Legal cultures in Arab-Norman Sicily and Italy
LMU Munich, 29th–30th October 2026
Programme (last updated: 21 Oct 2026)

Papers: 20–25 mins
Discussion: 20 mins
Venue: Philologicum (entrance via Ludwigstrasse 25)
Room: Multifunktionsraum

- Thursday 29th October

Time	Speaker	Working title
13.00–13.15	Alex Metcalfe	Welcome and introduction
13.15–14.00	Hossameldin Ali	The transmission of Mālikī law from Ifrīqiya to Sicily
14.00–14.45	Samuel Ramapuram	Water, law and community: irrigation disputes and customary practice in the Val di Noto
14.45–15.30	Simon Suttmann	Justice and conflict-management in 11th-century historiography
15.30–16.00	*Coffee break*	
16.00–16.45	Nathan Greenhaw	The adoption and manipulation of Byzantine law in the 12th-century kingdom of Sicily
16.45–17.30	Nicolò Galluzzi	Legal culture and social transformation in Norman Apulia
	Drinks and dinner at:	

- Friday 30th October

Time	Speaker	
09.30–10.15	Markus Krumm	*Non rigore iustitie, sed solo equitatis beneficio*... Settling conflicts in the court of Roger II
10.15–11.00	Alex Metcalfe	Law and royal administration: categories of lands and 'men'
11.00–11.15	*Coffee break*	
11.15–12.00	Jacek Roszkiewicz	The Assizes of Ariano in the formation of the kingdom of Sicily
12.00–13.30	*Lunch*	to be decided
13.30–14.15	Susanne Lepsius	Legal pluralism for lawyers of 13th-century Sicily
14.15–15.00	Felix Chang	Norman legislation in the Swabian-Angevin legal system and Neapolitan juristic culture
15.00–15.15	*Coffee break*	
15.15–16.00	Lilli Hölzlhammer	Legal culture and a translated Arabic fable in Sicily. On the 13th-century *Stephanites and Ichnelates* by Eugenios of Palermo
16.00–16.45	Theresa Bachhuber	The Sicilian tradition of Jewish oaths
16.45–17.00	Concluding comments	
	Drinks and dinner at:	

- Abstracts

1. Hossameldin Ali (Department of History, LMU Munich)
Title: The Transmission of Mālikī Law from Ifrīqiya to Sicily (9th–11th Centuries)
Abstract: Despite growing interest in legal transplants in the medieval Mediterranean, a significant gap remains in our understanding of how legal traditions were transmitted to both Muslim and Norman Sicily. Fundamental questions remain unresolved, including when and through what mechanisms Mālikī law reached Sicily from Ifrīqiya, and how, at a later stage, the Norman kingdom absorbed Byzantine legal concepts in general and the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* in particular. This paper addresses the first of these questions by examining the textual transmission of Mālikī sources from Ifrīqiya to Sicily between the 9th and 11th centuries. It reconstructs this process through two major chronological phases. The first covers the transition from Aġlabid to Fāṭimid rule, investigating how political and confessional change affected the circulation of Sunnī legal texts. The second focuses on the late 10th century, when the transfer of the Fāṭimid rule to Cairo reshaped the networks of Mālikī jurists and strengthened their ability to disseminate Mālikī learning across Sicily. By tracing the mobility of texts and scholarly networks, the paper offers the first systematic account of the transmission of Mālikī compilations to Muslim Sicily. In so doing, it fills a major gap in the study of medieval Mediterranean legal history and provides a new framework for understanding the formation and development of Islamic law on the island.

