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Byzantium – Rome – Denmark – Iceland: Dealing with Imperial Concepts in the North

There are no Scandinavian emperors. With the exception of Knud the Great, no Scandinavian ruler ever called himself *imperator*, *basileus* or *keisari*. When Knud did so in the 11th century, he inscribed himself into an Anglo-Saxon tradition by calling himself *basileus Anglorum* or *basileus* in eight of his charters.¹ The imperial title of *basileus* had emerged in Byzantium in the early 7th century and was first adopted by King Athelstan in 935, obviously reflecting his rule over other kings in a unified English realm.² This concept of an English *imperium* reaches even further back in time to the decades around 700 A.D., when the abbot Adomnán of Iona called St

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- 1 Sawyer, Peter H.: *Anglo-Saxon Charters. An Annotated List and Bibliography*. (Royal Historical Society. Guides and Handbooks 8). Offices of the Royal Historical Society: London 1968, nos. 956, 959, 961, 963, 964, 971, 972, 977. Sawyer 989 and 990 contain the title but are most probably spurious and therefore excluded.
 - 2 On the styles containing *basileus* in English charters, see Snook, Ben: *The Anglo-Saxon Chancery. The History, Language and Production of Anglo-Saxon Charters from Alfred to Edgar*. (Anglo-Saxon Studies 28). Boydell & Brewer: Woodbridge 2015, pp. 74–76, 156, 164, 189–191; Kleinschmidt, Harald: “Die Titulaturen englischer Könige im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert”. In: Wolfram, Herwig / Scharer, Anton (eds.): *Intitulatio III. Lateinische Herrschertitulaturen vom 7. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert*. (Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung. Ergänzungsband 29). Böhlau: Vienna / Cologne / Graz 1988, pp. 75–129, here pp. 89–98. The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England (PASE) (retrieved 09/05/2015, from http://www.pase.ac.uk/pdb?dosp=VIEW_RECORDS&st=OFFICE&value=157&level=1&lbl=Basileus) notes eight kings using the title *basileus* in their charters: Æthelstan, Edmund, Eadred, Eadwig, Edgar the Peaceful, Æthelred the Unready, Knud, Edward the Confessor. The according styles in copies / forgeries of charters of Cenwealh II of Wessex (7th century) and Alfred the Great are obviously influenced by those from the 10th century. The earliest charters of Æthelstan containing the title are actually from A.D. 931, but their authenticity is considered dubious.

Oswald *totius Britanniae imperator*.³ Similar titles and concepts of such regional, non-Roman empires are also to be found in other regions beyond the Carolingian sphere during the early middle ages, for instance in the Iberian Peninsula and in Bulgaria.⁴ Even inside the former Carolingian Empire, the late West Frankish Carolingians and the Capetians used or were ascribed imperial titles in order to assert their legitimacy against increasingly powerful Ottonian emperors, both in charters and historiography.⁵

There may consequently have been different reasons for conceptualising one's own rule as imperial, even if it was neither directly nor indirectly connected to Rome and the Roman Empire. The mixture of Roman titles such as *imperator* or *augustus* with the Byzantine *basileus* in all these regions indicates, however, that early medieval rulers sought for the Roman prestige which these titles carried, be it of Rhomaeon or Carolingian origin. Different explanations may also be valid in Knud's case: the most obvious reason for calling himself *basileus* was that he wanted to be viewed as a legitimate successor to earlier kings of England; Æthelred had used the title frequently.⁶ Knud's consequent adoption of imperial symbols, also in

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- 3 Anderson, Alan Orr / Anderson, Marjorie Ogilvie (eds.): *Adomnan's Life of Columba*. Nelson: London et al. 1961, pp. 200–210.
 - 4 Folz, Robert: *The Concept of Empire in Western Europe from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*. Harper and Row: New York / Evanston 1969, pp. 40–41, 53–58; Canning, Joseph: *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300–1450*. Routledge: London et al. 1996, pp. 79–81; Drews, Wolfram: "Politische Theorie und imperiale Konzepte". In: Ertl, Thomas (ed.): *Europas Aufstieg. Eine Spurensuche im späten Mittelalter*. (Expansion. Interaktion. Akkulturation. Globalhistorische Skizzen 23). Mandelbaum-Verlag: Vienna 2013, pp. 34–62, here pp. 36–45.
 - 5 Schneidmüller, Bernd: *Karolingische Tradition und frühes französisches Königtum. Untersuchungen zur Herrschaftslegitimation der westfränkisch-französischen Monarchie im 10. Jahrhundert*. (Frankfurter Historische Abhandlungen 22). Steiner: Wiesbaden 1979, esp. pp. 186–193; Drews, pp. 43–44.
 - 6 PASE (see note 2) counts 53 charters. Kleinschmidt, pp. 79–84, 89–98 assumes that there was no chancery in the 10th and 11th centuries, and that styles containing *basileus* were developed by recipients in the monasteries of Abingdon, Winchester and Worcester during the 10th century; these monasteries were interested in underlining the kings' power. Snook, however, argues convincingly in favour of the existence of a chancery and the conscious political use of titles by the kings (*ibid.*, pp. 1–27, 190–194). Cf. also Folz, pp. 41–44.

his coinage, was probably further enhanced by connections to the Salian court;⁷ he himself had been present at the coronation of Conrad II in 1027.⁸ A third factor for Knud's choice of title was undoubtedly constituted by connections between England and the Byzantine Empire, especially since Knud adopted only the Byzantine title, although his predecessors also used the Latin *imperator*.⁹ These connections are illustrated, for instance, by Byzantine lead seals from the 11th century found in England, the attested presence of "Greeks" in written texts, the rapid spreading of the Legend of the Seven Sleepers, the circulation of Byzantine objects¹⁰ and the fact that the Norman conquest triggered a surprisingly spontaneous emigration to Byzantium among English warriors.¹¹ Even Athelstan's first use of the title

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- 7 Lawson, Michael Kenneth: *Cnut. The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century*. Longman: London et al. 1993, pp. 137, 144–145; Abrams, Lesley: "The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia". *Anglo-Saxon England* 24, 1995, pp. 213–249, here p. 228; Bolton, Timothy: *The Empire of Cnut the Great. Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century*. (The Northern World 40). Brill: Leiden / Boston 2009, pp. 303–307. These connections also furthered interest in classical and local mythology (cf. Tyler, Elizabeth M.: "Trojans in Anglo-Saxon England: Precedent without Descent". *The Review of English Studies* 65, 2014, pp. 10–20).
- 8 See Waßenhoven, Dominik: *Skandinavien unterwegs in Europa (1000–1250). Untersuchungen zu Mobilität und Kulturtransfer auf prosopographischer Grundlage*. (Europa im Mittelalter 8). Akademie Verlag: Berlin 2006, pp. 221–222 for a list of relevant sources.
- 9 Cf. Kleinschmidt, pp. 99–103.
- 10 Lapidge, Michael: "Byzantium, Rome and England in the early Middle Ages". In: *Roma fra Oriente e Occidente*. (Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 49). Centro: Spoleto 2002, pp. 363–400; Shepard, Jonathan: "From the Bosphorus to the British Isles. The Way from the Greeks to the Varangians". In: Jackson, Tatjana N. (ed.): *Transkontinental'nye i lokal'nye puti kak sotsiokul'turnyi fenomen. Pamiati Igoria Sergeevicha Chichurova*. (Drevneishie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy 2009). Indrik: Moscow 2010, pp. 15–42, here pp. 23–42; Ciggaar, Krijnie N.: "England and Byzantium on the Eve of the Norman Conquest. The Reign of Edward the Confessor". *Anglo-Norman Studies* 5, 1982, pp. 78–96, esp. pp. 80–92. For Byzantine lead seals found in England, see Cheynet, Jean-Claude: "Les sceaux Byzantins de Londres". *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 8, 2003, pp. 85–100.
- 11 See Godfrey, John: "The Defeated Anglo-Saxons take Service with the Eastern Emperor". In: Brown, R. Allen (ed.): *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on*

Basileus Anglorum was probably due to the presence of Byzantines and the prestige of English-Byzantine connections. Thus, the English tradition which Knud employed had Byzantine roots itself. The concept of “empire” certainly possessed a Byzantine aura, even if it was informed by Carolingian, Ottonian or Salian models.¹²

It may therefore be surprising to the modern historian that Knud only used this imperial title with connection to his rule over England; styles like *totius Anglorum basileus ceterarumque nationum in circuitu degentium regens atque gubernans* are perfect imitations of those to be found among his predecessors.¹³ When Knud explicitly relates to his rule over both England and the Nordic countries, which he deliberately exaggerates, he uses styles like *rex totius Anglię et Denemarchię et Norreganorum et partis Swavorum*.¹⁴ We are therefore confronted with the paradox that when Knud’s chancery describes his North Sea realm as a sphere of expanding dominance, the semantics do not suggest that it was thought of as *imperialis*: what was dubbed his “North Sea empire” by modern scholars¹⁵ – and actually conforms to contemporary definitions of what constitutes imperial rule¹⁶ – never was one from the point of view of Knud’s surroundings. Contrary to Edward the Confessor, Knud’s Scandinavian successors did

Anglo-Norman Studies 1, 1978. The Boydell Press: Ipswich 1979, pp. 63–74; Ciggaar, Krijnie N.: “L’émigration anglaise à Byzance après 1066. Un nouveau texte en latin sur les Varangues à Constantinople”. *Revue des études byzantines* 32, 1974, pp. 301–342, esp. pp. 305–309; Shepard, Jonathan: “Another New England? Anglo-Saxon Settlement on the Black Sea”. *Byzantine Studies* 1, 1974, pp. 18–39.

12 Cf. Folz, pp. 61–74.

13 The example is from Sawyer 961 (A.D. 1024). Cf. for instance Æthelstan (Sawyer 441, A.D. 938) and Æthelred (Sawyer 851, A.D. 983); Snook, p. 75; Kleinschmidt, pp. 96–97.

