Kantorowicz probably decided to become an historian during the first years of his association with Stefan George, in 1921 or 1922. History was supposed to play a crucial role in George's revitalization of the German nation. The Germans, whose national self-image was deeply wounded in 1918, would be taught to regard their own past as glorious and mythical, and this would inspire them to build a great future. Two important concepts shaped the Circle's approach to history: first, the idea that great men of history can serve as models (Vorbilder) for the men of the present day; and second, the concept of the "reenchantment of the world" (Wiederbezauberung der Welt), which held that an eternal spirit inhabits the bodies of history's great men and manifests its divine will in their actions.

The concept of Wiederbezauberung der Welt was in a sense a response, an antidote to what Max Weber had termed the "Entzauberung der Welt." Weber diagnosed the twentieth-century mind as one which no longer perceived magic in the world, which no longer saw the hand of the divine intervening in human affairs. The George circle sought to reintroduce a consciousness of the divine in the Germany of their day.

Kantorowicz subscribed to both notions, of Vorbilder and Wiederbezauberung der Welt as he revealed in a methodological speech that he gave at an historian's
conference in 1930. Most importantly, as shall be seen in subsequent sections, Kantorowicz wrote his youthful masterpiece, a biography of the Emperor Frederick II, very much under the influence of the Georgian approach to history.

The George Circle sought to create a pantheon of historical figures, to reawaken in the minds of their contemporaries the memory of the great men of the past, heroes who would serve as models for the twentieth-century German elite. The Circle's studies of great men were not merely intended to be ennobling in the sense that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers believed that knowing about history's great figures could enrich their minds and personalities. The historical works of the George Circle were of a different tenor. They sought to instruct for life and for action.

Nietzsche, ever-present in the Circle's thought, had outlined three sorts of "useful" history in his 1888 essay "The Use and Disuse of History." They were: the monumental, in which a past hero's life is generalized with the intent of inspiring men of the present to action; second, antiquarian history, in which one conserves and reveres the past; and third, critical history, which invites the reader actively to pass judgment on events of the past. 30 Of the

three, the Circle clearly emphasized monumental history in their historical works.

Friedrich Gundolf addressed this notion in his essay "Vorbilder" ("Models"), published in the 1912 *Yearbook for the Spiritual Movement*. He wrote that

> Every movement is formed, apart from those forces of the present which work in its favor or hinder it, upon its particular selection from history. It does not rise only through the figures and the wills of its actual leaders. It also rises through the past which animates it, that gives it force (not material), circumstance (not subject), impetus (not knowledge). Unlike nature and the present, history and the past are not there just to be observed and taken in. Rather they are to be selectively transformed. The spirits separate the living present from yesterday insofar as some of yesterday becomes force and some material.

History's primary role, for Gundolf, was to provide contemporary movements with direction.

George guided members of the Circle in choosing subjects for their books, the stars that would form the Circle's historical constellation. Many of the books dealt with men of Antiquity, especially Plato. The German Classical Period also figured prominently. Kantorowicz's

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Frederick the Second was the only work on a medieval personage. Lacking was a work on Dante, whom the Circle greatly revered. Plato, Caesar, Frederick, Napoleon, Goethe, Nietzsche: these figures embodied for the Circle "that which makes productive, awakens forces, increases lust for living." They were men who served transcendental ideals, and were imbued with a Mediterranean spirit of light, humanism and universalism, not expedience-minded pragmatists like Bismarck, whom Kantorowicz calls "that uncrowned founder of a northern kingdom, the lonely fallen vassal in the Saxon forest." Their spirit, their example, could guide men to new greatness. Therefore, writes Gundolf, "it is the duty of every living movement to keep alive its heroes in the present, to assimilate them into its own being and to convert the radiance that it receives from them into a new form."

In the materialistic mass culture of twentieth-century Germany, the Circle perceived an absence of great men, that culture had become too sterile to produce a hero. This,

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34 There were hopes that Ernst Robert Curtius or Percy Gothein would write the Circle's opus on Dante, but this task was never fulfilled. See Karlhans Kluncker, "Percy Gothein, Humanist und Erzieher," in Castrum Peregrini 171-72, 1986, pp. 40-41.


they held, was due in part to the fact that modern man had forgotten, or ceased believing in, his own divine nature. It was "a day when Kaisers are no more," as Kantorowicz wrote in his prefatory note to Frederick the Second. To revive this dead spirituality, the Circle's history-writing depicted a world of wonder, of mystery and of magic. More wondrous than anything, the Circle believed, is the eternal spirit of greatness which lives in heroes and is passed, like a torch, down through the ages. Germany of the 1920s needed a hero -- the Circle would show the Germans the torch and wait for a hero to pick it up.