2. Samuel Ramapuram, (Department of Catholic Theology, Goethe University Frankfurt)
Title: Water, law and community: Irrigation Disputes and Customary Practice in the Val di Noto
This paper examines at the legal culture of rural water management in the Val di Noto, southeast Sicily, during the Norman period (c.1130–1194). Moving away from the palace-centred focus of previous research, it investigates how mixed Greek, Arabic-speaking Muslim, and Latin communities negotiated irrigation rights using customary standards. Using the theoretical lens of legal ecology, which holds that regulations governing natural resources are co-produced with environmental conditions, the study examines Arabic and Greek record fragments from monastic archives alongside archaeological evidence of water infrastructure. By comparing legal vocabulary to tangible relics of qanats and canals, the article reconstructs unwritten customary rules that existed independently of royal authority. The findings contend that water law in the Val di Noto is a unique hybrid customary formation built via intercommunal practice and environmental adaptation, demonstrating a grassroots legal diversity that preserved daily life in one of Sicily's most dry areas.

3. Simon Suttmann, (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Freiburg)
Title: The Beating of Arduin. Reflections on (In)justice and (Mis-)management of Conflicts in 11th Century Historiography
Abstract: One of the most remarkable semi-legendary stories from the early years of Norman presence in Southern Italy concerns the ignominious fate of the obscure Italian mercenary Arduin. Around 1040, at the height of a great Byzantine expedition to Sicily, Arduin allegedly accused his Greek commander of an unjust remuneration policy. As a consequence, he was publicly punished, beaten, and disgraced. Unwilling to accept this act of humiliation, he and his Norman companions deserted the army and launched a campaign of revenge against Byzantine possessions on the Italian mainland. Although Arduin himself disappears from the records soon afterwards, the tale of his unjust punishment and the subsequent retaliation efforts was later used by several historiographical accounts to explain and legitimise the Norman presence in Apulia from the 1040s onwards. This is particularly remarkable because the different authors seem to have drawn on different sources of information and consequently portray several contradicting versions of the respective events. The only point on which all accounts agree is that they consider the act of corporal punishment outrageous and the violent reaction of the offended and his companions appropriate or at least understandable as a countermeasure. Thus, many of the historiographical reports may be unreliable when it comes to reconstruct the actual incident, but they nevertheless reveal diverse contemporary perspectives on and expectations in certain modes of conflict management among members of militant lay elite groups. By comparing the various narratives, I therefore attempt to trace contemporary notions of equity and due process, as well as (imaginable) practices of escalating and de-escalating conflicts within a militant and culturally heterogeneous warrior society.

4. Nathan Greenhaw (Department of History, Stony Brook University, New York)
Title: The Norman adoption and manipulation of Byzantine law in the twelfth-century kingdom of Sicily
Abstract: This paper will examine how jurists in southern Italy during the reign of Roger II (r. 1130–1154) adopted and modified Byzantine legal texts to reinforce the political authority of the Norman king. From paraphrasing entire sections of the *Codex Justinianus* to citing canon law treatises like Neilos Doxapatres' *Order of the Patriarchal Thrones*, Italo-Norman legal authorities modelled Roger's sovereignty after that of the Byzantine emperor. In royal law codes, the king's office acquired priestly prerogatives, enabled the ruler to intervene in church affairs, and placed local ruling Greek ἄρχοντες ("magistrates") under the monarch's jurisdiction. In other cases, jurists edited extant Byzantine legal corpuses, like the tenth-century *Prochiron Legum* from Calabria, to reconcile them with the Norman administration. Sometimes the emperor's title was shamelessly replaced with the king's. Thus, the Norman imitation and exploitation of Byzantine law in Italy significantly elucidates how ideas over imperial rule were arbitrated in the twelfth-century Mediterranean.