14 In a letter by Knud to the people: Liebermann, Felix (ed.): *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* 1. *Text und Übersetzung*. Max Niemeyer: Halle (Saale) 1903, pp. 276–277, here p. 276.

15 Sawyer, Peter H.: “Cnut’s Scandinavian Empire”. In: Rumble, Alexander R. (ed.): *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*. Leicester University Press: London et al. 1994, pp. 10–26; Bolton, pp. 289–307.

16 Cf. Münkler, Herfried: *Imperien: Die Logik der Weltherrschaft – vom Alten Rom bis zu den Vereinigten Staaten*. Rowohlt: Berlin 2005, pp. 15–21.

not adopt the title of *basileus*, even though they felt entitled to conquer and rule England by inheritance.¹⁷

Neither did later historiographers conceptualise Knud as an emperor or his rule as imperial – with one exception: the Danish historiographer Svend Aggesen developed the idea of an ancient Danish *imperium* in the 1180s. The concept was then adopted by Saxo Grammaticus. However, Knud himself is not viewed as an emperor in these texts, and Svend’s presentation of his alleged dominance over Europe shows little resemblance to his actual sphere of power more than 150 years ago.¹⁸ The “Baltic Sea Empire” of Valdemar II in the early 13th century¹⁹ was just as little called an “empire” as was the simultaneously developing Norwegian dominance over the North Atlantic, and when a Scandinavian king got the chance to become king of the Romans and prospective emperor, this did not seem to be attractive: when Pope Gregory IX offered King Erik Plovpenning of Denmark his help to be elected after Frederick II had been excommunicated, the king declined.²⁰ It does therefore not come as a surprise that not even the Kal-

17 See the story of the emigration of Anglo-Saxon noblemen to Denmark in Chibnall, Marjorie (ed.): *The Ecclesiastical History of Ordericus Vitalis* [*Orderici Vitalis Historia æcclesiastica*] 2. *Books III and IV*. Clarendon Press: Oxford 1969, IV, pp. 202–204, the motivation for St. Knud’s attempted conquest of England in Ælnoth’s chronicle, ch. 11 (Gertz, Martin Clarentius [ed.]: *Vita sanctorum Danorum*. Gad: Copenhagen 1908–1912, pp. 96–97) and Saxo’s lamentation over the loss of England to the Danes (Friis-Jensen, Karsten / Zeeberg, Peter [eds.]: *Saxo Grammaticus: Gesta Danorum. Danmarkshistorien*. 2 volumes. Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab & Gads Forlag: Copenhagen 2005, [in the following GD] 10,21,6).

18 Svend Aggesen: *Brevis historia Daciae*, ch. 9: Gertz, Martin Clarentius (ed.): *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae mediæ ævi* 1. Gad: Copenhagen 1917–1918, pp. 120–122; *Lex Castrensis*, ch. 1: *ibid.*, p. 66. The concept will be treated in a later part of this article.

19 Cf. Skyum-Nielsen, Niels: *Kvinde og slave*. (Danmarkshistorie uden retouche 3). Munksgaard: Copenhagen 1971, pp. 276–287; Riis, Thomas: *Das mittelalterliche dänische Ostseeimperium*. (Studien zur Geschichte des Ostseeraumes 4). Odense University Press: Odense 2003; Bysted, Ane Lise et al.: *Jerusalem in the North. Denmark and the Baltic Crusades, 1100–1522*. (Outremer. Studies in the Crusades and the Latin East 1). Brepols: Turnhout 2012, pp. 85–89, 303.

20 Skyum-Nielsen, Niels (ed.): *Diplomatarium Danicum*. 1. *række*, 7. *bind*. 1238–1249. Reitzel: Copenhagen 1990, no. 25, pp. 24–26: Archdeacon Albrecht Behaim, who was in Bavaria at the time, writes to Pope Gregory in

mar Union triggered an imperial reflex, although it was viewed as a phase of Danish imperialism both in Norway and in Sweden in modern national history.²¹ There is only one visible consequence of this hegemony of the Danish monarchs with respect to their titles: Christoffer III of Denmark is called *archirex* in the context of his coronation in Ribe in 1443.²² As a consequence, one does not get closer to an “empire” in the North than Danish ideas of an ancient Nordic *imperium* without emperors at the close of the 12th century.

This applies if one chooses a semantic point of view which focuses on the lexical field of “empire”, i.e. the usage of words and their co-occurrences as well as their specific narrative and social context in different texts. The benefits of this analytical focus lie in the fact that an imperial status of certain political actions or constellations is not ascribed by the researcher, but that we only treat as “imperial” what was also labelled as such by medieval authors. Thus, the reconstruction of a concept is based upon a transparent text corpus rather than on impressions from selected texts chosen by a scholar,

June 1239 that he hopes Erik, whose father King Valdemar II was still alive then, will be elected king of the Romans. The plan to have Erik elected is corroborated by the “Vita Ethelgeri abbatis” from Mariëngaarde in Frisia and by the “Chronica Alberici monachi Trium fontium” (see *ibid.*). Cf. the similar plan to have Hákon IV of Norway elected after Frederick’s deposal in 1245 (note 169).

- 21 See for instance Enemark, Poul: *Fra Kalmarbrev til Stockholms blodbad. Den nordiske trestatsunionens epoke 1397–1521*. Nordisk Ministerråd: Copenhagen / Lund 1979, pp. 147–151; Larsson, Lars-Olof: *Kalmarunionens tid. Från drottning Margareta till Kristian II*. Prisma: Stockholm 2003, pp. 21–23; Bagge, Sverre / Mykland, Knut: *Norge i dansketiden 1380–1814*. Cappelen: Oslo 1987, pp. 8–9; Pryser, Tore: *Norsk historie 1814–1860. Frå standssamfunn mot klassesamfunn*. (Samlagetets Norsk historie 800–2000 4). Det Norske Samlaget: Oslo 2012, pp. 195–198.
- 22 Skyum-Nielsen, Niels: “Ærkekonge og ærkebiskop. Nye træk i dansk kirkehistorie 1376–1536”. *Scandia* 23, 1955–1957, pp. 1–101, here pp. 1–3, 42–49; Hoffmann, Erich: “Coronation and Coronation Ordines in Medieval Scandinavia”. In: Bak, János M. (ed.): *Coronations. Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*. University of California Press: Berkeley et al. 1990, pp. 125–151, here pp. 132, 135–136. It is probable that the title as well as certain details of the coronation ceremony contain a conscious imitation of the emperors or Roman kings, as Christoffer was the grandson of the Wittelsbach King Ruprecht.

who is necessarily guided by her or his background knowledge.²³ An overview over the instances of words containing “empire” or “imperial” in Old Norse and Latin texts from Scandinavia and their contexts thus constitutes the semantic basis of the analysis. Since medieval Scandinavian perspectives upon empires and being emperor are rather those of outsiders, it provides hints as to how ideas of imperial rule were received and conceptualised in the Nordic countries and reveals different Scandinavian attitudes towards imperial claims of universal rule, their roots in language – Latin versus vernacular – and their change over time, including the *Zweikaiserproblem*, which had existed since Charlemagne’s coronation.

The semantics of *keisari*, *imperator* and *imperium*

Following the entries in the “Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog” provided by the Arnamagnæan Commission in Copenhagen, which covers the whole corpus of Old Norse prose texts until the first printed Bible translation in Icelandic from 1540, there are 142 instances of words containing the root *keisar-* in altogether 63 texts, covering every genre from referential and fictional to encyclopaedic and legal texts.²⁴ The simplex *keisari* and the feminine form *keisar(a)inna* appear 79 times in 43 texts. Approximately one third of these instances relate to ancient Roman emperors or their wives in translations of classical martyr histories (*Heilagra manna sögur*

23 Cf. Reichardt, Rolf: “Historische Semantik zwischen lexikométrie und New Cultural History”. In: Id. (ed.): *Aufklärung und Historische Semantik. Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur westeuropäischen Kulturgeschichte*. (Zeitschrift für historische Forschung. Beihefte 21). Duncker & Humblot: Berlin 1998, pp. 7–28; Jussen, Bernhard: “Ordo zwischen Ideengeschichte und Lexikometrie. Vorarbeiten an einem Hilfsmittel mediävistischer Begriffsgeschichte”. In: Schneidmüller, Bernd / Weinfurter, Stefan (eds.): *Ordnungskonfigurationen im hohen Mittelalter*. (Vorträge und Forschungen 64). Jan Thorbecke Verlag: Ostfildern 2006, pp. 227–256, here pp. 239–244; Geelhaar, Tim: *Christianitas. Eine Wortgeschichte von der Spätantike bis zum Mittelalter*. (Historische Semantik 24). Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 2015, pp. 26–31.

24 See Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog (ONP), retrieved 18/06/2015, from dataonp.ad.sc.ku.dk/wordlist_d_menu.html. The count is based upon the list of occurrences, double entries resulting from repetitions in editions of different manuscripts containing versions of one text were eliminated. Medical treatises containing *keisari* as part of plant names were also excluded.

and homilies), where also the adjective *keisarligr* (< *imperialis*) is to be found,²⁵ or in historiographical texts which treat Roman history, mostly annals or encyclopaedic texts. The term *keisari* furthermore occurs five times in courtly fiction (Translated or Original *Riddarasögur*), which also knows “Saxon” emperors, and five times in legal texts or discourses on law like King Sverri’s “Speech against the bishops”, always representing the source of “secular” power. Snorri Sturluson explains the distinction in rank between the emperor and other rulers in his *Prose Edda*, confirming that his contemporaries were familiar with the concept of universal rule. The biggest group, however, is represented by references to medieval emperors in historiography and hagiography with 31 occurrences (44 %). Most of these are to be found in annals, just like *imperatores* in Latin annals from Denmark, in the “*Veraldar saga*”, an Icelandic World Chronicle, and other historiographical texts which use emperors’ ruling years for the dating of events in the North.

