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Transcultural Approaches to the Concept of Imperial Rule in the Middle Ages: Introduction

The last years have seen a growing interest in the thematic strand of “empire”: not least the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s has stimulated public debates about the role the United States as the single remaining super power were supposed to play in the world. These debates were intensified after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which, according to the sociologist Michael Mann,¹ constituted the United States’ transition from a hegemonic power widely accepted and acting benevolently to a militarist world ruler ruthlessly claiming “imperial” leadership.²

In the years following George W. Bush’s war against Iraq, a number of monographs on “empire” and/or “imperial rulership” were published both by historians and political scientists. In Germany, for example, Herfried Münkler published a volume on *Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States* in 2005, which soon became a standard work on the topic.³ In the same year, Hans-Heinrich Nolte published a monograph on empires in early modern times.⁴ Besides these general studies, several comparative studies were published in recent years: after an article published by Susan Reynolds in 2006,⁵ the afore-

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- 1 Mann, Michael: *The Incoherent Empire*. Verso: London / New York 2003, p. 252: “Whereas in the recent past American power was hegemonic – routinely accepted and often considered legitimate abroad – now it is imposed at the barrel of a gun. This undermines hegemony and the claim to be a benevolent Empire.”
 - 2 Cf. Münkler, Herfried: *Imperien. Die Logik der Weltherrschaft – vom Alten Rom bis zu den Vereinigten Staaten*. Rowohlt: Berlin 2005, p. 13.
 - 3 Cf. the German title in the footnote above. The English translation was published in 2007 by Polity Press.
 - 4 Nolte, Hans-Heinrich: *Weltgeschichte. Imperien, Religionen und Systeme 15.-19. Jahrhundert*. Böhlau: Vienna / Cologne / Weimar 2005.
 - 5 Reynolds, Susan: “Empires: A Problem of Comparative History”. *Historical Research* 79, 2006, pp. 151–165.

mentioned Hans-Heinrich Nolte edited a comparative study focusing on empires from the 16th to the 20th centuries in 2008,⁶ before in 2012 Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk published the excellent survey *Universal Empire. A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*, dealing with empires from Assyrian times to the 18th century.⁷ Most recently, in 2014, Michael Gehler and Robert Rollinger edited two vast volumes on empires from antiquity to the present.⁸

It is especially the last-mentioned work that deals with empires – or political systems similar to empires – of the Middle Ages. The empires dealt with include the empires of the Umayyads, Fatimids, Ayyubids, Mamluks, Almoravids, Almohads, Mongols, Byzantines, Ottomans, Merovingians and Carolingians as well as the European territories of the high and late Middle Ages, empires in India, the Holy Roman Empire and the papacy.⁹ Münkler only refers to the empire of the Mongols,

6 Nolte, Hans-Heinrich (ed.): *Imperien. Eine vergleichende Studie*. (Studien zur Weltgeschichte). Wochenschau Verlag: Schwalbach/Ts. 2008.

7 Bang, Peter Fibiger / Kolodziejczyk, Dariusz (eds.): *Universal Empire. A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2012.

8 Gehler, Michael / Rollinger, Robert (eds.): *Imperien und Reiche in der Weltgeschichte. Epochenübergreifende und globalhistorische Vergleiche, vol. 1: Imperien des Altertums, mittelalterliche und frühneuzeitliche Imperien, vol. 2: Neuzeitliche Imperien, zeitgeschichtliche Imperien, Imperien in Theorie, Geist, Wissenschaft, Recht und Architektur, Wahrnehmung und Vermittlung*. Harrasowitz: Wiesbaden 2014.

9 Cf. Hämeen-Anttila, Jaakko: “The Umayyad State – an Empire?”, pp. 537–558; Halm, Heinz: “Die Reiche der Fatimiden, Ayyubiden und Mamluken”, pp. 559–566; Id.: “Die Reiche der Almoraviden und Almohaden”, pp. 567–570; Rothermund, Dieter: “Imperien in Indien vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit”, pp. 571–588; Gießauf, Johannes: “Size does matter – das mongolische Imperium”, pp. 589–620; Chrysos, Evangelos: “Das Byzantinische Reich. Ein Imperium *par excellence*”, pp. 621–634; Inan, Kenan: “The Ottoman Empire”, pp. 635–658; Steinacher, Roland / Winckler, Katharina: “Merowinger und Karolinger – Imperien zwischen Antike und Mittelalter”, pp. 659–696; Vogtherr, Thomas: “Die europäische Staatenwelt im hohen und späten Mittelalter. Imperium oder konkurrierende Territorialstaaten?”, pp. 697–710;

whereas the volume by Bang and Kolodziejczyk contains three articles on medieval empires.¹⁰

