

## **Mediterranean Seminar February 2024 Roundtable Abstract, Prompt 2**

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The legislative texts of the Kings of Sicily, known collectively but misleadingly as the Assizes of Ariano (c. 1140), are something of a legal kaleidoscope; different legal influences and resonances appear depending on how one twists them. In the context of the revival of Roman and canon law in twelfth-century Western Europe, for example, it is significant that many of the laws are re-configured versions of Justinianic Roman laws, perhaps the result of the diffusion of legal knowledge from Northern Italian law schools. In another context, it is significant that the legislation reflects knowledge of Byzantine law and legal culture, perhaps gleaned from the Greek legal manuscripts circulating in southern Italy during the twelfth century. Such approaches to the Norman royal legislation have revealed a great deal about the sources of legal influence at work in the creation of the laws, but they are limited by the parochial horizons of the scholarly traditions that generated them.

Instead of undertaking the methodologically difficult task of determining sources of legal ‘influence,’ it may make more sense to analyze legal texts like the Assizes of Ariano holistically as products of a distinctly Mediterranean cultural environment characterized by the borrowing, forceful appropriation, adaptation, and reconfiguration of cultural forms, especially in the context of ideological self-fashioning. The Norman Kings of Sicily, as the rulers of a newly established kingdom, were particularly aggressive in their use of cultural forms and institutions from around the Mediterranean world to characterize their rule and their law is no exception.