There are only seven historiographical narratives which describe interactions between Scandinavians and *keisarar*: in the “*Hungrvaka*”, a chronicle of the diocese of Skálholt, Ísleifr Gizurarson, the first Icelandic bishop, is told to have met and befriended Henry III in 1056 and to have given him a polar bear as a gift.²⁶ Kings’ sagas from the 13th century tell us about the later king Haraldr inn harðárði, who spends some years in Byzantine military service,²⁷ about meetings between the crusader king Sigurðr Jórsalafari

25 The adjective occurs five times in the whole corpus, four times in classical hagiography and once in the Old Norse Version of the “*Life of Thomas Becket*”.

26 *Hungrvaka*, ch. 2: Ásdís Egilsdóttir (ed.): *Biskupa sögur II. Hungrvaka. Þorláks saga byskups in elzta. Jarsteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna. Þorláks saga byskups yngri. Jarsteinabók Þorláks byskups önnur. Þorláks saga byskups C. Þorláks saga byskups E. Páls saga byskups. Ísleifs þátrr bykups. Latínubrot um Þorlák bykup.* (Íslenzk Fornrit 16). Hið íslenska fonritafélag: Reykjavík 2002, p. 7.

27 Ármann Jakobsson / Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson (eds.): *Morkinskinna*. (Íslenzk Fornrit 23–24). Hið íslenska fonritafélag: Reykjavík 2011, vol. 1, ch. 11–15, pp. 88–117; Ágrip af Nóreghkonunga sögum, ch. 51: Bjarni Einarsson (ed.): *Ágrip af Nóreghkonunga sögum. Fagrskinna – Nóregh konunga tal*. (Íslenzk Fornrit 29). Hið íslenska fonritafélag: Reykjavík 1985, pp. 228–237; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ed.): *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla*. (Íslenzk Fornrit 26–28).

of Norway and the Byzantine as well as the Roman emperor,²⁸ and a little later also about the encounters between king Erik Ejegod of Denmark and the emperors.²⁹ “Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar” mentions the exchange of envoys and a meeting between Emperor Frederick II and Hákon of Norway.³⁰ Other sagas tend to focus on earlier times: “Þorvalds þáttur víðförla I” tells us about the journey of an early Icelandic Christian to Jerusalem and Byzantium, where he meets the emperor;³¹ in another version, both Þorvaldr and king Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway meet Otto III in Eastern Europe.³² Seen from this point of view, the occurrence of emperors may be interpreted as part of the indispensable European or Christian framework of Old Norse historiography as well as legal theory. Emperors remain in the background, albeit constantly, but they are usually not located in the centre of attention; encounters are at best described briefly, even if they serve to add prestige to the protagonist’s story. If one looks for exceptions, they will only be found in Constantinople. The only historical interactions between Scandinavians and emperors described in detail are those between the two crusader kings and Alexios I Komnenos. One may add the extensive narrative about the dealings of Anglo-Saxon emigrants with Alexios in “Játvarðar saga”, a

Hið íslenska fonritafélag: Reykjavík 1941–1951, vol. 3, Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar ch. 3–15, pp. 71–94.

- 28 Morkinskinna, vol. 2, ch. 68–70, pp. 95–100; Ágrip, ch. 90–91, p. 319–320; *Heimskringla*, vol. 3, Magnússona saga ch. 12–13, pp. 252–254.
- 29 Knýtlinga saga, ch. 81: Bjarni Guðnason (ed.): *Danakonunga sögur. Skjöldunga saga. Knýtlinga saga. Ágrip af sögu Danakonunga*. (Íslensk Fornrit 35). Hið íslenska fonritafélag: Reykjavík 1982, pp. 235–238.
- 30 Þorleifur Hauksson / Sverrir Jakobsson / Ulset, Tor (eds.): *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar II. Magnúss saga lagabætis*. (Íslensk Fornrit 32). Hið íslenska fonritafélag: Reykjavík 2013, ch. 178, p. 9, ch. 210, p. 38–40, ch. 284, p. 118, ch. 324, pp. 158–159.
- 31 Þorvalds þáttur víðförla I, ch. 10: Sigurgeir Steingrímsson / Ólafur Halldórsson / Foote, Peter (eds.): *Biskupa sögur I. Síðari hluti – sögutextar. Kristni saga. Kristni þættir: Þorvalds þáttur víðförla I. Þorvalds þáttur víðförla II. Stefnis þáttur Þorgilssonar. Af Pangbrandi. Af Þiðranda ok Dísunum. Kristniþöð Pangbrands. Þír þættir. Kristnitakan. Jóns saga ins helga. Gísls þáttur Illugasonar. Sæmundar þáttur*. (Íslensk Fornrit 15, 2). Hið íslenska fonritafélag: Reykjavík 2003, pp. 88–89.
- 32 Þorvalds þáttur víðförla II, ch. 4: *ibid.*, pp. 98–100.

14th century Old Norse version of a story told in various Anglo-Norman sources.³³

Table 1: Instances of the word *keisari* in Old Norse Prose texts

Historiography and hagiography: ancient world	Historiography and hagiography: middle ages		Fictional texts		Legal / normative discourse	Other titles for Byzantine rulers
	Western	Byzantine	Western / unspecified	Byzantine		
33	22	9	4	3	8	45

So far, statistics only reveal one aspect of Norse attitudes towards empires and emperors. On the one hand, Western Emperors as well as their ancient predecessors are always present, albeit in the background. They are virtually never of vital interest to stories themselves, contrary to their Byzantine counterparts in certain cases. This phenomenon is on the other hand not visible in statistics, which seems to be the result of the varying titles applied to Byzantine emperors. They are also called *stólkonungr* (“throneking”), *Grikkjakeisari*, *Miklagarðskeisari* (“emperor of the Great City”), *Miklagarðskonungr* (one instance), *Garðskonungr* (“king of the city”, seven times) or *Grikkjakonungr*³⁴ in altogether 28 texts.³⁵

33 *Játvarðar saga*, ch. 7–8: Guðbrandur Vigfússon (ed.): *Icelandic Sagas and Other Historical Documents Relating to the Settlements and Descents of the Northmen on the British Isles 1. Orkneyinga Saga and Magnus Saga with Appendices*. (Rerum Britannicarum Medii Ævi scriptores, or Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland During the Middle Ages [Rolls Series] 88,1). Her Majesty’s Stationery Office: London 1887, pp. 397–400. On the text and its models, see esp. Fell, Christine E.: “The Icelandic Saga of Edward the Confessor. Its Version of the Anglo-Saxon Emigration to Byzantium”. *Anglo-Saxon England* 3, 1973, pp. 179–196; Ciggaar 1974.

34 Rulers from ancient Greece like Alexander the Great or Agamemnon may also go under the title “King of the Greeks”. Therefore, “Alexanders saga”, “Gyðinga saga” and “Rómverja saga” (each with one instance) are excluded from the statistics above.

35 The ONP (note 24) does not have the entries “Miklagarðskonungr”, “Miklagarðskeisari” and “Garðskonungr”; neither does Fritzner’s *Ordbog over Det*

Table 2: Instances of the alternative titles of Byzantine rulers in Old Norse Prose texts

Stólkonungr	Miklagarðs-keisari	Miklagarðskonungr / Garðskonungr	Grikkjakeisari / Girkjakeisari	Grikkjakonungr / Girkjakonungr
16	3	8	1	17

These represent basically the same corpus as above, but include Íslendinga-sögur and a larger number of the Original Riddarasögur.³⁶ These titles are not always used coherently in one text: they appear side by side with *keisari* and may also vary in the manuscript tradition. If these instances are included into the count, the scale is clearly tipped in favour of the Byzantine rulers: they appear 57 times in Old Norse texts as opposed to 34 instances of western *keisarar*.³⁷ This nevertheless does not alter the fact that the word *keisari* is the only one applied to Charlemagne and his successors and is statistically much more likely to mean them rather than the emperors at the Bosphorus. Obviously and rather unsurprisingly, Norwegian and Icelandic authors had developed their view of a split Roman heritage in accordance with post-Carolingian models. It will therefore be worthwhile to go into detail and ask when and why certain texts prefer to call the Byzantine ruler *keisari*, too, and if that choice carries a political message.

Compounds containing *keisari*

Before proceeding to Latin sources, however, compounds containing *keisari* as a determiner prove to be quite revealing. 23 of these are documented,³⁸ they are to be found 66 times in Old Norse Prose texts. One may divide them into three groups: they either mean a) things owned or made by the

gamle norske sprog, with the exception of “Garðskonungr”. The count is based on what I could find by looking through indexes.

36 There are ten relevant Original Riddarasögur: “Bærings saga”, “Kiralax saga”, “Konráðs saga keisarasonar”, “Dámusta saga”, “Sigurðar saga turnara”, “Gibbons saga”, “Nítiða saga”, “Vilhjálm saga sjóðs”, “Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns”, “Sigrgrarðs saga ok Valbrands”.

37 Included in the count are historiography, hagiography, fiction and law, but no texts which relate to the ancient world.

38 The count is again based on ONP (see note 24), excluding double counts there.

emperor or imperial activities, e.g. *keisarahöll*, *keisaragarðr* (the emperors' hall / palace), *keisaralið* (the imperial army) or *keisaravígsla* (the emperor's unction); they designate b) the emperor's relatives, or they describe c) the status of being emperor and his sphere of power, e.g. *keisaranafn* (< *nomen imperialis*), *keisaradómr* (cf. German *Kaisertum*), *keisaraveldi* (empire). Despite the predilection of Old Norse for compounds, none of these occur frequently, with the exception of *keisaradómr* in the context of world history (18 times). It is usually "held" or "taken" by different Roman or Western Emperors, employing the idea of a continually existing Roman world empire, but it can also "fall down", as is the case after Frederick II's death.³⁹ The other important group is constituted by the emperor's relatives, mostly sons (8 times), daughters (8 times)⁴⁰ and sisters (3 times). It is remarkable that the latter appear exclusively in courtly fiction from the 14th and 15th centuries, with only one exception. "Morkinskinna" quotes two *lausavísur* of King Magnús berfœttr of Norway to Maktildr, an alleged *keisaradóttir*, employing concepts of courtly love.⁴¹ While the emperors' sons in *Riddarasögur* mostly come from "Saxony",⁴² the daughters and sisters nearly all live at a fictitious Byzantine court. Bridal quest romance became extremely popular in Iceland from the 14th century onwards, and usually the hero goes to Constantinople in order to prove his vigour.⁴³

39 Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar, ch. 324, p. 159.