Heroes are imbued with an eternal force, the Circle insisted, they are anything but ordinary men. As Kantorowicz wrote of Frederick, "Fate itself seemed to walk incarnate in the Hohenstaufen." A magical emanation surrounded heroes such as Alexander, Caesar, Frederick, and as many in the Circle would vouch, Stefan George himself. These great men, despite their differences in time and place and circumstance, somehow breathed the same divine air.

One particular anecdote illustrates this: the George Circle had gathered one evening for poetry readings and discussion. Someone in the Circle noticed Friedrich Gundolf sketching incessantly during the gathering. He asked Gundolf what he was drawing, and Gundolf replied that he was drawing the heads of the great men about whom he had

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38 Kantorowicz, p. 102.
written, i.e. Caesar, Shakespeare, Goethe and George. At the end of the gathering someone curiously looked at Gundolf’s drawings. All four were of the head of Stefan George.* One need hardly point out the biographical and visual differences among Caesar, Shakespeare, Goethe and George. But the essential for Gundolf was that all four were in communion with the same divinity, all were embodiments of the same spirit. Hence the heroes of history, like pearls along the string of time, are Gestalten, forms or figures which take their essence from something apart from themselves.

The George Circle’s particular notion of Gestalt was central to their approach to history. Friedrich Wolters, co-editor of the Yearbook for the Spiritual Movement, dealt with this important concept in his essay, "Gestalt," published in the 1911 Yearbook. The Gestalt, wrote Wolters, is what the history-writer or artist seeks. The history-writer or artist is not interested in cause and development, as these are merely shadows of the essential form, Urseinsform, a sort of Platonic form. The Gestalt in history is not the sum of cumulative development, but a flash of light at a given historical moment. It is the "carrier of eternal forces." The Gestalt is the "seal of the divine," and as such is timeless. 39 For the history-


* This anecdote was related to me by William A. Chaney. It is recounted in an essay on George written some forty years ago. Unfortunately, I am unable to provide a fuller citation.

Vanden Heuvel, 1989: Kantorowicz
writer it does not suffice to know the actions of a hero's life, and to organize them into a coherent narrative. Rather he must see the eternal force, the divine will expressing itself in those actions; he must view his subject as Gestalt.

To gaze upon this divinity of heroes, to see the godlike forces in them, is to have the ewiger Augenblick, the eternal moment or glimpse. The ewiger Augenblick, the Circle believed, conducts the life-giving spirits of past heroes into the men of the present and as such is a mystical experience. One member of the Circle, Ernst Bertram, wrote in 1917 that, "Any time an individual lives on and has influence beyond the borders of his personal lifetime is, as Jakob Burckhardt maintained, magic, it is a religious experience. 40 This on-going life and influence of an individual is the product of myth. One can enter into the fullness of myth, see the Gestalt is his subject through the ewiger Augenblick, a capacity which George sought to impart to his disciples. 41

Bertram wrote that each picture of a great man is formed by the limited perspective of the time viewing that great man. But if from his time-bound perspective, the


41 According to William Chaney, Kantorowicz at Berkeley often used the Greek word, Kairos, or "moment" to express the notion of ewige Augenblick.
historian captures the Gestalt of his subject, he adds to a living legend -- his Augenblick is eternal. Every Augenblick is indispensable to the entire legend.\(^{42}\) Bertram used the image of a geological movement to describe this: as the rock strata of a mountain slowly shift over the ages, one's view of that mountain imperceptibly, inevitably changes. A particular historian's view of a great man could not exist outside of his "geological epoch."\(^{43}\)

Kantorowicz most clearly stated his philosophy of history and his approach to the past in a paper called "The Limits, Possibilities and Duties in the Portrayal of the Middle Ages," which he delivered several years later at an historian's conference (Historiker Tag) in Halle on April 24, 1930. The paper was partly a defense of his controversial depiction of the Emperor Frederick, which will be discussed in some detail below. In Halle, Kantorowicz presented views that strikingly conformed to the Georgean view of history which he had imbibed during the 1920s. He in fact obliquely referred to himself as a "Georgean." He expressed his passionate hope that monumental history might inspire the German nation to rise out of its post-war

\(^{42}\) Bertram, p. 12.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.
debasement and assume its rightful place as a great world power. 44

Kantorowicz gave the historian’s pursuit of Gestalt, which Wolters and Bertram had touched on on a purely theoretical level, a methodological concreteness. If the historian wishes to capture the Gestalt of his subject, Kantorowicz maintained, he must cease viewing his subject in terms of cause and development, seeking the origin of a figure by examining all his precursors, or seeking to unravel his post mortem influence. For this sort of questioning relativizes an historical figure, erases contours, dissipates historical figures. The Gestalt is lost if one sees the subject merely as "the successor of preceding stages of development or the precursor of future stages of development," 45 wrote Kantorowicz.

