Building)

He then attacked Brescia and attempted to capture it, but after several months of unsuccessful siege, he was forced to abandon his attempt and retreated to Cremona for the winter.

Meanwhile, the pope had become increasingly hostile to the emperor, not only because of his campaigns in northern Italy, not only because the imperial party in Rome was getting stronger and stronger, but also because Frederick had arranged a marriage between his son Enzo and a Sardinian princess, Adelasia, despite recognizing the church's rule over the island. Gregory considered this a betrayal and decided to side with the municipalities, joined by the maritime republics of Genoa and Venice (the latter switching sides, fearing an excessive strengthening of the imperial party in Veneto). In March of 1239 Gregory IX excommunicated Frederick, and this time the excommunication will never be withdrawn, making the break between empire and church definitive.

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CHAPTER V
THE ANTICHRIST ON EARTH: THE ETERNAL WAR IN ITALY AND THE END OF THE DREAM (1239-1250)

On July 1, 1239, an encyclical by Pope Gregory IX (perhaps written by the energetic Cardinal Raniero Capocci, archenemy of the imperial party) spread terrifying news throughout Europe: the agent of the Antichrist had awakened and was ready to destroy the world. However, he was neither the devil nor an unknown man, but the Roman Emperor, King of Sicily and Jerusalem, Frederick II Hohenstaufen. It must be said that most of Europe's rulers did not respond to the pope's call for war against the emperor, except for the King of Bohemia and the Duke of Bavaria in Germany. The church's apocalyptic propaganda, however, was very successful in Italy.

In response, the emperor began to spread his own propaganda that portrayed himself with Christological traits: in his public letters he compared Jesi (his hometown) to Bethlehem, described himself as a "new David" and associated his empire with the concept of a messianic return. He also called the pope himself an Antichrist[1].

(Deception: Sophistry-Manipulation: Mass-Tactics: Boldness-Psychological Warfare: Reinforcements)

The clash between the Papacy and the Empire prevented either from facing a huge threat in Eastern Europe: the Mongols, led by Batu Khan (grandson of Genghis Khan), had defeated the Teutonic Order in Poland and were preparing to invade Europe. The emperor did not intervene, declaring that he would fight only if his excommunication were lifted, an offer Gregory refused. Fortunately for both, the death of the Mongol emperor put an end to the foreigners' military objectives in Europe.

Meanwhile, Frederick strengthened the castles of Southern Italy and forbade the clergy of the Kingdom of Sicily from traveling to Rome without royal permission, in order to prevent communication with the Pope[2]. Furthermore, in early 1240, the fleet of Pisa, a republic allied to the emperor, defeated that of Genoa and placed a naval blockade on the city to prevent a papal council in the area.

(Strategy: Castling-Counteraction: Trap Evasion/Tactical Response)

After gaining control of Viterbo, in northern Lazio, Frederick considered occupying Rome as well, but the decision not to attack the city directly (which would have eliminated any possibility of being lifted from excommunication) led him to abandon this plan, and he instead concentrated on controlling the Romagna region. Having reconquered Ravenna, he laid siege to Faenza, later planning to besiege Bologna as well, but since Faenza capitulated after eight months, he had to reschedule his objectives. Meanwhile, the pro-papal Campanian city of Benevento was also occupied.

(Planning: Process-Strategy: Building/Foresight)

On August 22, 1241, news of Gregory IX's death arrived unexpectedly. Frederick, hoping to initiate peace negotiations with his successor, retreated to the Kingdom of Sicily to await the

outcome of the cardinal election. The College of Cardinals, however, was deeply divided, and strong political tensions were raging in Rome. After several difficulties, Celestine IV was elected in October, but just the following month he too died. Since many cardinals had abandoned Rome for fear of political reprisals, there were no further papal elections for a year and a half, leaving the throne of Peter vacant.

Frederick did not take advantage of the situation to seize control of Rome; instead, he devoted himself once again to the administration of the Kingdom of Sicily and strengthened its fleet. On only two occasions did he interfere in the politics of the Papal States: in 1242, he destroyed some territories surrounding the Holy City to block the attempt of the city's lay governor to gain new influence and dominion over Rome. What really worried Frederick, however, was the defection of Archbishop Siegfried III of Magozna, who had gone over to the papal side, but was still the guardian of his son Corrado, King of Germany.

In June 1243, a new pope, Innocent IV, was finally elected. Frederick hoped that the new pontiff would initiate peace negotiations, but he was quickly forced to realize that he was as intransigent, if not more so, than his predecessor. Meanwhile, in the autumn of that year, a cardinal hostile to the emperor, Raniero of Viterbo, urged his hometown to rebel against Frederick's authority, who responded with a siege. However, this was unsuccessful and forced the emperor to retreat from Lazio. Despite of that his attempts at mediation with Innocent IV did not stop; indeed, he promised the pontiff that he would accept his control over Viterbo and other territories in central Italy and that he would free the war hostages, even repaying the damages caused during the war, if only the pontiff would lift the excommunication against him. What he could not accept, however, was a pardon for the Lombard League, which he considered guilty of high treason. Furthermore, the pope continued to reject any negotiation that did not involve the absolute humiliation of imperial power. Despite the pope's intransigence, Frederick did not abandon the path of diplomacy, at least not until the pontiff, in a clear sign of disdain for Frederick's geographical proximity, moved first to Genoa and then to Lyon.

The arrival in Europe of the new fall of Jerusalem in 1245 (the truce signed by Frederick in 1229 had expired six years earlier) gave the emperor hope that, in exchange for a commitment to a new crusade, he could finally make peace with the Church. He even went so far as to grant the pope the role of arbitrator in the dispute with the Lombard League, but it was all in vain: the pontiff's opposition was total. Indeed, in June 1245 the Pope convened a council in Lyon which would have as its central theme the clash with Frederick[3].

