

## **FREDERICK II, KING OF SICILY AND HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR 1194 TO 1250**

Who was Frederick II? How much do you know about him? On the assumption that many of his numerous audience of U3A members knew rather little about him, Mike Head offered a fascinating insight into the life, pursuits and significance of this powerful European ruler spanning the 12th and 13th centuries.



At the young age of four Frederick became King of Sicily on his father's death. His mother died soon after and Frederick was declared to have come of age in 1208, then crowned King of Germany four years later. Most significantly, he had inherited the position of Holy Roman Emperor by the age of 26 and so became the pre-eminent ruler in Europe. This position gave him the opportunity of undertaking a Crusade in the ongoing sequence of clashes between Christian and Muslim. Such facts suggest a determined, brave and strong character with a firm commitment to politics and religion. One of the most important contribution of Frederick II were the Constitutions of Melfi, the foremost great legal code of the Middle Ages basing political society in a pyramidal structure. Perhaps not surprisingly, though, Frederick's dominant position prompted papal jealousy and there were several clashes between the two significant rulers of temporal and spiritual powers.

There was, though, quite another side to this man of dominion which particularly intrigued Mike Head. Frederick was an especially cultured person and his court became a focus of new styles of literature, poetry, music and he also introduced

scientific ideas from the east. One particularly important contribution was Frederick's favouring many of the styles of other cultural centres. Arabic, Spanish and Celtic influences are clearly employed in his own poetry with the more basic sounds and traditions of the troubadours including a use of rhyme and rhythm echoing through his own verse as well as the development of the sonnet beginning to emerge as seen in the adoption of 11 beats in many lines of poetry. Such trends were much admired by Dante who praised the cultural role of Frederick II in the development of Italian poetry.



Straddling West and East, Sicily under Frederick II played a pivotal role in European politics, religion and culture which makes him a person of particular significance who deserves further acknowledgement from people of today's world. Mike Head was warmly thanked for introducing his audience to Frederick's contribution to our world and its development and gave us an eagerness to study him further.