

[From Prof. Robert Lowie, Anthropology]

January 29, 1940

President R. G. Sproul,
California Hall,
Campus.

Dear President Sproul:

In re Professor Ernst Kantorowicz

Owing to a clerical error or the postman's delinquency, I received no notice of last Friday's meeting of the Committee on History; and only through chance encounters with Professors Tatlock and H. R. W. Smith did I learn of the action taken. Since I deplore what I gather to have been the Committee's recommendation, I shall herewith express and document my own convictions.

In my opinion Professor Kantorowicz is intellectually superior to any permanent member of our History Department; he represents a different order of intelligence and scholarship. I base this verdict on a careful perusal of his book on Frederick II; on the reviews of it; and on the judgments expressed in correspondence by his former associates in England and elsewhere. The suggestion, which has been made, that the latter were prompted mainly by charitable sentiments toward a refugee is an insult to the distinguished scholars in question.

At the meeting which for reasons stated I did not attend some adverse German reviews were presented, I learn, and presumably they affected the decision reached. But in fairness to you as well as to Dr. Kantorowicz there should be offered a fair sampling of expert comments in their totality. I have therefore transmitted to Professor Tatlock a copy of a review by the late Professor Haskins, America's foremost medievalist; and I am now appending to this letter a second copy and three German reviews. The unqualifiedly eulogistic one in the *Historisches Jahrbuch* of 1931 effectively disposes of criticisms leveled at the book prior to the publication of the supplementary volume with the supporting notes.

On the basis of my own reading and the several reviews I have seen, the following opinions have crystallized in my mind:

Kantorowicz's book is universally recognized as a work of literary distinction and of original ideas.

For a man of thirty-two (in 1927) it seems an amazing feat of scholarship. Naturally the author was not omniscient, and specialists have discovered errors. But dry as dust historians, too, occasionally lapse into inaccuracies.

The interpretation of the great emperor is doubtless colored by hero-worship. This may at least in part be set down to youthful exuberance. I venture to point out in this connection that a Departmental candidate for the Ehrman professorship has pronounced Masaryk *the* leading statesman of his period in Europe.

In short, Dr. Kantorowicz is a man of original ideas, high scholarly attainments, and consummate literary craftsmanship. His retention is important in the interests of the *University*, his departure would be a grievous loss.

I may add that his English, a slurring reference to the contrary notwithstanding, is very good; that he is an excellent teacher, lively in exposition, humorous, and thoroughly human.

Unfortunately the History Department, instead of enthusiastically urging Dr. Kantorowicz's permanent appointment, is bent on his elimination. It concedes—ungraciously—that he is of full professorial stature, but alleges that it can get more value out of any typical American-born scholar. I have, with much effort, succeeded in extracting statements as to wherein such superiority of service is supposed to lie and can interpret them in no other way than the following:

The Department is opposed to the appointment of brilliant scholars and favors commonplace men who can be set at Departmental chores.

I regard this policy as unsalutary and even unpractical. In a large Department indispensable routine tasks can certainly be delegated to a few members of the staff.

I wish further to register the opinion, which I believe is shared by some other Committee members, that the Departmental attitude has been, not merely in the matter of Professor Kantorowicz but throughout all the Committee's deliberations, little short of scandalous. The Department has made proposals which some of us consider not merely ill-advised, but preposterous. It has resolutely refused to look at its own problems from the point of view of the University as a whole. I, for one, have been made to feel that it regarded us as poachers on the Departmental preserves. The Committee system may or may not be an ideal one; but so long as it remains operative, those who are honestly trying to do their duty under it can only be discouraged and sickened by such Departmental obstructionism.

Very sincerely yours,
[signed]
Robert H. Lowie

Postscript

I have now read three of the four articles adduced by Professor Paxson at Friday's meeting; one of them is at the moment unavailable. They embrace a critique by Albert Brackmann in the *Historische Zeitschrift* with a rejoinder by Kantorowicz and an "Epilogue" by Brackmann and a thirty-five page article by K. Hampe.

Though I have seen only two of the controversial articles, it seems clear that the main issue revolves about a "positivistic" philosophy of history. I note as particularly important that

Brackmann closes his discussion (*Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. 141:477 f., 1929) with the statements: (a) that K.'s book, aside from two others, is the first significant attempt to elaborate medieval history on a wholly new foundation; (b) that K., too, is a "positivist," who "has based his book on a thorough study of the sources" (sein Buch durch gründliches Quellenstudien unterbaut hat).

Far more important is the long essay by Hampe, the outstanding medievalist referred to by Haskins as typical of the conservative historical school ("Das neueste Lebensbild Kaiser Friedrichs II," *ibid.*, vol. 146:441-475, 1932). It is inconceivable to me that this authoritative article by one who is a specialist on the very subject in question (he contributed the article on Frederick II to our American *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*) could be regarded as anything but a tribute of the first magnitude to Kantorowicz. There are many differences in interpretation, some corrections, but the tone is in part more than appreciative,--almost reverential. I will cull a few representative phrases:

..."the command of the sources revealed by this foundation extensively and intensively (i.e., vol. II) may be described as exemplary" (die Quellenbeherrschung, die dieser Unterbau in Weite und Enge enthüllt, darf als vorbildlich bezeichnet werden). P. 441.

"Never before, notwithstanding our respect for...has the material in its totality been worked through, exploited, and neatly expounded, as here." (Noch nie ist bei aller Achtung...das Gesamtmaterial so umfassend durchgearbeitet, ausgewertet u. reinlich vorgelegt, wie es hier geschehen ist.) P. 441.

On p. 441 f. tribute is paid to K.'s control of the historian's techniques as to detail; some of the "Exkurse" in vol. II are said to "be convincing by virtue of their meticulousness (in ihrer sorgfältigen Art überzeugend) and "leave little to be desired."

On p. 442 attention is called to the zealous re-examination that has gone into the second volume.

On pp. 442-444 Hampe lists the themes for further research suggested by K.'s book.

On p. 444, H. points out the dual character of K.'s work,—its careful accumulation of factual material culminating in a unified total picture and the subjective tang due to a definite world-view. The qualifications that follow, of course, largely bear on this subjective element; they are interlarded with expressions of the utmost esteem ("penetrating description," "notable achievement," p. 458; "always brilliantly formulated discussions," p. 472).

The closing paragraph reads as follows:

"What is involved in the difference of opinions as to the vigor of expression is often a difference of temperament. And as regards many other points of difference noted above, the

reader should consider that they are bound to accumulate precisely in face of an *exceptionally original achievement* (besonders originellen Leistung). Because here there is truly one of *extraordinary extent* (ungewöhnlichem Ausmass) is why in conclusion all those to whom the history of the last great Hohenstaufen emperor is a matter of concern may express their gratitude to the author."

As a result of this review I am more strongly convinced than before that K. represents an order of intellect, scholarship, and literary skill superior to that of any of our Campus historians.