(Adversity Capacity: Perseverance)

During the Council of Lyon, the Pope declared Frederick deposed from both the titles of Roman Emperor and Sicilian King, asserted his authority over the Kingdom of Sicily as its feudal lord, and forbade all Christian rulers from collaborating with the former emperor, under penalty of excommunication. The protests of Frederick's ambassadors, who not only attempted to propose new mediations but also denounced the illegality of the Pope's action, were to no avail (it had never happened before that a pontiff had declared an already crowned emperor deposed).

Frederick then appealed to public opinion and the solidarity of other European rulers: the Pope had no right to revoke a throne guaranteed by God, and if he had been deposed, what safeguarded other kings from being replaced in the future?

(Reasoning: Inductive-Deception: Sophistry-Psychological Warfare: Abusing Insecurities)

Frederick's request for mediation to King Louis IX of France was, however, blocked by Innocent, who managed to befriend the king's brother and weaken the imperial party at the French court in exchange for territorial promises in Provence.

In May 1246, Innocent's demands for deposition were granted by the ecclesiastical princes, who appointed Henry Raspe, the Lagrave of Thuringia, as the new king of Germany. Frederick had appointed him as the new guardian of his son Conrad after the defection of Siegfried III, but he had also betrayed him. None of the secular princes, however, defected to the papal side. Henry defeated Conrad in battle at Frankfurt, but his subsequent siege of the city of Ulm ended in defeat, and he fell ill and died in early 1247. Upon his death, William of Holland was elected the new anti-king, but his power was too limited to truly challenge Frederick's hold on the empire.

Meanwhile, in June 1246, Innocent had declared a crusade against Frederick, granting all the privileges of combatants in the Holy Land to those who declared war on the emperor in Germany, Italy, Poland, and France.

He even went so far as to organize a conspiracy to assassinate Frederick. The emperor found secret documents in a monastery in Parma that spoke of a plot to eliminate him and his son Enzo, who had become lieutenant of the imperial forces in Italy, but which did not directly name any conspirators. A few weeks later, the Count of Caserta sent messengers to warn him of the real nature of an assassination attempt. The emperor launched an investigation that exposed Tebaldo, imperial podestà of Parma, as the leader of the plot. He answered to the pope's orders and implicated many nobles from northern and southern Italy, as well as several imperial administrators, in the plot[4].

(Field Crafting: Info Gathering-Counteraction: Trap Evasion-Reasoning: Abductive)

The conspirators, discovered, entrenched themselves in the castle of Salerno. The emperor marched against them, first defeating the papal forces sent to their aid in Umbria. He then laid siege to the castle and, upon its surrender, punished the traitors with extreme severity: the women were burned at the stake or imprisoned for life, the men blinded, then mutilated, and finally drowned. The leaders of the conspiracy were tortured and horribly mutilated and sent to the cities of the kingdom to die in agony in public squares as a warning to all the emperor's enemies. Meanwhile, Frederick committed himself to restoring order in the territories of the southern nobles who had betrayed him.

(Strategy: Castling-Psychological Warfare: Inducement/Demoralization)

In 1247, Frederick convened a Diet in Cremona, and the situation in Italy seemed to be more favorable to his cause: Viterbo and Vicenza had returned to his control, and Boniface, the noble who controlled Montferrat, had re-sworn his loyalty. The experience of the conspiracy led the emperor from then on to trust only his relatives: his sons and grandsons were appointed as executors of imperial power throughout Italy, and in particular, his fourth son, Henry, was named

the new co-king of Sicily. He married his illegitimate son, Manfred, to the daughter of the Count of Savoy, thus gaining his support. Meanwhile, the Pope rejected the emperor's final attempts at mediation and even requested military support from the King of France, further widening the conflict.

(Strategy: Building)

Frederick prepared to face the enemy forces and cross the Alps, but just as he was about to do so, news reached him that Parma had rebelled against him and had fallen under the control of Innocent IV's brother-in-law. Fearful of a new revolt by the Lombard League, Frederick decided to first focus on extinguishing any possible insurrection. Parma's resistance, however, was stubborn, despite Frederick's cutting off supplies to the city and employing psychological warfare tactics such as beheading and throwing enemy bodies over the city walls.

(Psychological Warfare: Inducement/Demoralization)

The siege, in fact, proved a major defeat for the emperor: he was caught off guard by a sortie from the city's forces, which destroyed his camp, weakened by the abandonment of some of his knights, distracted by a deceptive maneuver by the papal army. The defeat of the imperial army provoked the rebellion of other municipalities in Emilia and Romagna. Soon after, the cities of Lombardy and Veneto also vigorously resumed the fight against the emperor, also incorporating others, and during a battle in Emilia, the son of Frederick, Enzo, was captured by the Lombards and imprisoned in Bologna.

The conflict continued throughout 1249 and 1250, with victories on both sides and a stalemate that slightly favored the imperials, but Frederick's health began to deteriorate, forcing him to retreat to the Kingdom of Sicily and leave command of operations to his sons or lieutenants. On December 13, 1250, having been ill with typhus or septicemia, the emperor died, leaving as his heirs the King of Germany, Conrad, and his two other sons, Henry and Manfred. The universal empire he coveted, however, was doomed to failure: the Swabian forces in Germany were defeated after Conrad's death, which was followed by twenty years of anarchy in the empire, while Manfred's attempt to stop the French invasion of the Kingdom of Sicily, begun in 1261, ended with his death in the Battle of Benevento and the definitive end of the Hohenstaufen dynasty.

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