No historian, if he "wants to capture a reflection, a picture, on the ever-changing surface of the pool of world history, can avoid constructing a frame. He must erect a

44 "Grenzen, Möglichkeiten und Aufgaben der Darstellung mittelalterlicher Geschichte" was never published. In his will, Kantorowicz stipulated that none of his unpublished papers were to be published. Later in life, he felt a great deal of intellectual distance from some of his earlier views and did not wish to have views expressed in papers which he had not released for publication attributed to him. The reader should bear this in mind when I quote from unpublished works. For the sake of convenience, I will cite the appropriate paper number from the copies of the respective papers at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York.

45 Kantorowicz, "Limits, Possibilities and Duties...," p. 12.
dam at some point in the flowing water, and hold up the flow for a moment." Thus in his biography of Frederick, Kantorowicz sought to "drive the flow of time out of history," to use Ranke’s words.\textsuperscript{46} He evaded that linear mode of questioning which asks always "where does it come from?" and where is it going?" With the flow of time dammed up, Kantorowicz could explore Frederick’s depths, recreate Frederick in his three-dimensional entirety.

To see the reflection on the pool of dammed-up water, the essential character of one’s historical subject, was Kantorowicz’s metaphor for the ewige Augenblick. Kantorowicz sometimes used the Greek work Kairos, or "the moment," to express this. For him, rendering this ewige Augenblick, this cosmic moment of insight into the past, was an artistic endeavor. The historian’s task, for Kantorowicz, was that of the epic poet -- to make myths and legends live for his contemporaries.

Kantorowicz wrote history with his contemporary readers foremost in his mind. At the Historiker Tag, he expressed his distress at the "hopelessness after the collapse" (of Germany at the end of World War One). He sensed that in Germany "doubt was predominant and the faith in the inner truth of the nation was shaken to its very foundations."\textsuperscript{47} To reaffirm this faith was Kantorowicz’s goal in writing

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 31.
history. His work sought to assure Germans that their day of greatness was not past, but still to come. He vowed to uphold the "fully irrational belief in a still-to-be-fulfilled task within Germany and with the Germans themselves." This reaffirmation of faith in Germany's national future was Kantorowicz's purpose in writing history. As he stated in Halle, "I can...provide an answer to the question posed to me about the scientific value of the historical work of the George-School. Their value is based exclusively on the fact that they serve the belief in the Day of the Germans, in the Genius of the Nation." During the 1920's Kantorowicz succumbed to the ideological partisanship which Weber had warned against over a decade before. He sought no transcendental, no objective historical truth, but to propagate the truth of the George Circle and the national rebirth which the Circle had prescribed for Germany. He derided those scholars who suggested "that one cannot write history as a follower of George, or as a Catholic or Protestant or Marxist, but only as a truth-seeking man." The scientific approach, which "believes it will uncover that rosy chestnut of truth without bias and without the application of one's entire humanity," was self-deluding, according to Kantorowicz.

48 Ibid., p. 32.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., p. 24.
They do not "realize that truth doesn't lie in the facts and in the things, rather in the man who examines the facts and things."\textsuperscript{51}

Kantorowicz, like the other history-writers in the George Circle, entered the ideological fray of Weimar, offering his particular antidote to Germany's malaise. The Circle did not engage directly in politics. As George once told Max and Marianne Weber, all he needed to know about politics he could find out chatting with Gundolf's maid. But the Circle sought a transformation of the German soul as a prerequisite to any political strides. By showing the Germans the Genius and Gods of their past, they sought to prepare the way for new Gods in the future, to "stir up the air so that great deeds blossom and the spirits search for coming heroes." The historian's role, as Gundolf wrote, was to "call up the forces of history and their powers, the nations and the leaders."\textsuperscript{52}

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\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p. 25.
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FREDERICK II - KANTOROWICZ'S YOUTHFUL MASTERPIECE

The fruit of Kantorowicz's association with Stefan George came in 1927 with the publishing of his biography of the Hohenstaufen Emperor, Frederick the Second (1194-1250), the book which established Kantorowicz as a prominent medievalist in Germany. George's influence on the book was profound. Eckart Grünewald has opined that George may have even suggested the topic for the book.\(^53\) Kantorowicz himself once said that he probably could not have completed the arduous work on the book, which began in 1924 and entailed several research trips to Italy, without the inspiration and support of George.\(^54\) As the book neared completion, Kantorowicz would read aloud passages of his manuscript at gatherings of the Circle in Heidelberg. George, who lived with Kantorowicz during part of 1927, worked scrupulously on the manuscript, editing and making suggestions to Kantorowicz, and he conducted all the negotiations with the publisher, Georg Bondi, on Kantorowicz's behalf.\(^55\)

In 1927, the Georg Bondi house in Berlin published Frederick the Second. Kantorowicz, then 32 years old, had his book appear in the Blätter fur die Kunst series, the

\(^{53}\) Grünewald, p. 59.

