

Handbook of Medieval Studies

Terms – Methods – Trends

Edited by
Albrecht Classen

Volume 1

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Marilyn Sandidge

Kantorowicz, Ernst Hartwig (May 05, 1895, Posen – September 09, 1963, Princeton, NJ).

K. was born in Posen (now Poznań, Poland), capital of the homonymous Prussian province, from a rich family of assimilated Jewish industrialists. His parents, Joseph and Clara Hepner, brought him up in the culture and values of the German nation, which he felt to be part of until the coming of Nazism. Destined to work in the paternal firm, he undertook commercial studies in Hamburg, up to the outbreak of the First World War, which he took part in as a volunteer. He fought on the French front, where he was wounded in Verdun; he was then sent to Russia and Turkey, where he came into contact with the Mediterranean and Oriental culture, which would be very important for his subsequent research. In 1918, he matriculated at the University of Berlin, where he attended the lectures of the Islamist Carl Heinrich Becker. In a short time, he left his studies again, to fight against the rebel Polish in Posen and the spartakist in Berlin. In 1919 he went to Munich to enroll in the Faculty of Economics. Here he attended Max WEBER's courses and took part in the repression of the second Bavarian People's Councils' Republic (*Räterepublik*), with the *Freikorps*.

In fall 1919 he was in Heidelberg to continue his university training. Here he attended lectures given by the historian of culture Eberhard GOTHEIN, by the national economist Edgar SALIN and by the historian of antiquity Alfred von DOMASZEWSKI. However astonishing it may seem, he did not attend courses on medieval history, though he came soon into contact, even of friendship, with the medievalists Karl HAMPE, Percy E. SCHRAMM and Friedrich BAETHGEN.

K. graduated under the direction of GOTHEIN in 1921, offering a dissertation on the nature of Muslim craftsmen guilds. In Heidelberg, K. was introduced to the circle of the poet Stefan GEORGE whose verses taught German youth to reconcile with its history, after the deep wound to the national

pride, caused by the catastrophic outcomes of the Great War and the severe sanctions imposed on Germany by the treaty of Versailles. In the circle of GEORGE, K. learned to temper his original nationalist ardor with cultural universalism, and became convinced that “science” and “life” do not have to be considered two different aspects in the living unity of the individual.

In this cultural milieu, he composed his first work: *Kaiser Friedrich II (Emperor Frederick II, 1212–1250)*. Even if the appreciation of his work among German medievalists was not unanimous at all, in 1930 K. was invited to teach Medieval History at the University of Frankfurt, at first as honorary professor, and then as an ordinary professor. Nevertheless, he could teach for only a little time, because in April 1933, a Nazi law compelled all Jewish professors to retire from teaching unless they had fought in the First World War or against the communist Spartakists in the immediate period after the war. For K., that was the case, but he stopped his teaching all the same, in polemic against an obtuse anti-Semitic rule that hurt his person and values.

In August 1934, he was asked to swear faithfulness to Hitler, but he refused to do it and chose to retire, when he was only thirty-nine years old. Nevertheless, he did not leave Germany, though permanence in his country became extremely uneasy for him. Up to 1938, he lived mostly in Berlin, with some stays in Italy and in England, in Brussels and Paris, for research needs, for conferences and short teaching contracts. In 1938, when his survival in Germany had become impossible, K. left his country, went to England first, and then to the United States, where he got a teaching contract at the University of California, Berkeley. Here he published *Laudes regiae. A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Medieval Ruler Worship* in 1946. The quiet climate of these years suddenly broke off in 1949, when, in full McCarthyist hysteria, university professors were asked to subscribe to the oath of anticommunist faithfulness. In a pamphlet titled *The fundamental Issue*, K. sharply criticized a provision that undermined freedom of teaching, using the same arguments as fifteen years earlier, when he had protested against the proscription of Jewish teachers in Germany. In this way, he began a legal dispute with the University of California, which was to conclude successfully for him and his colleagues some years later when he had already left Berkeley, moving to the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton. Here he stayed from 1951 until his death and composed his last published work: *The King's Two Bodies*.