Apart from these articles and Münkler's references to the Mongols, there are also several recent monographs dedicated to medieval empires or at least elements of imperial rule. Stefan Burkhardt, for example, analysed the Latin Empire of Constantinople as a Mediterranean Empire; Almut Höfert dealt with the imperial monotheism in the early and high Middle Ages, examining the aftermath of Roman imperial tradition not only in Western Europe, but also in Byzantium and the Islamic caliphate in the early and high Middle Ages.¹¹ This shows that in recent years, researchers have increasingly turned their attention to the Islamic world, too, thus going beyond a Eurocentric perspective. In addition to Höfert's survey and the contributions to the Islamic world in the above mentioned volumes, this becomes evident in Robert G. Hoyland's latest publication of a monograph on the early Islamic empire.¹² Last but not least, the topic "empire" was discussed among medievalists on several conferences, among them the International Medieval Congress (IMC) in

Kampmann, Christoph: "Das Heilige Römische Reich deutscher Nation – das nominelle Imperium?", pp. 711–724; Schima, Stefan: "Der Heilige Stuhl und die Päpste", pp. 725–760. Unfortunately, an article about the Abbassid caliphate is missing.

- 10 Cf. Fowden, Garth: "Pseudo-Aristotelian Politics and Theology in Universal Islam", pp. 130–148; Angelov, Dimiter / Herrin, Judith: "The Christian Imperial Tradition – Greek and Latin", pp. 149–174; Haldén, Peter: "From Empire to Commonwealth(s): Orders in Europe", pp. 280–303.
- 11 Burkhardt, Stefan: *Mediterranes Kaisertum und imperiale Ordnungen. Das lateinische Kaiserreich von Konstantinopel*. (Europa im Mittelalter 25). Akademie Verlag / De Gruyter: Berlin / Boston 2014; Höfert, Almut: *Kaisertum und Kalifat. Der imperiale Monotheismus im Früh- und Hochmittelalter*. (Globalgeschichte 21). Campus Verlag: Frankfurt am Main / New York 2015; on the Norman Empire, cf. besides Bates, David: *The Normans and Empire*. Oxford University Press: Oxford 2013.
- 12 Hoyland, Robert G.: *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*. Oxford University Press: New York / Oxford 2015.

Leeds in 2014,¹³ a conference held at the University of Münster in 2015,¹⁴ and another at the University of Hamburg in 2016.¹⁵

There are numerous definitions about what constitutes an “empire”. We here follow the definition given by the aforementioned German historian Hans-Heinrich Nolte¹⁶ who defined an empire by seven characteristics: 1. a monarch at the top of the hierarchy, 2. a close cooperation between church and crown, 3./4. an elaborate bureaucracy based on and working with written records, 5. centrally raised taxes, 6. diverse provinces, 7. a low degree of political participation of the subjects.¹⁷ Other authors add further characteristics, for example regarding space and time. According to most definitions, an empire must cover a vast geographical area, although this criterion is difficult if not impossible to assess for seaborne empires.¹⁸ Besides, even if seaborne empires often were not that large, they gained their power from controlling important trade routes, which can be regarded as more important than pure seize.¹⁹

Researchers disagree, however, as far as the factor time is concerned: whereas Herfried Münkler holds the view that an empire must have lasted a certain amount of time and have gone through at least one circle of rise and fall,²⁰ others disregard this factor and count, for example, Napoleonic

13 The IMC took place from 7 to 10 July 2014 in Leeds. The triple session “To Be or not to Be Emperor – Transcultural Approaches to the Concept of Imperial Rule from Iceland to Jerusalem”, organised by the editors, was the starting point and basis for this volume. We thank all speakers and participants of the sessions for their valuable contributions and statements to our topic.

14 The conference in Münster, organised by Wolfram Drews, took place from 11 to 13 June 2015 and dealt with the interaction between rulers and elites in imperial orders of the Middle Ages. Cf. the conference report by Jan Clauß, Nadeem Khan and Tobias Hoffmann under <http://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-6170> [last accessed: 13 July 2016].

15 The conference in Hamburg, organised by Stefan Heidemann, took place from 7 to 8 October 2016 and was dedicated to the Islamic Empire. It was entitled “Regional and Transregional Elites – Connecting the Early Islamic Empire”.