\(^{54}\) Grünewald, p. 150.

\(^{55}\) Grünewald, p. 149-57.
label under which Bondi published books by the entourage surrounding the poet George. Frederick the Second bore the signet of a swastika, which marked all the non-poetical works emanating from the Circle. The book was astonishing. It was a complex, erudite magnum opus, painstakingly researched, rich in symbolism and imagery, from an unknown private scholar who had no professorship, no Habilitation, not even a book review to his name. Moreover, Kantorowicz was purely self-taught in the field of medieval history. As his friend Percy Schramm has pointed out, Kantorowicz concentrated on ancient history at Heidelberg and never attended a lecture or seminar on medieval history.

As if to emphasize the boldness of his work, Kantorowicz did not deign to include a single footnote or

56 George had been introduced to the swastika symbol by Alfred Schuler, a neo-pagan, and along with George, a member of the so-called "Cosmic Circle," which met in Munich's bohemian quarter of Schwabing around the turn of the century. The swastika is an old pagan, some say Aryan, symbol. It symbolized fertility and vitality -- a wheel turning on itself, or the sun moving across the sky. The Circle was using the signet as early as 1910, years before the Nazis ever existed. The Georgean swastika had curved hooks, rather than right-angled hooks like the Nazi swastika. Malkiel suggests that Alfred Schuler may have befriended and influenced Adolf Hitler in Munich sometime during the 1910s, but provides no evidence to support this. One must note, however, that they continued to use the swastika during the 1920s, at a time when the symbol's association with the Nazis would have been obvious. After the Nazis came to power many writers from the Circle began to use a three-pronged swastika.

57 See Grunewald, p. 56, n. 136.
citation in the book, a move which many established historians must have considered downright impudent. The reason for the absence of footnotes was twofold. First, the historical works of the George Circle did not really strive to be statements in an on-going dialogue among academic historians. The book appeared from outside the German academic establishment and rejected the establishment’s fundamental tenet of the historian’s scientific impartiality. As George (who guided the writing of the book and helped edit it) once said: "Von mir aus führt kein Weg zur Wissenschaft." ("From me no road leads to science.") Frederick the Second appeared as a work of art, a monument to a monumental man.

As in much of George’s later poetry, there is a stone-like solidity to Frederick the Second, a sense of comprehensiveness and finality, as though the words were etched in marble rather than printed on the page. In its stark and clear contours and its many dimensions, Kantorowicz’s portrayal of Frederick resembles sculpture more than painting. It does not propose to illuminate an aspect, to render an impression, but to recreate an

58 Oswald Spengler and Keyserling, two of the most learned of the historical popularizers of the period, also wrote without using footnotes. Spengler’s view of history was closely akin to that of George and his circle, but I’ve come across no evidence to suggest that Spengler and George ever met.

59 Quoted in Edgar Salin, Um Stefan George, (Munich, 1948), p. 49.
historical figure in his three-dimensional entirety. The mass of factual details and the footnotes which document those details, so necessary to master when carving Frederick the Second, seemed to Kantorowicz superfluous in terms of the final work of art.

The second reason for eschewing footnotes was that George and Kantorowicz sought a broad readership for the book. They wanted to produce a work which would be read not only by academics and discussed at specialists' conferences, but one which would be grasped by the educated public, a work which would lead before the eyes of a defeated, postwar Germany the glorious pageantry of her medieval past. Kantorowicz wished above all, to show the Germans their national dignity.60

Kantorowicz's audacious book drew reactions, mostly suspicious, even hostile, a few guardedly enthusiastic, from academicians throughout Germany. Older professors in the German academy, who had been trained decades before in the tradition of Ranke, held scientific impartiality as the historian's highest goal. This impartiality entailed a certain distance from one's topic. Kantorowicz's book on Frederick had an ebullient tone, and was full of hero worship and obvious allusions to Germany's twentieth-century

60 Kantorowicz, "Limits, Possibilities, and Duties," pp. 29-33.
concerns. The book smacked of political activism in the ivory tower.