5. Nicolò Galluzzi (Istituto italiano di studi storici "Benedetto Croce", Naples)
Title: The justice league. Legal culture and social transformation in Norman Apulia (11th–12th Centuries)
Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between legal culture and local pre-eminence in Apulia during the transition from Byzantine to Norman rule (c. 1070–1130), focusing on Bari and drawing comparative evidence from Conversano, Troia, and Terlizzi-Giovinazzo. Moving beyond interpretations centred on the Norman conquest or later institutional frameworks of Roger II's kingdom, it examines how local societies reshaped authority and mechanisms of conflict resolution. Particular attention is devoted to judges and legal experts, whose growing prominence reflected broader social and political transformations. Under Byzantine administration, judges generally occupied subordinate positions within the entourage of public officials. From the late eleventh century onwards, however, they emerged as central figures in the administration of justice, operating within new judicial arenas such as the *curia civitatis*, exercising increasing control over documentary production and legal procedure. The paper argues that judges' legal expertise, documentary authority, and capacity to mediate disputes enabled them to play a pivotal role in the emerging Norman political order. Their authority rested less on military power than on their ability to regulate conflicts and preserve social equilibrium amid political fragmentation and competing forms of local pre-eminence. By analysing judicial practices, documentary forms, and social networks, the paper shows that legal culture became a key instrument of political mediation and social distinction in the reconfiguration of Norman Apulia.

6. Markus Krumm (Department of History, LMU Munich)
Title: *Non rigore iustitie, sed solo equitatis beneficio*... Settling conflicts in the court of Roger II of Sicily
Roger II of Sicily is said to have been an especially harsh—if not cruel—ruler. Whether or not one agrees with this view, it is essentially based on sources concerning the various military conflicts between the king and the nobility during the establishment of the Kingdom of Sicily. In contrast, considerably less attention has been paid to the numerous documented cases in which solutions to conflicts were sought and found within Roger II's court. This paper presents some reflections on a systematic analysis of the relevant source material.

7. Alex Metcalfe (Department of History, LMU Munich)
Title: Law and royal administration: categories of lands and 'men'
Abstract: This paper opens with a resumé of key ideas about the emerging legal 'system' in early Norman Sicily with a particular focus on legal concepts which were informed by different customs and practices. It then tackles a key question concerning law and administration in the new kingdom: had the Normans adopted the legal–fiscal categories of state lands and 'men' who lived on them that had existed under the Muslims? Or had they imported these categories with them during and after the Conquest through the medium of Byzantine Greek notaries from mainland Calabria? At the least, this paper will describe the problems facing historians and explain their wider importance; it will also try to make sense of the historiography and the extant evidence.

8. Jacek Roszkiewicz (School of Humanities, University of Warsaw)
Title: *Pro varietate populorum nostro regno subiectorum* – The Assizes of Ariano as an Instrument in the Formation of the Kingdom of Sicily
The Assizes of Ariano issued by King Roger II constitute a remarkable and, to a certain extent, pioneering monument of European legal culture. The phrase quoted in the title reflects the legislator's awareness of the cultural and ethnic diversity of his kingdom. Moreover, the provisions introduced by this legislation became the foundation of the legal system of the Kingdom of Sicily long after the end of Norman rule. In my paper, I intend to examine the extent to which the Assizes of Ariano contributed to the formation and consolidation of the Sicilian state, both by shaping the scope of royal authority and its relationship with the aristocratic elite, and by promoting greater harmonisation of relations among the numerous ethnic and cultural communities living within the Kingdom of Sicily. Given the continuing controversies in the extensive scholarly literature devoted to the Assizes, I also wish to address the question of their dating by comparing the circumstances of their promulgation with those of the pacification assembly held at Melfi in 1129. I believe that such a comparison may offer useful insights into the dating of this legislative act.