16 To Münkler’s criteria cf. the contribution by Nadeem Khan in this volume.

17 Nolte 2008, p. 14. To Nolte’s criteria cf. also the article by Stefan Burkhardt in this volume.

18 Münkler 2005, p. 23.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

France, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as empires.²¹ Especially for the European Middle Ages, a further criterion seems indispensable to us, videlicet the claim to be the only empire with one single emperor dominating the whole of the world. As a result of this claim, empires could not accept others as equals.²² Therefore, conflicts arose when two political systems within the same geographical area claimed to be empires, as with the Western and Eastern empires in the Middle Ages (*Zweikaiserproblem*).

In this volume, however, we not only deal with classic examples of medieval empires such as that of Charlemagne or the Byzantine empire, but we also cover other communities or “kingdoms”, among them the Barbarian successor states of the Roman West, Anglo-Saxon England, Denmark, Iceland, Poland, Burgundy and Provence and look at elements of imperial rule (for example imperial titles, claims etc.) which played a role in ruling these communities. The following central questions were given by the editors as common ground for all authors to work with: for which reasons and in which situations did some rulers, for example Charlemagne, aspire imperial titles such as “emperor” or “basileus”, whereas other sovereigns, whose rule showed certain characteristics of “imperial” rule such as that of Theodoric the Great, voluntarily shrank away from them? Related to this point is the question as to why some rulers like Charles I of Naples or James of Baux strove for “virtual” or titular titles like “Emperor of Constantinople”, although no immediate power was connected to them.

Concerning imperial terminology and related matters, it is necessary to point out that titular emperorship seldom came alone. Instead, it was semantically flanked; claims of emperorship were underlined by a more or less sophisticated cluster of titles and symbolic prerogatives. Although these ritual aspects are not part of the pragmatic criteria formulated by Hans-Heinrich Nolte above, several contributions will analyse them regarding their underlying traditions and ideological references. After all, these

21 These three systems are included in the aforementioned volume edited by Gehler and Rollinger, for example, cf. Broers, Michael: “The Napoleonic Empire”, pp. 893–912; Moos, Carlo: “Mussolinis faschistisches Imperium”, pp. 1133–1164; Thamer, Hans-Ulrich: “Das Dritte Reich und sein Imperium”, pp. 1119–1132.

22 Münkler 2005, p. 17.

specific symbolic resources could not only help to transform royal into imperial power, they could also enable real and “would-be” emperors to furnish their sovereignty with a charismatic aura helping to stabilize their rule. We therefore ask where these titles and rituals arose from, if they originated from a society’s “own” cultural horizon or if they were trans-cultural borrowings, as was the “*basileus*”-title in Anglo-Saxon Britain?

Analysing the cultural and conceptual background reveals that imperial titles can occasionally be understood as government programmes. This might include that newly-crowned emperors aimed at reforming the style and intensity of their rule. Around the year 800, for instance, Charlemagne pursued a more comprehensive policy than his predecessors on the Frankish throne had done. Thus, imperial augmentation could bring about internal as well as external changes, among them the sacralisation of the emperor and his realm as a means to stand out from royal opponents, whose power was *per se* conceived as inferior. For this reason, several contributions in this volume turn towards the changing claim to power as well as to its ethos. They ask as to what extent processes of imperialisation affected other political entities, which were – at least nominally – demanded submission, how the agents politically relevant dealt with conflicts possibly arising from their imperial concepts, and how they used them to order the world mentally.

Apart from that, this volume asks for the legitimacy of imperial rulers: whose consent was necessary to make a ruler emperor? Which role did other rulers, for example the popes, play in the process of the elevation of an emperor: was another ruler necessary to make someone emperor or could this be done by the latter and his surrounding alone? Which (invented) traditions and rituals were used to legitimise one’s imperial rule or dynasty? Further emphasis is put on the representation of imperial rule in the Middle Ages: which titles were held by imperial rulers, which rituals and symbols did they use to represent themselves? How were they portrayed on coins or images? How was this representation perceived by other rulers and which conflicts arose from certain kinds of representations?

Last but not least, we ask for the perception of imperial rule in the Middle Ages: whose rule was perceived by others as “imperial”? Was it necessary to carry an imperial title such as “emperor” or “*basileus*” to be

recognized as superior or did it occur that rulers were regarded as such without holding these titles?