Traditionally, historians had soberly regarded Frederick’s messianism as propaganda shrouding his very mundane goal of increasing imperial power. Kantorowicz took Frederick’s claims of divinity seriously. Kantorowicz saw the Emperor as he wished to be seen, and in so doing he "practised, if he did not invent, a new historical method." If Frederick portrayed himself as Christ reincarnate, if his subjects saw him as a Messiah, then Kantorowicz, rather than subjecting this view to criticism, unmasking it as political bombast, offered it to his readers as living myth.

The unorthodoxy of the book made a response from the establishment inevitable, and Kantorowicz was drawn into debates with fellow historians regarding his methodology. His critics complained that he disregarded the "dignity of facts," and blurred the line between legend and historical truth. Albert Brackmann, the influential editor of the Historische Zeitschrift attacked Kantorowicz for giving his imagination créatrice too free a reign, for approaching his subject with an idée fixe. "Kantorowicz first felt the

Emperor, experienced him, looked at him; then he went to his source material," maintained Brackmann.62

This was an indictment which Kantorowicz would not have cared to repudiate. For him, the imagination créatrice, the historian's subjective judgements and predilections, were precisely what breathed life into the facts of the past, what gave history its vital force for present-day men and women. Kantorowicz's work was based on solid fact culled from scrupulous archival research -- no one disputed that. But Kantorowicz rendered these facts into an epic. The line between legend and historical truth, sacrosanct and immutable for historians like Brackmann, was ignored by Kantorowicz. He sought to make Frederick the Second live for the Germans of the 1920s; by burnishing the myth of him as well as investigating the facts of his life.

In terms of sales, the book was a tremendous success. It sold out shortly after its first printing (which produced only 2900 copies) requiring a second printing of 4400 copies in the following year. Translation into English and Italian and the third printing of 2200 copies followed in 1931, and the fourth printing of 3000 in 1936.63 Yakov Malkiel, a


63 Grünwald, p. 156.
young student in Berlin in the 1920s, remarks that Frederick
the Second "had the effect of a bombshell." It attracted
"thousands and thousands of readers bored by dry monographs,
yet scornful of merely glittering, gaudy biographies
romancées."64 The book was sold both in the fashionable
shops along Berlin's Kurfürstendamm and in the strictly
academic bookstores around the university.

The young in particular must have found in the book a
vibrant vitality lacking in the impersonal scientific
studies by traditional academicians. Frederick the Second
was a favorite among groups in the German Youth Movement
(Jugendbewegung). George's poetry had already struck a
chord with these romantically inclined German youths. This
was especially true of his volume Stern des Bundes (Star of
the Covenant) which proclaimed a chivalrous code of
devotion, struggle and sacrifice. Groups were known to
carry George volumes on their hiking and camping trips,
and he was apparently know to many of the well-educated
officers and volunteers fighting in World War One.
Kantorowicz once said that the youth groups would have
brought Frederick the Second along with them on their
camping trips had the book not been so heavy.65

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64Malkiel, p. 184.

65William Chaney related this to me.
FREDERICK THE SECOND AND THE AMORALITY OF POWER

Kantorowicz portrayed Frederick as youthful and ingenious, an entirely new type of ruler for the Middle Ages, a sort of reincarnation of both Caesar and Christ. He showed Frederick to be cosmopolitan, a great humanist — bold in his artistic taste, insatiably curious in the sciences. Indeed, for Kantorowicz, Frederick represented the dawning of the Renaissance. But there is also a demonic quality to Kantorowicz’s Frederick, a man who like Nietzsche’s Übermensch, casts aside all human limitations and enters a realm beyond good and evil. He obeyed only his own will, and feeling unconstrained by any conventions of governance, became a tyrant. Frederick’s tyrannical Führer-qualities were, Kantorowicz believed, necessary to revive a medieval empire in the throes of despair and decline. Kantorowicz saw many analogies between Frederick’s time and his own, and believed that the German of his day needed a Frederick-like Führer; he both prophesied and sought to hasten such a Führer’s advent.

The fresh childlike innocence of the young Hoehenstaufen provided a central theme of Kantorowicz’s book. The boy-king Frederick, orphaned in 1198, at the age of three, had been forgotten in the Holy Roman Empire. As the German princes fought their petty battles for sovereignty, and Pope Innocent III, the boy’s regent, acted as de facto Emperor, young Frederick, the verus imperator,
passed a strange and turbulent childhood in a fortress in Palermo, a childhood marked by events "more unreal and fantastic than all legend could invent." The Hohenstaufen's coming of age and his beginning to assert himself against Guelf forces, to unfold his "immense strength of will which had been left entirely untamed," was seen by his contemporaries as "the victory of the eternal CHILD, who with invisible weapons overthrows the mighty." (p. 160)