40 *Keisaradóttir* appears seven times, one time a daughter is called *keisarabarn*.

41 Morkinskinna, ch. 62, pp. 60–62; cf. the edition of the stanzas by Kari Ellen Gade. In: Clunies Ross, Margaret (ed.): *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 2. Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2,1*. Brepols: Turnhout 2009, pp. 387–389. The other instances of *keisaradóttir* are to be found in "Karlamagnús saga", "Dámusta saga" and "Dínuss saga drambláta".

42 This is the case in six instances from three texts from the 14th century: "Klári saga", "Konráðs saga keisarasonar", "Rémundar saga keisarasonar".

43 Cf. van Nahl, Astrid: *Originale Riddarasögur als Teil altnordischer Sagaliteratur*. (Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe 1: Deutsche Sprache und Literatur 447). Lang: Frankfurt am Main et al. 1981, pp. 99–110, 155; Kalinke, Marianne E.: *Bridal Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*. (Islandica 46). Cornell University Press: Ithaca / London 1990, esp. pp. 25–65; Barnes, Geraldine: *The Bookish Riddarasögur. Writing Romance in Late Medieval Iceland*. (The Viking Collection 21). University Press of Southern Denmark: Odense 2014, pp. 151–181.

These heroes help to save Byzantium from its heathen enemies, befriend the emperors, marry their daughters and sometimes even inherit imperial rule.⁴⁴ The settings often combine an imagination of classical antiquity with conflict schemes from the crusades, where Byzantium is both the centre and the eastern outpost of the Christian world.⁴⁵ Rome is mostly unimportant in these contexts, and the dominance of a Byzantine background in the occurrences of imperial relatives serves to illustrate that Old Norse stories about emperors and empire are as a rule located in the East. This phenomenon will have to be analysed against the background of the varying imperial titles described above.

Imperium and imperator

Latin sources from Denmark and Norway pose different problems; not only do we lack an up-to-date lexicon with finding aids, let alone a database including all the relevant texts, but the classical meanings of *imperium* as “command / order”, “the authority to issue orders” and “personal rule” respectively make things difficult. Only statistics of co-occurrences in the sentences in question would provide a solid ground for semantic interpretation of all the hits. Since we do not, for now, possess reliable electronic versions of the edited texts in question, except for the “Gesta Danorum”, a manual search in a manageable corpus was the only way to gather information.⁴⁶ As a consequence of the semantic ambiguity, most of the hun-

44 These aspects are to be found in “Bærings saga”, “Konráðs saga keisarasonar”, “Sigurðar saga turnara”, “Gibbons saga”, “Vilhjálmss saga sjóðs”, “Jarlamanns saga ok Hermanns” and “Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands”.

45 Cf. for instance Kålund, Christian (ed.): *Kirialax saga*. (Samfund til Udgivelse af gammel nordisk Litteratur 43). Samfund til Udgivelse af gammel nordisk Litteratur: Copenhagen 1917, esp. pp. 64–67, which combines a pilgrimage of the Greek protagonist to the Holy Land with stories about the Migration Period. The idea of Byzantium as a frontier is in the background of all the stories named above.

46 Editions used are Storm, Gustav (ed.): *Monumenta historica Norvegiæ. Latinske Kildeskrifter til Norges Historie i Middelalderen*. Bøgger: Kristiania 1880; Gertz, Martin Clarentius (ed.): *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae mediæ ævi*. 3 volumes. Gad: Copenhagen 1917–1922; *Vitæ sanctorum Danorum*; Ekrem, Inger / Boje Mortensen, Lars / Fisher, Peter (eds.): *Historia Norwegie*. Museum Tusulanum Press: Copenhagen 2003. The “Compendium Saxonis” (contained in

dreds of instances of *imperium* are without relevance, because they relate to the personal rule of single kings in the North; in the “Gesta Danorum” this is the case in 154 of altogether 167 occurrences. While the Old Norse compounds *keisaradómr*, *keisararíki*, *keisaravald* and *keisaraveldi* offer a clear “imperial” meaning without the necessity of further definition, one has to look at the semantic context of *imperium*. A typical grey zone is found in narratives where kings from the North submit other countries to their *imperium* (*subiugare / subiacere*), as is the case several times in Saxo’s “Gesta Danorum”⁴⁷ and also in the “Historia Norwegie”, where the Jarls of Mœrir extend their rule over parts of England, Scotland and Ireland.⁴⁸ As these *imperia* do not appear to be thought of as political structures beyond the personal military success of one ruler, they consequently do not distinguish themselves from any other form of personal *imperium*. If one takes the *Imperium Romanum* and the underlying idea of a fourth World Empire as a reference, however, similar constructions of an *imperium Danicum*, *imperium Danorum* or an *imperium gentis nostrae* emerge.⁴⁹ Surprisingly enough, none of these constructions is to be found in Norwegian texts,

Scriptores minores, vol. 2) is excluded, as it is a retelling of the “Gesta Danorum”. The “Gesta Danorum” were searched with the help of the application “Historical Semantics Corpus Management” (HSCM, see hscm.hucompute.org, retrieved 30/06/2015); an easy access version is to be found under comphistsem.org (retrieved 30/06/2015). It is based upon an automatic lemmatisation of digital texts in TEI format and offers inter alia statistical analyses of the words used and co-occurrence-analyses of specific terms and phrases. In our case, the analysis is based upon the electronic version of Olrik, Jørgen / Ræder, Hans (eds.): *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*. Levin & Munksgaard: Copenhagen 1931–1957 by the Kongelige Bibliotek in Copenhagen (retrieved 27/06/2015, from <http://wayback-01.kb.dk/wayback/20100504154321/http://www2.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dsr/index.htm>). The relevant passages have been checked with the printed edition Friis-Jensen / Zeeberg 2005. Quotations and book as well as chapter numbers refer to the latter edition.

47 See for instance GD 2,6,1. Cf. the instances listed in note 51.

48 *Historia Norwegie*, VI,8, p. 66.

49 These do admittedly not always imply an imperial concept; cf. *imperium Danicum* in GD 3,3,1, where it is unified with the *imperium Sueticum*. A similar construction is to be found in GD 8,5,2.

whereas Danish authors also refer to an *imperium Graecorum*.⁵⁰ They deal frequently with the “Roman empire” (*Imperium Romanum*) and sometimes view their own realm as a potential victim of vassalitic subjection, sometimes as a parallel imperial structure which “adds” other realms to its own sphere (*regna imperio adicere / afferre*).⁵¹ Obviously, the direct neighbours of Roman emperors invested much more thought into their imperial status – or its absence – than did Norwegian historiographers in the 12th century. This applies first and foremost to conflicts in the Valdemarian Age, when Saxo directly and Svend Aggesen indirectly discuss the limits of Roman imperial power. Their stories will be dealt with in detail later on.

Contrary to the use of *imperium*, the association between the term *imperator* and Rome is stable and exclusive in Latin texts from the North. No other rulers are ever called *imperatores*. One is therefore surprised by the fact that any distinction in title between rulers of the First and Second Rome is absent. Except for two instances, neither Danish nor Norwegian authors ever call the Byzantine emperor *rex Graecorum* or similar,⁵² leaving us with the impression that the vernacular terminology regarding imperial concepts in Icelandic texts actually shows a greater proximity to continental Latin than Saxo, Svend Aggesen and Theodoricus monachus. Byzantine *basileis* do admittedly not appear too often in Danish historiography: the sources gathered in the edition *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii aevi* mention Western Emperors 33 times in eleven contexts, only one of which relates to rulers of Constantinople, in this case to the Latin emperors Balduin and Henry of Flanders (*imperatores Constantinopolitani*), who were descendants of St Knud of Denmark.⁵³ The situation in the “Gesta Danorum” is a little different: Saxo calls emperors both *imperator* (28

50 Cf. Svend Aggesen’s *Lex Castrensis*, ch. 1 (*Scriptores minores*, vol. 1, p. 66) and his *Brevis historia*, ch. 9 (*ibid.*, p. 120).

51 GD 5,8,6; 5,10,12; 5,13,3; 10,2,1.

52 Saxo calls the Byzantine ruler *rex Bizantii* in one special context (note 54). The “*Historia de profectioe Danorum in Hierosolymam*” relates the dealings of Danish crusaders in Constantinople on their way back to the North and speaks of a *rex Grece* (ch. 25: Gertz, Martinus Clarentius (ed.): *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii aevi*, vol. 2. Gad: Copenhagen 1918–1920, p. 490).

53 Vilhelm of Æbelholt: *Genealogia regum Danorum* (*Scriptores minores*, vol. 1, p. 183).

times) and *cæsar* (69 times). The only Eastern Emperors to appear are Constantine IX, who remains an anonymous *rex* in the context of Haraldr inn harðráði's leaving of Byzantium,⁵⁴ and Alexios Komnenos, who is visited by King Erik Ejegod in 1103, before he dies in Cyprus on his way to Jerusalem. Alexios is consequently called *imperator* eleven times in an elaborate narrative of his dealings with the Danish king.⁵⁵ Nowhere else is the title used this frequently. The "Compendium Saxonis", an abridged retelling of the "Gesta Danorum" in a more straightforward Latin from the 14th century, even strengthens this impression.⁵⁶

The occurrences in Norwegian texts are even more striking: if not for Theodoricus, Western Emperors would be virtually absent. One obvious reason for this is that there were fewer interactions between emperors and Norwegian kings. Furthermore, early Latin texts from Norway are not particularly interested in universal history, in contrast, for instance, to the Icelandic "Veraldar saga". Theodoricus mentions only the alleged Christianisation of Denmark by Otto II, *christianissimus imperator*.⁵⁷ Other references to Roman emperors result from his typological interpretation of Norwegian history; they are to be found in his frequent excursions, which serve to illustrate parallels between Norwegian and ancient or Frankish history.⁵⁸ Here, we come across Jovian, *christianissimus imperator*, who did not want to rule over a heathen people, just like Óláfr Tryggvason, and other ancient emperors like Augustus and Constantine the Great. Also, the fight of the early Byzantine emperors against the Huns is mentioned.