In answering these questions, the articles in this volume refer to examples from the early to the late Middle Ages, with a temporal emphasis on the early and high Middle Ages. Geographically, the articles not only cover Western, Northern and Eastern Europe (the Western Mediterranean, England, Scandinavia and Poland), but also the Eastern Mediterranean (the Byzantine empire) as well as the Islamic world. Thus, this volume approaches elements of imperial rule in a transcultural perspective, going beyond central Europe and including the alleged periphery in the North and East as well as Latin Europe's Byzantine and Islamic neighbours.

The concept of "transculturality" was originally developed by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz²³ and taken up by the German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch in the 1990s.²⁴ According to this concept, "cultures" cannot be understood as monolithic blocks, as was the understanding in the past, but – following Homi Bhabha and Edward Said – as hybrids and processes which permanently interact with and borrow from each other.²⁵ The fact that

23 Ortiz, Fernando: *Contrapunto cubano del tabaco y el azúcar. Advertencia de sus contrastes agrarios, económicos, históricos y sociales, su etnografía y su transculturación*. Jesus Montero: Havanna 1940.

24 Welsch, Wolfgang: "Transkulturalität – Die veränderte Verfassung heutiger Kulturen". *Via Regia. Blätter für internationale kulturelle Kommunikation* 20, 1994, pp. 1–19; Id.: "Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures today". *California Sociologist* 17/18, 1994/1995, pp. 19–39.

25 Mersch, Margit: "Transkulturalität, Verflechtung, Hybridisierung – ‚neue‘ epistemologische Modelle in der Mittelalterforschung". In: Drews, Wolfram / Scholl, Christian (eds.): *Transkulturelle Verflechtungsprozesse in der Vormoderne*. (Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung 3). De Gruyter: Berlin / Boston 2016, pp. 239–251, esp. pp. 244–247. The contributions in this volume further discuss the concept of "transculturality" and apply it to the Middle Ages and the early Modern Period. Further contributions to transculturality in the Middle Ages include Borgolte, Michael: "Migrationen als transkulturelle Verflechtungen im mittelalterlichen Europa. Ein neuer Pflug für alte Forschungsfelder". *Historische Zeitschrift* 289, 2009, pp. 261–285; Id. et al. (eds.): *Mittelalter im Labor. Die Mediävistik testet Wege zu einer transkulturellen Europawissenschaft*. (Europa im Mittelalter 10). Akademie-Verlag: Berlin 2009; Id. / Schneidmüller, Bernd (eds.): *Hybride Kulturen im mittelalterlichen Europa. Vorträge und Workshops einer internationalen Frühlingsschule*. (Eu-

“cultures” permanently borrow from each other also becomes apparent in the articles of this volume, for example borrowings of imperial titles or rituals from Byzantium or Ancient Rome by rulers from Latin Europe.

The first article, written by Christian Scholl, deals with the *imitatio imperii*, which means the imitation of the Roman emperor by the rulers of the Barbarian kingdoms in the early Middle Ages. It asks for the reasons why Barbarian kings adopted certain elements of rule formerly employed by the Roman emperors and, in a second step, identifies some elements which were adopted by the Barbarian rulers and some which were not. Special interest is given to the question as to why no Barbarian ruler before Charlemagne strove for the title “emperor”, not even the Ostrogothic king Theodoric the Great, who was ruling over a considerable part of the former Roman empire, thus exerting hegemony over the Western Mediterranean in the early 6th century.

Sebastian Kolditz addresses Byzantium’s relations with the peoples of the Eurasian steppe zone primarily in the 6th and 7th centuries. Conflicting with their own self-understanding, the East Roman emperors had to admit that right at their borders Türks, Avars and later on Khazars attained quasi-imperial plenitude of power. Kolditz expounds the diplomatic and military relationships between these polities and the Romans as well as their reception in Byzantine historiography. These relations encompassed a vast range of contact forms between hostile confrontations, encounters of emperors and the Nomads’ rulers, the qaghans, and even marriage projects. Kolditz’ paper focusses on the (changing) usage of the title “qaghan” and related terminology for Avar, Türk and Khazar rulers in the Greek sources. In this way, it unfolds how the Romans at times denied imperial qualities, or in case of Menander’s assessment of the Türks even applied the title of “basileus” to their leader, although this term was normally reserved for the Roman emperor, only.

