commissioned a bust of himself in the guise of a Roman emperor; supported by angels, his head towered over a representation of a city, probably Rome. (See Plate 6.1.)

By 1167, most of the cities of northern Italy had joined with Pope Alexander III (1159–1181) to form the Lombard League against Frederick. Defeated at the battle of Legnano in 1176, Frederick agreed to the Peace of Venice the next year and withdrew most of his forces from the region. But his failure in the north led him to try a southern strategy. By marrying his son Henry VI (r. 1190–1197) to Constance, heiress of the Kingdom of Sicily, Frederick Barbarossa linked the fate of his dynasty to a well-organized monarchy that commanded dazzling wealth.

As we saw (p. 158), the Kingdom of Sicily had been created by Normans. In theory, it was held as a fief from the pope, who, in the treaty of Benevento (1156), recognized Norman sovereignty over a territory that extended from Sicily all the way to the southern edge of the papal states. Both multilingual and multi-religious, the Kingdom of Sicily embraced Jews, Muslims, Greeks, and Italians. Indeed, the Normans saw themselves as heirs to the Byzantines and Muslims and frequently came close to conquering Byzantium and North Africa. Taking over the Byzantine and Islamic administrative apparatuses already in place in their kingdom, they crafted a highly centralized government, with royal justices circuiting the kingdom and salaried civil servants drawn from the level of knights and townsmen.

Frederick II (1194–1250), the son of Henry VI and Constance, tried to unite Sicily, Italy, and Germany into an imperial unit. He failed: the popes, eager to carve out their own well-ordered state in the center of Italy, could not allow a strong monarch to encircle them. Declaring war on Frederick, the papacy not only excommunicated him several times but also declared him deposed and accused him of heresy, a charge that led to declaring a crusade against him in the 1240s. These were fearsome actions. The king of France urged negotiation and reconciliation, but others saw in Frederick the devil himself. In the words of one chronicler, Frederick was “an evil and accredited man, a schismatic, a heretic, and an epicurean, who ‘defiled the whole earth’ (Jer. 51:25)” because he sowed the seeds of division and discord in the cities of Italy.

This was one potent point of view. There were others, more admiring. Frederick was a poet, a patron of the arts, and the founder of the first state-supported university, which he built at Naples. His administrative reforms in Sicily were comparable to Henry II’s in England: he took what he found and made it routine. In the Constitutions of Melfi (1231) he made sure that his salaried officials worked according to

Plate 6.1 (facing page): Bust of Frederick Barbarossa (1165). Made in Aachen, and thus associated with Charlemagne, this bronze-gilt bust of Frederick shows him wearing an imperial fillet on his short curly hair. (You can see such fillets on the heads of the figures in Plate 3.1 on p. 85.) The inscriptions were added later, when Frederick gave the bust to his godfather, Otto. Transforming the bust into a reliquary to hold a hair of Saint John the Evangelist, Otto gave it to a religious house that he had co-founded and eventually led.

Map 6.5: Italy in the Age of Frederick Barbarossa