54 GD 11,3,1.

55 GD 12,7,1–6.

56 The term *imperator* occurs 40 times in 14 different contexts, whereas *caesar* is not used. The only Byzantine context is Erik Ejegod's crusade, where Alexios is called "emperor" 8 times.

57 *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, ch. 5 (*Monumenta historica Norvegiæ*, p. 11). Otto I is also mentioned in order to date the life of St Sunniva: *Acta Sanctorum in Selio* (*ibid.*, p. 147).

58 On this historiographical technique, see Bagge, Sverre: "Theodoricus Monachus – Clerical Historiography in Twelfth Century Norway". *Scandinavian Journal of History* 14, 1989, pp. 113–134, here pp. 117–123; Scheel, Roland: *Lateineuropa und der Norden. Die Geschichtsschreibung des 12. Jahrhunderts in Dänemark, Island und Norwegen*. (Frankfurter Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge 6). trafo: Berlin 2012, pp. 158–176, 221–222.

Charlemagne serves as the ideal ruler in two contexts.⁵⁹ The only *imperatores* with direct connections to Norwegian rulers, however, are from the East: in Theodoricus, the interactions between Haraldr inn harðráði and the *imperator* are described briefly,⁶⁰ and different hagiographical texts about St Olav of Norway mention the basileis' involvement in the miracles performed by the saint among the Varangians in Byzantium.⁶¹ Thus, the only emperors to show up in hagiographical and liturgical texts about the national saint until the end of the Middle Ages are the Byzantine ones.

Summing up the impressions gathered from rather dry statistics and first occasional glances at narrative contexts of the different instances, one may state that Scandinavian interest in the Eastern Emperors is remarkable. One would have expected a clearer dominance of the Romano-German Empire. After all, Scandinavian texts are well-known to follow models from Central and Western Europe both in historiographical and fictional courtly genres, not to mention the transfer of Latin as a standard language in Denmark and Norway. It is even more remarkable that the interest in and the stability of the association between the Byzantine ruler and the imperial title cannot be described as a vernacular phenomenon. As could only be shown through quantitative analysis, the imperial nature of Byzantine rule is even clearer in Scandinavian Latin than in Old Norse texts; only the latter adapt alternative, at least potentially diminishing titles like *Grikkjakonungr* (< *rex Graecorum*), which in turn reflect the usage in Latin texts from Western Europe. Furthermore, the fact that Latin historiography mentions emperors

59 Jovian: ch. 8 (*Monumenta historica Norvegiæ*, pp. 15–16), Augustus: ch. 32 (*ibid.*, p. 64–65), Constantine: ch. 13 (*ibid.*, p. 23), Huns: ch. 17 (*ibid.*, pp. 31–34), Charlemagne: ch. 23 and 30 (*ibid.*, pp. 46–48 and 59–60).

60 *Ibid.*, ch. 28, p. 57.

61 Metcalfe, Frederick (ed.): *Passio et Miracula Beati Olavi. Edited from a Twelfth-Century Manuscript in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford*. Clarendon Press: Oxford 1881, pp. 76–78; Indrebø, Gustav (ed.): *Gamal norsk homiliebok. Cod. AM 619 4°*. Dybwad: Oslo 1931, p. 114; Heinrichs, Anne (ed.): *Olafs saga hins helga. Die "Legendarische Saga" über Olaf den Heiligen Hs. Delagard. saml. nr. 8II*. (Germanische Bibliothek. Reihe 4, Texte. Neue Folge 7). Winter: Heidelberg 1982, ch. 92, pp. 212–214; Chase, Martin (ed.): "Einnarr Skúlason: Geisli" In: Clunies Ross, Margaret (ed.): *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 7. Poetry on Christian Subjects 1: The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Brepols: Turnhout 2007, stanzas 43–56, pp. 48–53.

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does not automatically imply that vernacular texts do so, too: when Theodoricus monachus mentions an *imperator* in the context of King Harold's youth, the vernacular "Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sǫgum", which is largely an Old Norse adaptation of Theodoricus' chronicle, shortens the passage extremely.⁶² "Knýtlinga saga", which is obviously based upon the account of the "Gesta Danorum", but also on "Morkinskinna's" story of King Sigurðr in Byzantium, turns the *imperator* Alexios from the "Gesta Danorum" and the *keisari* from the "Morkinskinna" into a *Girkjakonungr*.⁶³ The time in which a text was written also played a role in the choice of titles.

The Translation of Empire and its semantic renouncement

It could be argued that the concentration on details like titles for some rulers far away leads to over-interpretation, and that most of the Scandinavian authors neither knew about nor cared for empires or the problem that some people thought there should theoretically only be one. This is not the case, however, at least not from the 12th century onwards. "Veraldar saga", an Icelandic world chronicle finished between the 1150s and 1190, describes the restauration of the Roman Empire in the West as follows:⁶⁴

A dogvm þessa keisara [Leon IV to Michael II Psellos] gengv Langbarþar ok margar þiðir adrar yfir Rvmveria riki. þeir beiddv opt keisara þa er varo i Miclagardi ser lidveizlo. En þeir mato eigi Rvmveriom at lidi verþa fyrir þvi at þeir hofdv sva mikit vandræði at travt mattv þeir hallda sinv riki fyrir heidnvm þiodvm er a hendr þeim gengv þvi sidr mattv þeir odrvm at lidi koma. þadan fra sottv þeir travst þeirra hofdingja er fyrir nordan fiall varo a Fraclandi ok siþan er Pipinvs tok konvngdom yfir Rvmveriom at vilia Stephani pafa þa hvrfo Rvmveriar vndan Miclagardz konvngom. haufvm ver þadan engar sanligar saugvr siþan Rvmveriar hvrfo vndan þeim. siþan kallaz hvarr þeirra odrum meiri stolkonvngv i Miklagardi ok keisari a Saxlandi.

In the days of these emperors [Leo IV to Michael II], the Lombards and many other peoples came over the realm of the Romans. They often asked the Emperors who sat in Miklagarðr for help. But they could not help the Romans because they had great trouble themselves in defending their own realm against the heathen peoples who attacked them. From that time on, the Romans sought the help of

62 Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sǫgum, ch. 33, p. 44.

63 Knýtlinga saga, ch. 81 (*Danakonunga sǫgur*, pp. 236–238).

64 Jakob Benediktsson (ed.): *Veraldar saga*. (Samfund til Udgivelse af gammel nordisk Litteratur 61). Luno: Copenhagen 1944, pp. 69–70.; translation by R. S.

the magnates who were north of the mountains in *Frakkland*, and later, when Pippin took the kingdom over the Romans according to the will of Pope Stephanus, the Romans turned away from the Kings of Miklagarðr. Ever since each of them has rather called himself *stólkonungr* – throne-king – in Miklagarðr, and *keisari* in Saxland.

This is a perfectly clear explanation of the *translatio imperii*, followed by a shift of focus towards the Western Emperors. The idea that the *Imperium Romanum* was revived and continued by the successors of Charlemagne had become increasingly influential since the time of Otto II. Around 1100, the idea of the four World Empires was systematically connected to the “Romano-German” empire in world chronicles, thus turning a *renovatio*, which allowed for two Roman emperors like in Late Antiquity, into a *translatio*.⁶⁵ It should be noted that Adam of Bremen around 1075 was one of the earliest historiographers to express this thought.⁶⁶ As a result of clerical networks in the archdiocese and the fact that Adam’s work contained relevant material, his “*Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*” were known at least in Iceland and Denmark around 1130.⁶⁷ Although his idea of a translation of empire may have been one of the sources for the “*Veraldar saga*”, there must have been a more extensive world chronicle

65 Cf. Goetz, Werner: *Translatio Imperii. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Geschichtsdenkens und der politischen Theorien im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*. Mohr: Tübingen 1958, pp. 79–93, 104–137; Folz, pp. 104–118; Drews, p. 43. “*Veraldar saga*” also contains comments on the first five of the six *aetates mundi*, which employ models of thought known from the church fathers and the Victorines (*Veraldar saga*, pp. 79–86; cf. *ibid.*, pp. XXXIX–XL; Marchand, James W.: “The Allegories in the Old Norse *Veraldar saga*”. *Michigan Germanic Studies* 1, 1975, pp. 109–118; Scheel, pp. 148–149.).

66 Schmeidler, Bernhard (ed.): *Adam von Bremen: Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte [Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum]*. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptorum rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi [2]). Hahnsche Buchhandlung: Hannover / Leipzig 1917, 1,10, p. 11.

67 Cf. the extensive use of Adam’s text in “*Chronicon Roskildense*” (*Scriptores minores*, vol. 1, esp. pp. 14–20) and the use of his work for the dating of the conversion of Iceland in Ari Þorgilsson’s “*Íslendingabók*” (Christensen, Aksel E.: “Om kronologien i Aris *Íslendingabók* og dens lån fra Adam af Bremen”. In: Brøndum-Nielsen, Johannes (ed.): *Nordiske studier. Festskrift til Chr. Westergård-Nielsen på 65-årsdagen den 24. november 1975*. Rosenkilde og Bagger: Copenhagen 1975, pp. 23–24).

in the background, most probably by Sigebert of Gembloux.⁶⁸ Be this as it may; no possible Latin source we know of connects the translation with a concrete new title for the successors of Constantine. Sigebert writes: *immutato ordine regnorum, immutandus est etiam ordo titulorum*.⁶⁹ This is duly implemented in the “Veraldar saga”.