The article by Jan Clauß deals with cultural and political long-term processes in the Carolingian world prior to Charlemagne’s imperial coronation. Traditional Carolingian scholarship advocated the position that Charlemagne

ropa im Mittelalter 16). Akademie-Verlag: Berlin 2010; Id. et al. (eds): *Europa im Geflecht der Welt. Mittelalterliche Migrationen in globalen Bezügen*. (Europa im Mittelalter 20). Akademie-Verlag: Berlin 2012; Id. / Tischler, Matthias M. (eds.): *Transkulturelle Verflechtungen im mittelalterlichen Jahrtausend. Europa, Ostasien, Afrika*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt 2012.

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was taken by surprise when Leo III crowned him emperor, and therefore attributed the driving force of the restoration of emperors in the West to the pope. Against this narrative of a passive Frankish king, Clauß' paper gathers evidence which evinces that around the turn of the century Frankish scholars actively paved the way for Charlemagne's imperial perception. The imperialisation of the *regnum Francorum* and Charlemagne involved political entities in and outside the Carolingian sphere of influence. Corresponding with actual power politics, the status of the papacy, the Byzantine emperor and the Abbasid caliph in Bagdad were denied or (argumentatively) ascribed to the Frankish king himself. For this purpose Frankish scholars made use of selective borrowings from imperial traditions. The paper accordingly outlines that Charlemagne's imperial rise was above all a transcultural project, which implied a critical reflection on empires of the past and present.

Simon Groth's paper discusses the role the papacy played in the coronations of emperors in the 9th century. Although Charlemagne was crowned emperor by pope Leo III at Christmas 800 – as is discussed in the article by Jan Clauß –, and although a pope was necessary for the coronations in the high and late Middle Ages, there were two emperors in the early 9th century, Louis the Pious and Lothair I, who were not crowned emperors by the pope, but by their fathers Charlemagne and Louis – in both cases, the papal consent was given afterwards by a second coronation carried out by the pope, but these papal acts were not constitutive. It was not before the coronation of Lothair's son Louis II, carried out by pope Stephan IV in 850, that the papacy regained the decisive position it had already assumed at Charlemagne's coronation. This position was confirmed by the coronations of Charles the Bald and Charles the Fat in 875 and 881, both carried out by pope John VIII. Groth's article examines these events in detail and reflects the process in which the papacy regained its essential position in the "making" of a Medieval emperor.

In her article, Jessika Nowak looks at successful and failed imperial projects in post-Carolingian Provence and Burgundy. Nowak elucidates why the Provençal kings Hugh of Arles and Louis the Blind as well as the Burgundian Rudolph II pursued differing agendas towards the *regnum Italiae* and either strove for or declined the imperial crown. In order to do so, she identifies essential political and cultural factors which shaped the respective political options. Drawing predominantly on charters, but also on numismatic sources,

Nowak shows that the ambition to become Roman emperor mainly depended on family networks, especially connections to the Carolingian dynasty, and territorial powerbases and alliances in Italy. The lack of these features caused Rudolph II to emphasise his Burgundian kingship even when he was ruling in Italy, and at the same time led to a rather modest concept of Burgundian kingship. Nowak's contribution thus demonstrates that 'not being Emperor' could be a preferable option for medieval royal agents, as it had been the case with the Ostrogothic king Theodoric the Great.

Torben Gebhardt examines in his contribution the curious case of the use of the title "basileus anglorum" by the Anglo-Saxon king Æthelstan, which was to become something of a tradition with his successors. Gebhardt demonstrates that while the Anglo-Saxon king viewed himself as more than a mere "rex", he did not strive for the Roman emperor title that Byzantines and Ottonians competed for. He rather aimed at an elevated state between contemporary kings and the Roman emperor, for which he drew inspiration by Bede's account of English history. Gebhardt comes to the conclusion that basileus, in this context, is more to be understood as a "superrex" in the lexical sense than emperor. Still, the title expressed Æthelstan's very own concept of a British imperial hegemony. It reflects his rule over a regional construct he, following Bede, envisioned as *Britannia*.

Nadeem Khan's contribution deals with the caliphates of the Islamic classic (Rāšidūn, 'Umayyād, 'Abbāsīd and Fāṭimid caliphates), showing that these can be classified as "empires" according to the definition given by the aforementioned Herfried Münkler, at least until the 9th/10th centuries. By taking into account the aspect of symbolic communication, Khan furthermore demonstrates that the 'Abbāsīd and Fāṭimid caliphs were still of "global" or "imperial" importance after they had lost most of their factual political power. Source of their power was their potential to give – or deny – authority to local, "factual" rulers, a power Khan calls "imagined" or "pretended suzerainty". To exemplify this imagined suzerainty, Khan refers to Saladin, probably the most famous figure in premodern Islam, who was alternating between the 'Abbāsīd and Fāṭimid caliphs, using them both as a source of legitimacy.