As he matured, Frederick retained his boyish looks and combined an astounding learnedness with childlike naiveté. Kantorowicz points out that even as Frederick reached maturity as emperor, "the whole imperial group was young, not only in spirit, but in years, incomparably young, full-blooded and alive." (p. 308) The young imperial group reflects the George Circle's image of itself -- the emphasis on youth was inseparable from the Circle, most of whom were in their twenties. The book reflected a widespread view among the German intelligentsia of the 1920s that only youth could spur a new beginning and save a decaying German culture.67

Frederick had appeared in one of medieval German's darkest hours. It was a time when factions were enriching

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66 Kantorowicz, Frederick the Second, p. 22. Henceforth in this chapter, page citations from Frederick the Second (Lorimer's 1931 translation) will appear directly in the text.)

themselves at the expense of the child-king, when the consciousness of Empire and of the German mission had faded into obscurity. A malaise much like what Kantorowicz had perceived in his own day had hung over Europe at the advent of Frederick. Kantorowicz’s description of the failed Children’s Crusade, "when hordes of boys and girls, seized with a blind enthusiasm and passionate fanaticism had poured into Italy," conjures images of the First World War, when the youth of Kantorowicz’s generation dashed fervently to their deaths at Langemarck: "people had gazed in depression at this hapless procession of ill-starred youngsters, moving to inevitable destruction..." And like the disillusioned post-war Germans, the people of Frederick’s time sought a new leader to guide them up from their depths: "the more gladly did they greet the festive progress of the Hohenstaufen boy." (pp. 59-60)

But the legal constraints of government impeded Frederick’s will to rule. "Every step he took in Germany had in one way or another to be accommodated to the princes’ wishes; he could not stir a finger in any direction without coming up against some constitutional obstacle." (p. 109) The political circumstances that Frederick encountered mirrored what many Germans perceived as the circumstances under the flawed Weimar government: a government crippled to inaction by constitutionalism, legal impediments and partisan strife. It was not until Frederick broke loose
from the stultifying constraints imposed by the feudal lords and established his Neues Herrschertum (new rulership) that the Empire could again flourish.

Kantorowicz depicts the cosmopolitanism and heterogeneity of Frederick's court with an affectionate attention to detail. The gaudy menagerie of Frederick's entourage -- a polyglot mix of Sicilian Normans, Germans, Turks, Arabs and Italians dazzled his contemporaries. The Emperor was the scion of a German family, yet he preferred to spend his time in Norman Sicily. He was raised as an Italian, a "child of Apulia," whose Germanic spirit, balanced and refined by the Mediterranean influence, produced "song and vision like Germany has never seen again." Frederick spoke many languages fluently and moved with ease in cultures outside of his own inheritance. He showed his love of the East and an interest in Arab culture, and introduced Byzantine pomp to his court. On Crusade, Frederick seemed more interested in discussing the Arab poets with the Sultan's delegate, Fakhru'd Din, than fighting. To the consternation of many crusaders, he signed a treaty with the Sultan himself and had himself crowned King of Jerusalem.

For Kantorowicz, cosmopolitanism entailed a love of variety and an openness to the strange and exotic. This openness was essential to the blossoming of humanism at Frederick's court. Frederick's humanism can be traced back
to his childhood, where he received not a systematic education, but one from "life itself."

At eight or nine years old the young King wandered about (Palermo)... without let or hindrance.... An amazing variety of peoples, religions and customs jostled each other before his eyes: mosques with their minarets, synagogues with cupolas stood cheek by jowl with Norman churches and cathedrals, which again had been adorned by Byzantine masters with gold mosaics, their rafters supported by Greek columns on which Saracen craftsmen had carved in Kufic script the name of Allah. (p. 27)

Frederick emerged from this variegated milieu with a freedom of mind and a personal liberty "over the intellectually-fettered age in which he lived." (p. 218) Many of his contemporaries thought that Frederick had no religion other than the religion of man and of himself. The open intellectual spirit which flowed from Frederick's court shocked many of the narrow scholastics of his time. He and his humanist chancellor, Piero della Vigna, revived the spirit of Plato. Frederick wrote poetry and songs. "The whole of Hohenstaufen art and all Frederick's own compositions are steeped in joy of living," wrote Kantorowicz. (p. 328) Frederick showed a renewed love of the form of the human body. His man-centered approach to art anticipated the Renaissance and clashed with the rigidity and conventionalism of religious art. In his unquenchable thirst for knowledge and his playful curiosity Frederick reminds one of Leonardo da Vinci, a comparison, Kantorowicz pointed out, first made by Nietzsche. (p. 357)
Yet despite the light, the youth, the cosmopolitanism and humanism of Frederick, he possessed a Mephistophelian quality, which Kantorowicz, like Nietzsche, saw as typical of German leaders. "Dangerous, bold, wicked and cunning," were Nietzsche’s words for Frederick, one of his "Mephistophelian Germans." A dark side of Frederick’s nature emerged as he encountered resistance to his expanding power -- he became a tyrant. Since his days as King of Sicily, Frederick had shown a determination "forcibly to win control over men’s minds and bring them within the unity of the state." (p. 133) He persecuted Jews, whores and minstrals insofar as they did not conform to his tightly disciplined rule. Jews who were loyal to the state were tolerated. Frederick subjugated all considerations to the primacy of the state.