In the circle of GEORGE, K. conceived the idea to write his first book on the figure of Friederich II of Hohenstaufen, the Holy Roman emperor and King of Sicily. On the other hand, GEORGE had himself evoked the image of the Emperor in some poems, and Wolfram von den Steinen, a historian close to the circle, at the beginning of the Twenties had published works on

the Swabian sovereign. Generally speaking, the figure of Friederich II was widely present in German culture in the first decades of the 20th century, mostly because of Nietzsche's influence, which was pervasive even among historians. K. wrote his ponderous biography – more than six hundred pages – on *Kaiser Friedrich II* in less than five years, starting from 1922. The first volume (*Textband*) was published in 1927; in 1931 the second volume (*Ergänzungsband*), containing notes and historiographical excursus, came out. These were years of deep and concentrated work in various European archives and libraries like the Roman Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and the Berlin *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* – a privileged place for German historical erudition. Nevertheless, these were also years of discussion with the historians of whom he was disciple and friend, and of constant attention to the contemporary cultural debates. Surprisingly, the first readers caught only the literary aspect of that work, misunderstanding its complex structure and inspiring principles: this misunderstanding was to go on up to the Nineties. Today K.'s *Kaiser Friedrich II* is still able to astonish readers because of its singular mixture of erudition and vocation for the historiographical synthesis, vivid descriptions of milieus and characters, and the richness of images endowed with political meanings. But K. does not consider history a rhetoric exercise, aimed at edifying the readers' souls, pushing them to political action; he does not even consider history a fiction, opposed to the practices of scientific historiography, as they had been consolidated in the second half of the 19th century, with the progressive professionalization of that discipline. K. does not doubt the value of historical research; on the contrary, he thinks it is a fixed passage for whoever wants to accomplish a historiographical work that should not be charged with dilettantism.

In 1938, when he left Germany for good, K. brought with him the manuscript of his second work, mostly completed, that was to appear only in 1946: *Laudes regiae: A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Medieval Ruler Worship*. In this book, the fundamental importance of liturgy for the understanding of medieval reign and of the Middle Ages *tout court*, was acknowledged for the first time in a wide historical perspective.

This work may be considered a refined *pendant* of the research about *Ordines* that Percy E. SCHRAMM was carrying out in the same years. Besides, K. was able to enrich his volume with the contribution of the musicologist Manfred F. BUKOFZER, which showed that musical evidence could represent a precious source for historians. The existence of liturgical songs in honor of the sovereigns was already known, for example on the occasion of Charles the Great's coronation: K. reconstructed the complete history of *Laudes regiae*; he followed their tracks back to antiquity, and tied their origins to the fusion of

late-Roman formulas with Anglo-Irish elements; he showed that, during Pipin's reign or, at most, at the beginning of Charlemagne's, those formulas and elements had ripened in the expression of the Frankish idea of regal priesthood, according to which the king stood for the terrestrial image of Christ, lord of the universe. Then, K. followed the developments of that idea in the Roman Curia, in the Norman Kingdoms of Sicily, Normandy and England, in Dalmatia and in the Venetian colonies, up to their late, disquieting resonance in an hymn of Fascist Italy, "in a so exhaustive way that on this topic little remains to add" (P. E. SCHRAMM, "Review to Selected Studies," *Erasmus. Speculum Scientiarum* 18 [25-VIII-1966], 451).

While *Laudes* deals prevalingly with high Middle Ages, when the worship of *rex-sacerdos* was strong, *The King's Two Bodies* goes through high and low Middle Ages. This work was begun in the late Forties at the University of California, Berkeley and was finished at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, where the atmosphere was free of material worries; it had been solicited from the conversation of famous scholars, such as Max RADIN, Erwin PANOFSKY, Andreas ALFÖLDI, Kurt WEITZMANN, Theodor E. MOMMSEN, Harold CHERNISS, and Leonardo OLSCHKI. This work moves from the theory of the 16th-century English jurist Edmund Plowden, according to which the king's person has a double body: the natural, mortal body and the political, invisible, incorruptible one.

While in *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France* (*Les Rois thaumaturges*), Marc BLOCH reconstructed the sacral aspect of the ancient European monarchies, showing anthropological sensitiveness for the "collective representations," K. chronologically inventories those materials of the learned culture that constitute its symbolic foundations. In so doing, he makes use of scattered and various documents: theological and ecclesiological treatises, juridical and political essays, administrative acts and numismatics, literary and narrative sources, iconographic representations. K. describes the way in which the late-medieval juridical and political thought conceived the immortality of the monarchy beyond the mortal person in which it is embodied. He offers, then, the genealogy of the distinction between the public function and people who practice it.