The Icelandic chronicler managed to combine up-to-date world history with older, specifically Scandinavian cultural knowledge. The emerging picture is clear: the Byzantines failed to protect the Romans, albeit for reasons they cannot be held responsible for. The information is friendly towards the Byzantines and carefully picked from the sources in this regard. Not only in Sigebert’s text, but virtually in all world chronicles, the reasons for the translation of empire are either iconoclasm or the fact that there was no male emperor in the year of Charlemagne’s coronation, or both. “Veraldar saga” drops this information and simply states that the basileis were otherwise engaged. As a result, the imperial title rests with the Western Emperors, while the Byzantines adopted another title which seems to explain itself. As one can read a little earlier in the chronicle, Constantine the Great

68 Bethmann, D. (ed.): “Chronica Sigeberti Gemblacensis a. 381–1111”. In: Pertz, Georg Heinrich (ed.): *Chronica et annales aevi Salici*. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptorum (in Folio) 6). Hahnsche Buchhandlung: Hannover 1843, pp. 300–374, here pp. 333–336, esp. p. 336. Sigebert’s chronicle is rather detailed about the Byzantine rulers’ troubles with their neighbours, and especially the sentence: *Romani, qui ab imperatore Constantinopolitano iamdiu desciverant* [...] (ibid., p. 336, A.D. 801) is mirrored in the expression *Rómverjar hurfu undan þeim*. (“The Romans turned away from them.”). Cf. also Waitz, G. (ed.): “Ekkehardi chronicon universale ad a. 1106”. In: *MGH SS 6*, pp. 33–231, here pp. 169, 175. The editor of “Veraldar saga” was convinced that the text is based upon a lost compilation of Latin sources. This has been doubted in the last years. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir: “Um aldir alda. Veraldarsögur miðalda og íslenskar aldartölur”. *Ritið* 3, 2005, pp. 111–133, here p. 125; Würth, Stefanie: “Die mittelalterliche Übersetzung im Spannungsfeld von lateinischsprachiger und volkssprachiger Literaturproduktion. Das Beispiel der Veraldar saga”. In: Johanterwege, Vera / Würth, Stefanie (eds.): *Übersetzen im skandinavischen Mittelalter*. (Studia mediaevalia septentrionalia 14). Fassbaender: Vienna 2007, pp. 11–32, here pp. 19–20; Scheel, pp. 144–149), and the observations above point strongly into an independent handling of different sources by the author of the saga.

69 *MGH SS 6*, p. 336 (A.D. 801).

had moved the Roman imperial throne – *keisara stóll* – to Constantinople, hence *stólkonungr*.⁷⁰ The Byzantine rulers had been and still are sitting on the ancient imperial Roman throne. This etymology is probably historically incorrect, as the term was rather borrowed from Eastern Slavonic *stol'nji kn'az'* in earlier times, when it denoted the ruler of Kiev.⁷¹ However, this has no consequences for our case. It was understood as explained in the “*Veraldar saga*”: while the empire had been transferred to the Frankish and Saxon rulers, the Byzantines remained heirs to ancient Roman places, symbols and traditions. “*Veraldar saga*” mentions the throne, Hagia Sophia and the Codex Iustinianus.

Although the narrative follows the Romano-German model and explicitly suggests a descent in rank, it refrains from blaming Irene and the last members of the Isaurian dynasty. In addition, the title of *stólkonungr* associated with Byzantium possessed and retained an imperial connotation and a powerful sound to Icelandic and Norwegian ears. In Snorri Sturluson’s Edda, it is listed among the poetic synonyms for Christ, the king of kings, and it was also used this way in “*Maríu saga*”.⁷² What we see here is the mobilisation and integration of knowledge from oral tradition. Since the emergence of Rus’, the development of the way “from the Varangians to the Greeks” and especially since the early pilgrimages of Scandinavian kings to Jerusalem and Byzantium, Constantinople had become the most important Mediterranean destination for Scandinavians.⁷³ Pilgrims and

70 *Veraldar saga*, p. 59.

71 Stender-Petersen, Adolf: “Études Varègues V,2. La théorie de l’origine Varègue de la byline russe”. *Classica et mediaevalia* 8, 1946–1947, pp. 121–138, here p. 128.

72 Finnur Jónsson (ed.): *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*. Gyldendal: Copenhagen 1931, Skáldskaparmál ch. 65, p. 158–159; Unger, Carl R. (ed.): *Mariu saga. Legender om Jomfru Maria og hendes Jertegn*. Brøgger & Christie: Christiania 1871, p. 1086 (*stólkonungr Jesus*).

73 This was already stated by Blöndal, Sigfús: *Væringjasaga. Saga norræna, rússneskra og enskra hersveita í þjónustu Miklagarðskeisara á miðöldum*. Ísafoldarprentsmiðja: Reykjavík 1954; cf. the English version Blöndal, Sigfús: *The Varangians of Byzantium. An Aspect of Byzantine Military History Translated, Revised and Rewritten by Benedikt S. Benedikz*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge et al. 1978, pp. 122–166; Ellis Davidson, Hilda Roderick: *The - Viking Road to Byzantium*. Allen & Unwin: London 1976; Zeitler, Rudolf

mercenaries would meet compatriots in the “Great City” and Byzantine garrisons; they could expect to be employed in the Byzantine army and to return home with money and prestige. Consequently, it had become common knowledge that “Greece” and the City with its many relics and imperial tradition were at the same time a centre of the Christian sphere as well as a defender of the frontier against “heathens” in the East. This is clearly expressed by *kenningar* in Skaldic poetry from the 11th century, when a skald compared Knud the Great’s (imperial?) rule to God’s rule in heaven, expressing the contemporary idea of the *basileus Anglorum* as a *vicarius Christi*.⁷⁴ The Skaldic circumlocution for “God” is “protector of Greece” (*gætir Grikklands*). This *kenning* was very probably considered to be flattering enough to save the poet’s neck;⁷⁵ it belongs to a refrain (*stef*) which Þórarinn loftunga, the skald in question, had been forced to add by the king on the threat of death: the first, plainer version of his panegyric had been considered an insult to a ruler of Knud’s rank.⁷⁶ Some decades later, another skald prayed for the late Haraldr inn harðráði to the “Guardian of the Greeks and the Rus’” (*Grikkja vörðr ok Garða*).⁷⁷ While this is an expression of the same idea as above, another quite obvious motivation for the choice is the parallel to Harold’s own biography. Before his return to Norway, he and his men had themselves served among the troops of Jaroslav the Wise and afterwards in Byzantium.⁷⁸ Even though this mate-

(ed.): *Les pays du Nord et Byzance (Scandinavie et Byzance). Actes du colloque nordique et international de byzantinologie. Tenu à Upsal 20–22 avril 1979*. Almqvist & Wiksell: Uppsala 1981; Piltz, Elisabeth (ed.): *Bysans och Norden. Akta för Nordiska forskarkursen i bysantinsk konvetenskap 1986*. Almqvist & Wiksell: Uppsala 1989. One should add that Rome was of course an important destination especially for bishops and clergymen. Saga narratives, however, do not treat those journeys with equal interest.

74 Townend, Matthew (ed.): Þórarinn loftunga: Höfuðlausn. In: Whaley, Diana (ed.): *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1. Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1,2*. Brepols: Turnhout 2012, stanza 1, pp. 850–851. Cf. Bolton, pp. 291–292.

75 Hence the name of the poem: *Höfuðlausn* means “release of the head”.

76 *Heimskringla*, vol. 2, pp. 307–308.

77 Whaley, Diana (ed.): “Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson: Haraldsdrápa”. In: Clunies Ross 2009, stanza 17, p. 279–280.

78 For a list of sources, see Waßenhoven, p. 202.

rial is far too thin to deduce any form of “orthodox influence”, it becomes clear that the learned historiographers of the 12th and 13th centuries could draw upon a set of semantic associations. Also the idea of a “throne-lord” (*stólþengill*) in Byzantium can be traced back to Skaldic poetry from the 11th century.⁷⁹

On the other hand, there was no traditional distinction in rank between emperors and other rulers; the word *keisari* is absent from Eddaic poetry and occurs only twice in skaldic stanzas about kings from the North: Knud the Great is called *kærr keisara* – dear to the emperor – meaning Conrad II whom he had met in Rome in 1027.⁸⁰ In the beginning of the 12th century, a skald calls Henry IV, whom Erik Ejegod of Denmark had met in 1102, *ríkr keisari* (powerful emperor) and *César*.⁸¹ It is symptomatic that there is no exclusive poetic synonym for emperors in the Skaldic corpus. Snorri Sturluson, who catalogues skaldic circumlocutions and synonyms in his Edda, ranks emperors as the highest rulers in the world. He ascribes to them the heiti *allvaldr* (“all-ruler”), but it is not exclusively used for emperors and was applied to kings and jarls, too.⁸² One of the rulers called *allvaldr* in Skaldic Poetry is Alexios Komnenos, the Byzantine Emperor, in the context of his meeting with King Erik of Denmark in 1103.⁸³ We may infer from this, firstly, that the idea of a special imperial rank was not established in the North before 1100 and, secondly, that the Byzantine rulers enjoyed a special prestige well before this time. After all, Snorri lists the title *Grikkjakonungr* (“king of the Greeks”) among *kennings* for God himself. Although his example reflects the language use of the 11th century,⁸⁴ calling the basileus *Grikkjakonungr* need not necessarily have implied a statement

79 Whaley, Diana (ed.): “Þjóðólfr Arnórsson: Sexstefja”. In: Clunies Ross 2009, stanza 7, pp. 118–119.

80 Townend, Matthew (ed.): “Sígvatr Þórðarson: Knútsdrápa”. In: Whaley 2012, stanza 10, pp. 661–662. Four other occurrences of *keisari* are to be found in Skaldic poems about classical hagiography.