In his last years, Frederick went beyond authoritarianism. His desire to expand the Empire and to rule knew no bounds.

"Now I shall be hammer!" this was the characteristic cry which led Nietzsche to hail Frederick of Hohenstaufen as "one of my next of kin." Nietzsche, the first German to breathe the same air as Frederick, took up the cry and echoed it, Frederick had struck a new note, and passed into a supernatural world in which no law was valid save his own need. (p. 603)

In retrospect, Kantorowicz’s Frederick appears a chillingly proto-Hitlerian figure. He unleashed savagery and ruthlessness against rebels and would-be rebels. "It is said that when Frederick captured rebels fighting against
him and wearing the sign of the Cross that he forthwith 
crucified them so that they might realize the meaning of 
the symbol." (p. 556) He boasted of hanging and 
slaughtering scores of rebels. "As the Scourge of God he 
recognizes no law, divine or human, save his own advantage 
and his own caprice," wrote Kantorowicz. (p. 605) 
Kantorowicz, like George, adopted the Nietzschean notion 
that great individuals, such as Frederick, tend to verge on 
being criminals or outcasts.68

Frederick's tyranny, too, was part of Kantorowicz's 
Vorbild. His tyranny did not repel Kantorowicz; rather 
Kantorowicz saw it as an expression of Frederick's divine 
will. "Frederick II was judge in a degree undreamt of by 
Emperors before or after him, hence gratitude, tolerance, 
kindness, magnanimity had no more right than their opposites 
(i.e. hate and vengeance) to a place among his qualities." 
Frederick's power over life and death was virtually unchecked 
by higher codes of morality. (p. 604) Kantorowicz treated 
Frederick's ruthless brutality as called for by the higher 
goals of Empire. "His reign of terror was not inspired by 
madness, but by direst need." (p. 654) Frederick's 
relentless effort to consolidate the empire under his rule 
led him to brutal excesses in crushing the opposition to him.

68 Stanley J. Antosik, The Question of Elites, (Berne, 
When Frederick realized that he was the emanation of a Godhead, he knew that he had to obey only the eternal law of his own being. "The fullness of time had come, and Frederick was chosen to reap the harvest of centuries. The form of one great ruler was to be conjured up anew."

Frederick knew that he was the carrier of eternal forces, that he was of a heaven-born "race which springs from Aeneas, the father of the Roman people, and descends through Caesar to Frederick and his offspring in direct descent. All members of this imperial race are called divine." (p. 572)

As Frederick turned into a tyrant, another facet of the eternal force in him comes into view: the Antichrist. "Caesar, Messiah, Antichrist: these are the three fundamental identical manifestations of Frederick since Cortenuova -- since the beginning of the World Rule. He remained unchanged, only the fluctuations of circumstance show us his form lit with a different glow." (p. 608) The same Godhead which had emanated through Frederick the messianic qualities of Christ, now filtered a divine, hateful wrath through this tyrant. At the very zenith of his power, Frederick died of a fever in 1250 at the age of
fifty-six, an age which Kantorowicz maintained had fateful significance for the heroes of history.69

Kantorowicz had subtly laced his book on Frederick with parallels and analogies to his own time. For Kantorowicz, to speak to his contemporaries, to have impact on the present, was the whole point of writing history. In his closing paragraph Kantorowicz obliquely pointed to the living myth of Frederick the Second as a regenerative force in Germany of the 1920s. The legend of Frederick had held great power for the people of the medieval Empire. But as the universal Empire decayed and the Reformation dawned in Germany, Frederick the Second was forgotten and his grandfather, Frederick Barbarossa, who was said to be sleeping on the Kyffhauser peak, became the life-giving legend for the Germans.