In the U.S. scientific world, K.'s prestige has grown for many years, also in virtue of the scholars who have continued and still proceed in cultivating the research areas K. introduced, such as Michael CHERNIAVSKY, Ralph E. GIESEY, Robert L. BENSON, Sarah HANLEY, Richard A. JACKSON, and Lawrence M. BRYANT. On the other hand, in Europe K.'s name was still largely unknown in the Eighties, because the wide reputation of his juvenile work on the Emperor Frederick II (soon translated into English, 1931, and Italian,

1939) had gradually diminished. K.'s name was remembered only in the works of a few erudite researchers who generally just utilized the wide range of materials K. collected without any reflection on the structure of the volume and on the conception of history it contained. These interpreters, in a positivistic mood, often reproved him for having included legendary elements in the historical treatment, for not having made a distinction between myth and factual reality, in order to renew the imperial apotheosis in the reader. This was also the judgment expressed by the first critics of K.'s work, e. g., Albert Brackmann.

A similar prejudice characterized also the European reception of *The King's Two Bodies* up to the eighties. This work has usually been considered a mine of references to little known sources, "fascinating in style and sagacity," but "oblique, artificial, far-fetched," "eclectic in topics and eccentric in synopsis," as Theodor SCHIEFFER and Ernst RIEBSTEIN maintained. In *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (1975, 33f.), Michel FOUCAULT paid homage to K.'s genius: this was a turning point in K.'s critical reception that would be evident in France – with Marcel GAUCHET's, Louis MARIN's, Jean-Marie APOSTOLIDÈS' and Alain BOUREAU's works, but also with the translations of *The King's Two Bodies* into Spanish (1985), French (1988), Italian (1989) and German (1990). In 1982, Eckhart GRÜNEWALD (*Ernst Kantorowicz und Stefan George. Beiträge zur Biographie des Historikers bis zum Jahre 1938 und zu seinem Jugendwerk 'Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite,'* 1982) published a scrupulous biography that focused on K.'s German period. In 1993, Johannes FRIED and Robert L. BENSON (*Ernst Kantorowicz. Erträge der Doppeltagung*, 1997) organized an important international conference, concentrating on some neglected aspects of K.'s life and works. From that day on, in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and England has begun a veritable K. Renaissance, that has yet to end (*Geschichtskörper. Zur Aktualität von Ernst H. Kantorowicz*, ed. by Wolfgang ERNST, Cornelia VISMANN, 1998; *Ernst Kantorowicz (1895–1963). Soziales Milieu und wissenschaftliche Relevanz*, ed. Jerzy STRZELCZYK, 2nd ed., 1996; 2000; Kay SCHILLER, *Gelehrte Gegenwelten. Über humanistische Leitbilder im 20. Jahrhundert*, 2000; Roberto DELLE DONNE, "'Historisches Bild' e signoria del presente. Il 'Federico II imperatore' di Ernst Kantorowicz," *Le storie e la memoria. In onore di Arnold Esch*, ed. Roberto DELLE DONNE, Andrea ZORZI, 2002, 295–352). The influence of his work in medieval and modern studies is particularly, but not exclusively, evident among the historians of kingship, ritual, and ceremony; just to mention few names: Alain BOUREAU (*Le simple corps du roi. L'impossible sacralité des souverains français, XV^e-XVIII^e siècles*, 2nd ed. 2000), Natalie ZEMON DAVIS ("History's Two Bodies," *American Historical Review* 94 [1989]: 1–10), Sergio BERTELLI (*The King's Body: Sacred Rituals of*

Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, 2001), Johannes FRIED and Patrick GEARY (*Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography*, ed. Gerd ALTHOFF, Patrick J. GEARY, and Johannes FRIED, 2002). Unlike the majority of medievalists, who are not well known outside the specialists' circles, K. has become a benchmark also for literary critics (David NORBROOK, "The Emperor's New Body: Richard II, Ernst Kantorowicz, and the Politics of Shakespeare Criticism," *Textual Practice* 10 [1996]: 329–57), social and political scientists (Charles TAYLOR, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2004; Mauro CALISE, "Corporate Authority in a long-term Comparative Perspective-Differences in Institutional Change between Europe and the United States," *Subsidiarität als rechtliches und politisches Ordnungsprinzip in Kirche, Staat und Gesellschaft*, 2002), philosophers (Giorgio AGAMBEN, *Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*, 2005; *Il regno e la gloria. Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo*, 2007) and gender researchers (Cynthia HERRUP, "The King's Two Genders," *Journal of British Studies* 45 [July 2006]: 493–510).

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