81 Carroll, Jayne (ed.): “Markús Skeggjason: Eiríksdrápa”. In: Clunies Ross 2009, stanza 24, pp. 453–454.

82 *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, Skáldskaparmál 80, p. 179.

83 Markús Skeggjason: Eiríksdrápa (note 81, here stanza 28, p. 457–458).

84 *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, Skáldskaparmál 65, pp. 158–159, esp. stanza 275 (also Whaley, Diana (ed.): “Arnórr jarlaskáld: Haraldsdrápa [around / after 1066]”. In: Clunies Ross 2009, stanza 17, pp. 279–280.).

about a non-imperial status in later times. Answers will only be possible by looking at the contexts.

Yet, we cannot deny that the Scandinavian authors definitely knew the Western ideas of translation of empire. There are 13 textual witnesses of “Veraldar saga” – a lot by Icelandic measures – and many more manuscripts containing encyclopaedic material on the same basis.⁸⁵ We can also find the idea of *translatio imperii* in Denmark, for instance in manuscripts of the “Annales Lundenses” under A.D. 768, the beginning of Charlemagne’s rule: *hic transit imperium Romanorum ad reges Francie*.⁸⁶ The annalists from Lund used material from German world chronicles, albeit transferred via English or Norman manuscripts, and material from the “Anglo-Saxon Chronicle”.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, all our Scandinavian authors followed Romano-German ideas of translation. The sources for both Danish and Icelandic world history must furthermore somehow be connected to texts like the “Vita Willibrordi” by Thiofrid of Echternach from 1103/04 or the “Echternach chronicle” from 1191. They all include Charlemagne’s father Pippin into the process of translation, which begins with his coronation as “King of the Romans” in the “Veraldar saga”, and is finished with his death in 768 in the “Annales Lundenses”.⁸⁸ One may wonder why Scandinavian

85 Cf. *Veraldar saga*, pp. V–XXXV. For a broader view on universal history in Iceland, cf. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 2005 and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir: “The World and Its Ages”. In: Williams, Gareth / Bibire, Paul (eds.): *Sagas, Saints and Settlements*. (The Northern World 11). Brill: Leiden 2004, pp. 1–7.

86 Jørgensen, Ellen (ed.): *Annales Danici medii ævi*. Gad: Copenhagen 1920, p. 51. The event seems to be important to the scribes or the compiler of the annals, as it marks the beginning of the more recent annalistic part, which combines Danish and universal history. It follows directly after the inserted “Chronicon Lethrense”, which treats the history of Danish kings in mythological prehistory.

87 *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6, 12–13; Leegaard Knudsen, Anders: “Interessen for den danske fortid omkring 1300. En middelalderlig dansk nationalisme”. *Historisk tidskrift [DK]* 100, 2000, pp. 1–34, here pp. 5–7.

88 Weiland, L. (ed.): “Ex Vita S. Willibrordi auctore Thiofridi abate”. In: Pertz, Georg Heinrich (ed.): *Chronica ævi Suevici*. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores (in Folio) 23). Hahnsche Buchhandlung: Hannover 1874, pp. 23–30, here pp. 24–25.; *Chronicon Epternacense auctore Theoderico monacho*. In: *Ibid.*, pp. 38–64, here p. 38. Cf. Goez, p. 130. *Veraldar saga*, p. 70; “Annales Lundenses” (Jørgensen, p. 51) has the translation before King Pippin’s death.

historiographers chose to follow the eschatological interpretation of the Roman Empire, as alternatives were certainly available, for instance the interpretation in Hugh of Fleury's "Historia ecclesiastica". It plays down the idea that Charlemagne's empire was universal and thus taken away from the Byzantines.⁸⁹ This idea of two regional empires in the East and the West negates the eschatological relevance of the Roman World Empire, as illustrated especially by Otto of Freising,⁹⁰ and fits neatly within the development of political thought. It was adopted by several historiographers during the 12th century,⁹¹ but not in Scandinavia. The concept of translation of empire analysed so far is consistent with Danish historiographers' use of *Imperium Romanum*. It may be inferred from this that when Scandinavian historiographers and authors of other texts ignored the problem of two emperors, they did so deliberately and probably for a reason.

Rex imperio dignus – rex imperator in regno suo

In the case of Denmark, the attitude towards imperial concepts of universal rule and the logic behind the use of imperial titles is quite obvious. The explanation lies in the relationship between the Danish kings and the Romano-German emperors during the 12th century. Internal conflicts had

Connections between Echternach, its surroundings and Iceland in the 12th century are plausible: "Rómverja saga" uses a version of Sallust which is found in an 11th-century manuscript from Echternach (Hofmann, Dietrich: "Accessus ad Lucanum. Zur Neubestimmung des Verhältnisses zwischen Rómverja saga und Veraldar saga". In: Simek, Rudolf (ed.): *Sagnaskemmtun. Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson on his 65th Birthday 26th May 1986*. (Philologica Germanica 8). Böhlau: Vienna et al. 1986, pp. 121–151, here p. 149), and the veneration of the apostle Matthew in Trier spread rapidly to Iceland in the 12th century (van der Toorn-Piebenga, Gryte Anne: "De Ijslandse bewerkingen van de legende over de apostel Mattias". *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek* 22, 2001, pp. 91–108).

89 Mégier, Elisabeth: "Karl der Große, das römische Reich und die Kirche in franko-normannischer Sicht: der Standpunkt Hugos von Fleury". In: Ead.: *Christliche Weltgeschichte im 12. Jahrhundert: Themen, Variationen und Kontraste. Untersuchungen zu Hugo von Fleury, Ordericus Vitalis und Otto von Freising*. (Beihefte zur Mediävistik 13). Lang: Frankfurt am Main et al. 2010, pp. 325–331.

90 Goetz, pp. 111–125; Folz, pp. 114–118.

91 Goetz, pp. 136–137; cf. Drews, pp. 45–48. See also below, note 106.

opened the door to imperial influence since 1131, when Magnus, the son of King Niels, had murdered his cousin Knud Lavard. His intention was most probably to avoid Knud's election as king after the prospective death of his father, King Niels.⁹² What he accomplished instead was the veneration of Knud as a martyr, the mobilisation of a strong opposition and the start of a feud during which Magnus himself and his father died and which involved Lothair of Supplinburg, by then still only Roman king. He had been closely related to Knud Lavard and now prepared for war against King Niels and his murderous son Magnus. The Danish king was forced to pay a large fine and to leave hostages, and, more importantly, Magnus had to swear an oath of fealty (*hominium*).⁹³ After Lothair's stay in Italy and his coronation as emperor, Magnus had to come to Halberstadt in 1134 where he bore the imperial sword in the Easter ceremonies and was crowned in Lothair's presence – the first coronation of a Danish king we know of.⁹⁴ Although lately doubt has been cast on the relevance of feudo-vassalitic concepts and their application in the interpretation of early 12th century politics, this very case points strongly to the establishment of a vassalitic dependence.⁹⁵

92 For the history of the internal Danish conflicts between 1131 and 1134, see Fenger, Ole: *Kirker rejses alle vegne: 1050–1250*. (Gyldendals og Politikens Danmarkshistorie 4). Gyldendal: Copenhagen 2002, pp. 72–76; Hermanson, Lars: *Släkt, vänner och makt. En studie av elitens politiska kultur i 1100-talets Danmark*. (Avhandlingar från Historiska Institutionen i Göteborg 24). Historiska Institutionen: Gothenburg 2000, pp. 88–138.

93 Schmeidler, Bernhard (ed.): *Helmolds Slavenchronik*. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi [32]). Hahnsche Buchhandlung: Hannover 1937, sch. 49–50, pp. 96–100. Cf. Böhmer, J. F./Petke, Wolfgang (eds.): *Regesta imperii IV. Erste Abteilung: Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter Lothar III. und Konrad III. Erster Teil: Lothar III. 1125 (1075)-1137*. Böhlau: Cologne / Weimar / Vienna 1994, nos. 284–286, pp. 181–183.

94 Waitz, Georg (ed.): “Annalista Saxo a. 1114–1163”. In: *MGH SS* 6, pp. 542–777, here A.D. 1134, p. 768; “Annales Magdeburgenses a. 1–1188”. In: Pertz, Georg Heinrich (ed.): *Annales aevi Suevici*. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores (in Folio) 16). Hannover 1859, A.D. 1134, p. 184. Cf. Böhmer / Petke, no. 392, pp. 247–248.

95 Auge, Oliver: “Hominium, tributum, feudum. Zu den Anfängen des Lehnswesens im Nordosten des Reiches bis 1250”. In: Dendorfer, Jürgen / Deutinger, Roman (eds.): *Das Lehnswesen im Hochmittelalter. Forschungskonstrukte –*

However, his coronation did Magnus not help too much: a little later at Pentecost 1134, the king and his entourage were killed by an attack of Knud Lavard's half-brother Erik when they had just landed in Scania. The old King Niels fled, but was killed in Schleswig a little later by citizens who had sworn loyalty to Knud Lavard. Juicily enough, Saxon knights on horseback had taken part in the attack on Niels and Magnus;⁹⁶ it may be suggested that Lothair double-crossed Magnus, who had proved to be disloyal.⁹⁷

The new king Erik Emune was obviously a friend of the emperor and his policy towards Denmark. From 1135 onwards, when his envoys were received by Lothair in Magdeburg,⁹⁸ Erik's charters give both the years of Erik and Lothair as rulers, and the "Chronicon Roskildense" criticises Erik heavily for his church policy and the fact that he in all aspects behaved like an emperor or the emperor, who probably considered himself to be

Quellenbefunde – Deutungsrelevanz. (Mittelalter-Forschungen 34). Jan Thorbecke Verlag: Ostfildern 2010, pp. 195–215, here pp. 197–207 demonstrates that the occurrence of the term *hominium* in Henry the Lion's dealing with Wendish princes at the same time does not imply the handover of a *beneficium* and the establishment of "vassalitic" duties. For a broader view on the subject, cf. Deutinger, Roman: "Das hochmittelalterliche Lehnswesen: Ergebnisse und Perspektiven". In: Dendorfer / Deutinger, pp. 463–473, here pp. 465–467; Patzold, Steffen: *Das Lehnswesen*. Beck: Munich 2012, pp. 71–86. While the alleged legal clearness of the rituals described above may be doubted, the substantiation of some form of dependence cannot. From the perspective of the later 12th century, both parties recognise feudo-vassalitic implications. Saxo does not report the dealings at Halberstadt, but has Magnus become a *miles Imperii* in the context of Lothair's first intervention in 1131 (GD 13,8,6).