Germany’s dream was changed, and change of myth reflects the changing life and longings of a people. The snow white sleeper (i.e. Barbarossa) ... has no message for the Germans of today: he has had his fulfillment, in the greatest vassal of the Empire, the aged Bismarck. The weary Lord of the Last Day has naught to say to the fiery Lord of the Beginning ... he who slumbers not nor sleeps but ponders how he can renew the "Empire." The mountain would to-day stand empty were in not for the son of Barbarossa’s son. The greatest Frederick is not yet redeemed ... "lives

69 The George Circle had a fascination with this sort of numbers mysticism. Fifty-six, or, Gundolf maintained, 53-57, was the crucial age in the lives of poets and heroes. Caesar, Napoleon, Frederick II, Dante, Shakespeare, Beethoven, and Schiller all died at 56. Ironically, Hitler also died at age 56.
and lives not"...the Sibyl's word is not for the Emperor, but for the German people. (p. 65)

In this mystical and haunting closing Kantorowicz urged the Germans to draw life-giving breath from Frederick's legacy of Empire. The Germans could retake their place as an imperial nation if they allowed their politics to be animated by the spirit of Frederick. Kantorowicz believed that such an exalted goal could only be achieved under a leader like Frederick -- brilliant and brutal. As he wrote in Frederick the Second, the revival of a nation, the creation of a people, is "a task impossible for any but a tyrant, and a tyrant who believes himself to be God." (p. 219)

Kantorowicz also recognized that the historical moment must be right for a great Fuhrer to seize power. In Frederick's time, like in the Weimar period:

Everything was in movement, and for decades all the various forces of the known world had tossed and tumbled there. The real statesman can only reach his full stature in fluid circumstances -- all great men have needed revolutions -- and this very chaos offered the most favorable possible conditions without the fear of organized opposition. (p. 110)

In Frederick the Second, Kantorowicz pointed to the essential qualities of this "real statesman:" he was young and fiercely idealistic, seductive and deceitful, bold and innovative, stern and mighty, joyful and radiant; above all, he was charismatic.
But Kantorowicz's new leader, his Novus Dux, was essentially amoral. Kantorowicz imposed no ethical standards on his ideal Fuhrer. "He could be bound only by fetters of his own making," as he wrote of Frederick (p. 603). His leaders operate in a Nietzschean universe in which no values are absolute or transcendent. Frederick's world, and by analogy Kantorowicz's own, was a moral tabula rasa where the only veracious values are those which spring from the will of the leader. Whether Kantorowicz's Novus Dux would use his power for good or evil was a question not worth discussing since, as values, good and evil were no more permanent than words written in sand. Fritz Stern has written,

Ever since the Geniezeit, the early romantic, the Sturm und Drung period, the Germans have celebrated the mysterious and sometimes demonic creativity of the poet, the artist, the warrior-statesman, and finally the scientist....In their veneration of the amoral genius, of the divine poet who could intuit truths accessible to no one else, they exposed themselves to great risk.70

Kantorowicz's Frederick was one such genius. The existential genius of the leader, completely amoral, was for Kantorowicz the only valid standard for political life.

Thus the political ethos of Frederick the Second, in the hands of a wicked leader was dangerous and volatile. Where in a Germany of the 1920s, when a fragmented, disillusioned nation was, Kantorowicz believed, in dire need

of a Novus Dux, would Frederick's heir appear? Not in the enchanted palaces of Palermo nor on the snowy peaks of the Kyffhäuser, but in the beer halls of Munich and on the streets of Berlin, vehemently spitting out his hateful creed; a new Führer more Antichrist than Messiah, was gathering force for his drive to power. His brutal rule would pervert all the lofty ideals of a new Führer which Kantorowicz had extolled, and in a terrible way substantiate his belief in the demonic in German rulers.

A remark of Heinrich Rickert, a philosophy professor at Heidelberg during the 1920s, about Friedrich Gundolf is equally telling of Kantorowicz:

The seeds which Nietzsche sowed have sprouted, and the scientific mind is in danger. Here in Heidelberg, it's taken an especially chaotic course. But Gundolf is one of us (i.e. scientifically oriented), although his notion of Gestalt is more artistic than scientific. In my youth I couldn't have resisted him.

To romantically-inclined students and to readers throughout Germany who were disillusioned with the Weimar Republic, Kantorowicz's call for a Führer was like a siren's song. Many of the elites of his generation of Germans despaired at the awesome responsibility of mundane problem-solving and surrendered themselves to a messianic leader. Goebbels, with his almost religious conversion and submission to Hitler, is a sad and striking example of this

71 Quoted in Glockner, op. cit., p. 13.
abdication of responsibility. His skill at making Hitler appear a mythic figure with godlike infallibility would be crucial to the Nazis' hold on power. A book like Kantorowicz's Frederick the Second would give the Führerprinzip intellectual resonance.