9. Susanne Lepsius (Leopold-Wenger-Institut für Rechtsgeschichte, LMU Munich)
Title: What kind of legal pluralism counted for the lawyers in 13th-century Sicily?
Abstract: Legal Pluralism is not a feature coming to mind when thinking about the so-called Liber Augustalis of Emperor Frederick II. My paper would trace those passages of these famous constitutions in which different rules from Norman times and current practice are dealt with. Most of all, my paper will present insights from an ongoing edition project on the oldest gloss apparatus up to the so-called glossa ordinaria, thus discussing the arguments and authorities Latin trained-and thinking lawyers working for the Crown discussed in these *materiae.*

10. Felix Chang (School of History, Classics and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh)
Title: The legacy of Norman legislation in the Swabian-Angevin legal system and Neapolitan juristic culture in the kingdom of Sicily
Abstract: Norman royal legislation, the assizes of Roger II and the fragmented enactments of his successors, outlived the dynasty that produced them. This paper follows their long afterlife through two later regimes and the jurists who interpreted them. Frederick II's Swabian codifications, the Assizes of Capua (1220) and the *Constitutions of Melfi* (1231), absorbed a substantial portion of Norman law. The subsequent Angevins preserved much of this Norman legal inheritance within the framework established by the *Constitutions of Melfi*. Meanwhile, the Neapolitan school of glossators reinterpreted elements of this Norman legacy to guide the legal practice in response to new political and legal conditions. By tracing selected threads and provisions, this paper explores how each stage received and reworked its Norman inheritance, and sets legislation and legal commentary against surviving evidence of judicial practice. The fit and friction among norm, doctrine, and practice reveal the legal culture and practical concerns of each era.

11. Lilli Hölzlhammer (Byzantine Studies, LMU Munich)
Title: Legal culture and a translated Arabic fable in Sicily. On the 13th-century *Stephanites and Ichnelates* by Eugenios of Palermo
Abstract: In the 13th century, Eugenios of Palermo, a literary accomplished *anmiratus* (admiral) to the Kingdom of Sicily hired a group of men to translate the Arabic fable collection *Kalila wa-Dimnah* into Greek. These men, accustomed to the Greek terminology of Sicilian legal culture, then translated faithfully, although not in the most elegant Greek, the so-called *Trial of Dimnah*, the second chapter of the aforementioned fables. Their knowledge of Sicilian legal culture is reflected in their terminology, thus helping us date the translation to a certain time period. Unfortunately, this well crafted translation in elegant Sicilian Greek was then contaminated by some who mixed it with the older Constantinopolitan translation of the same fables by Symeon Seth from the 11th century. Thus, only the passages that Seth did not translate survive in the extant manuscripts. So the story goes. This paper aims to change the narrative around the Eugenian translation that has been written by scholars up to date. By reconsidering their arguments, comparing the Eugenian translation to the extant 190 Arabic manuscripts and re-evaluating the Eugenian preface to the translation, it will undo much of the aforementioned narrative. First of all, it will show that Sicilian legal culture left no trace on the *Trial of Dimnah*. Second, an analysis of the Eugenian translation's translation method will show that they in fact only translated some of the passages omitted by Seth and intentionally created a version that integrates his translation. This is most easily

proven by the use of the Greek name *Ichnelates* that Seth invented for the Arabic character *Dimnah*. Finally, by actually looking at the Eugenian translation, it will explore the interest in philosophy, politics, and erotic tales that must have inspired it.

12. Theresa Bachhuber (Department of History, LMU Munich)
Title: The Sicilian tradition of '*more Iudaico*' oaths
Abstract: Greek Jewish Oaths (*more Judaico*) are an underresearched topic in the various fields they are, or could potentially be, a part of: Byzantine legal studies, Jewish history of Sicily, and the history of Jewish oaths. According to the foundational myth perpetuated by German-language history on Jewish oaths, the first Greek Jewish oath goes back to the time of Emperor Constantine. The oldest transmitted oath formula from the Byzantine Empire however was promulgated by Emperor Manuel I. Komnenos in the 1140s. In contrast to this formula and its content, a different Greek Jewish oath tradition was established in twelfth-century Sicily, which spread across the kingdom and the island, introducing unique elements unknown in other formula traditions and potentially being derived from older Byzantine oath formulas. Additionally, the way these oaths were copied amongst other texts or left out of certain books allows insight into the spread of Byzantine law in twelfth-century Norman Sicily.