Tobias Hoffmann investigates the Western perspective on the Byzantine court ceremonial, which intended to emphasize the emperors' socio-economic pre-eminence and was therefore often arranged as a downright running the gauntlet for Western visitors. In the early and high Middle Ages,

there were anecdotal reports on the experiences of Frankish, Norman and Scandinavian kings and their emissaries visiting Constantinople. Literary echoes of these official visits to the imperial court can be found in writings such as Wace's "Roman de Rou", the "Morkinskinna"-saga or Notker's "Gesta Karoli Magni", all written for a Western audience. Hoffmann demonstrates that these sources share the common feature of turning the tables in favour of the Western side; they aim at playing the Greeks at their own game, styling their respective protagonists as cunning diplomats who avoid compromising themselves and / or their lords, or who deliberately provoke scandals outshining Byzantine ostentation. It turns out that the allegedly trivial anecdotes on golden horseshoes and eating habits in fact were quite aware of the symbolism of courtly protocol and its political implications. Using the Byzantine court as an antagonistic background, the entertaining episodes thus mirror a transcultural rivalry between East and West.

Roland Scheel's subject are imperial concepts in the Scandinavian North. While there are almost no Scandinavian rulers that assumed an imperial title, emperors feature frequently in sagas and other prose texts. In his article, Scheel examines the choice of words for these occurrences as well as their semantics and is able to show that western emperors were either uninteresting to the authors or depicted as hostile and inferior. In addition, Byzantine rulers featured far more often and enjoyed great popularity in the North. Scheel concludes that it was the Byzantine method of soft power, which employed the Byzantines' cultural heritage and wealth to exert control, in contrast to the brute Western hegemonic claim, that ensured the Eastern emperors favorable depictions over their central European counterparts.

Stefan Burkhardt asks for the reasons why a number of French princes from Southern Italy strove for "virtual" imperial titles, especially the title "Emperor of Constantinople", in the decade after the Latin empire of Constantinople had been reconquered by the Byzantines in 1261. Burkhardt demonstrates that it was especially princes with expansive ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean, above all Charles I of Naples whose aim was a crusade to recapture Constantinople, who tried to attain these titles. Thus, a virtual title like "Emperor of Constantinople" was regarded as a preliminary stage to justify the exertion of "real" power in the future.

Grischa Vercamer's article focuses on a realm that is normally not associated with imperial ideas. Yet, Vercamer manages to identify various

imperial concepts in medieval Polish historiographies between the 12th and 15th centuries. The first conclusion the author draws is a temporal limitation of the use of imperial concepts in historiography to the pre- and early Polish history. The works of Gallus Anonymus and Vincentius Kadłubek take a prominent position among the works analysed because of their early composition and their far-reaching influence on subsequent authors. Therefore, Vercamer puts a special emphasis on them without ignoring different depictions in other Polish chronicles. He comes to the conclusion that Polish historiographies use a variety of discourses, among them Pan-Slavism and superiority over imperial aggressors, to present Poland as an *imperium* in the collective memory (*kollektives Gedächtnis*) of the contemporary elites.

Thus, the contributions in this volume examine a wide range of regions as well as a wide span of time, thereby referring to numerous elements and characteristics of imperial rule in very different political communities. Furthermore, the volume not only covers different (interacting) cultural regions, the case studies also deal with a rich spectrum of source material. They include historiography, *realia* such as coinage, seals and architecture as well as charters, poetry and dogmatic treatises. In this way, the articles often reveal a certain asynchrony of different social contexts with regard to imperial concepts. At a given time and cultural sphere, there could be diverse reflections on imperial rule, which sometimes stimulated one another, but also could conflict with each other. The collected articles, therefore, investigate the dynamics resulting from these colluding forces. Besides, different types of sources often witness the transcultural interferences mentioned above. Localizing the dogmatic treatises and provisions issued by Charlemagne in the context of an increasing rivalry with Byzantium for imperial authority, for instance, clarifies the immediate repercussion of Greek dogmatics on Frankish ecclesiastical politics; the coinage of Knud the Great mirrors his familiarity with imperial symbolism of the Salian dynasty.

But of course, it is impossible for any volume to treat the subject “empire” comprehensively because there will always remain a variety of other questions concerning this topic which cannot all be addressed here. Therefore, we can only hope to have shown the scientific potential that surfaces when looking at elements of imperial rule in various regions, times and communities of the Middle Ages.