96 Their identity and number (300) are given in the "Annales S. Petri Erphesfurtensis" (Heebøll-Holm, Thomas Kristian: "Priscorum quippe curialium, qui et nunc militari censetur nomine. Riddere i Danmark i 1100-tallet". In: *Historisk tidsskrift [DK]* 109, 2009, pp. 21–69, here p. 43).

97 Gelting, Michael H.: "Da Eskil ville være ærkebiskop af Roskilde. Roskildekrøniken, Liber daticus Lundensis og det danske ærkesædes ophævelse 1133–1138". In: Carelli, Peter / Hermanson, Lars / Sanders, Hanne (eds.): *Ett annat 1100-tal. Individ, kollektiv och kulturella mönster i medeltidens Danmark*. (Centrum för Danmarksstudier 3). Makadam: Gothenburg / Stockholm 2004, p. 189.

98 Annalista Saxo (note 94), A.D. 1135, p. 769.

his liege.⁹⁹ The role of overlord, arbitrator and protector also fell to later emperors: Erik Emune had been killed in 1137, and after an interlude, the conflict between the descendants of Knud Lavard and Magnus arose again. The years between 1146 and 1157 saw two and then three kings fighting for control over Denmark, and it was Frederick Barbarossa who decided how the power should be distributed between the competitors in 1152.¹⁰⁰ He did so in favour of Svend, who was his *amicus* and *comiles*.¹⁰¹ Frederick's solution did not last, but what Valdemar the Great inherited when he won the conflict in 1157 was a problematic dependency on Frederick. He had to follow him into the papal schism of 1157 and gained the chance to emancipate himself from this dependency not until after the death of the anti-pope Victor IV in 1164 and after Frederick had got into trouble.¹⁰²

From this situation onwards until the beginning of the next century, we see a well-known, growing anti-imperial sentiment in Danish historiography.¹⁰³ In 1182, Knud IV denied Frederick the oath of fealty. This emanci-

99 Chronicon Roskildense, ch. 18 (*Scriptores minores*, vol.1, p. 31). Cf. Scheel, pp. 53, 62–63.

100 Waitz, Georg (ed.): *Otonis et Rahewini Gesta Friderici I. imperatoris*. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi [46]). Hahnsche Buchhandlung: Hannover / Leipzig 1912, II,5, pp. 105–106; GD 14,8,1–2. Cf. Böhmer, J. F. / Oppl, Ferdinand / Mayr, Hubert (eds.): *Regesta imperii IV. Ältere Staufer. Zweite Abteilung: Die Regesten des Kaiserreiches unter Friedrich I. 1152 (1122)–1190. 1. Lieferung 1152 (1122)–1158*. Böhlau: Vienna / Cologne / Graz 1980, no. 88, p. 22; Engels, Odilo: “Friedrich Barbarossa und Dänemark”. In: Haverkamp, Alfred (ed.): *Friedrich Barbarossa. Handlungsspielräume und Wirkungsweisen des staufischen Kaisers*. (Vorträge und Forschungen 40). Jan Thorbecke Verlag: Sigmaringen 1992, pp. 353–385. With regard to the conflicts in Denmark, cf. Hermanson, pp. 209–232; Fenger, pp. 126–160.

101 GD 14,8,1.

102 Qvistgaard Hansen, Jørgen: “Pavestrid og europæisk storpolitik 1159–1170”. *Historisk tidsskrift [DK]* 12(3), 1969, pp. 369–430; Engels, esp. pp. 375–379; Leegaard Knudsen, Anders: “Absalon and Danish Policy towards the Holy Roman Empire”. In: Friis-Jensen, Karsten / Skovgaard-Petersen, Inge (eds.): *Archbishop Absalon of Lund and his World*. Roskilde Museum: Roskilde 2000, pp. 21–35, here pp. 24–25, 29–35.

103 Cf. Leegaard Knudsen; Groh, Martin: “Das Deutschenbild in den historischen Büchern der Gesta Danorum”. In: Nyberg, Tore (ed.): *Saxo and the Baltic Region. A Symposium*. (University of Southern Denmark Studies in History and

pation is accompanied by the emergence of the above-mentioned Danish, Nordic imperium as a third entity besides the Greek and Roman one in the distant heroic past. The idea is fully developed in Svend Aggesen's "Brevis historia regum Daciae" from between 1185 and 1188, where Knud the Great's realm borders on *Graecorum imperium*. Not only is Knud the ruler of a third huge imperium:¹⁰⁴

Mortuo Suenone filius eius Canutus in regno successit, quem et Senem cognominabat. Hic regni sui terminos mire uirtutis potentia dilatauit. Nam ab ultima Tyle usque ad Grecorum ferme imperium uirtute multiplici circumiacentia regna suo aggregauit imperio. Quippe Hyberniam, Angliam, Galliam, Italiam, Longobardiam, Teotoniam, Noruagiam, Slauiam cum Samia satis eleganter subiugauit.

He also has to help his son-in-law, the Emperor Henry III, who cannot get an insurrection of the Romans under control.¹⁰⁵ Knud is superior to the emperor, just as Danish kings and queens in former times had been. Svend Aggesen not only presents us with another story of the defence of the Danish *honor regni* against greedy Roman-German emperors, but also with the idea *Rex imperator in regno suo*.¹⁰⁶ It is Thyra, the last heathen queen of Denmark, whom Otto the Great tries to force to become his concubine. Her answer after some proofs of her superior wits and playing upon Otto's imperial self-image is that her sovereignty inside her own realm is just as great as Otto's in his. By inventing this story, Svend manages to turn the history of imperial-Danish interactions into its opposite: it is a female heathen ruler and not a Christian male who refutes any imperial claims on Denmark. Svend cleverly and carefully constructs a subversion of the

Social Sciences 275). Odense University Press: Odense 2004, pp. 143–160; Foerster, Thomas: *Vergleich und Identität. Selbst- und Fremdentung im Norden des hochmittelalterlichen Europa*. (Europa im Mittelalter 14). Akademie Verlag: Berlin 2009, pp. 121–134.

104 Brevis historia regum Dacie, ch. 9 (*Scriptores minores*, vol. 1), pp. 120–122; cf. also Svend's *Lex Castrensis* (*ibid.*, p. 66).

105 Brevis historia, ch. 9 (*Scriptores minores*, vol. 1), p. 122.

106 The following story is found in Brevis historia, ch. 5–6 (*Scriptores minores*, vol. 1, pp. 106–114). Svend illustrates the principle of equal sovereignty before it was formulated that way just after 1200 (cf. Grewe, Wilhelm G. (ed.): *Fontes historiae iuris gentium. Quellen zur Geschichte des Völkerrechts 1. 1380 v. Chr.-1493*. De Gruyter: Berlin / New York 1995, pp. 427, 432–436; Canning, pp. 124–125). For an interpretation, cf. Scheel, pp. 96–103.

existing historical narrative. What one would have expected instead of his story is a mention of Otto II's campaign to Jutland, the fact that he was the godfather of Svend Tveskæg and / or a narrative of the missionary Poppo. He was allegedly sent by Otto I or Otto II – depending on the respective historiographical tradition.¹⁰⁷ Earlier Danish sources and also the “Annals of Lund” tell either one, two or all three stories, and also Theodoricus monachus has Otto II christianise Denmark, just as in the “Veraldar saga” and several kings' sagas.¹⁰⁸ Adam of Bremen and some Scandinavian sources even mention the fact that Louis the Pious was the godfather of the Danish King Harald klak.¹⁰⁹ There was therefore ample evidence for beneficial imperial intervention in Denmark, especially with regard to the Christian faith. Not only does Svend conceal this, he actually elaborates the idea of universal imperial rule just to put it to ridicule in the case of Otto, whom Queen Thyra mockingly calls the “tamer of so many peoples' ferocities”,¹¹⁰ before she tells his envoys very clearly that his power is restricted to his own realm. Svend's refutation of a universal empire is built upon a con-

107 Widukind (Hirsch, Paul (ed.): *Die Sachsen-geschichte des Widukind von Korvei*. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi [60]). Hahnsche Buchhandlung: Hannover 1935, ch. 65, p. 140–141) and Thietmar of Merseburg (Holtzmann, Robert (ed.): *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg und ihre Korveier Überarbeitung*. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum, Nova series 9). Weidmannsche Buchhandlung: Berlin 1935, ch. 14, pp. 53–54.) connect Poppo's ordeal to Otto I and Harald Blåtand, Adam (Schmeidler 1917, 2,35, pp. 95–94) dates it to Otto II's time. Cf. Gelting, Michael H.: “Poppo's Ordeal. Courtier Bishops and the Success of Christianization at the Turn of the First Millennium”. *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 6, 2010, pp. 101–133.

108 Theodoricus monachus: *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, ch. 5 (*Monumenta historica Norvegiæ*, pp. 11–12). The information is also included in Odd's “Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar”, “Fagrskinna”, “Heimskringla” and “Knýtlinga saga” (Schmidt, Hans-Joachim: *Studien zum Kaisertum und den deutschen Kaisern in den nordischen Quellen bis zum Ausgang des 13. Jahrhunderts*. Doctoral thesis: Frankfurt am Main 1973, pp. 100–113, esp. pp. 106–108).

109 Adam (Schmeidler 1917, 1,15, p. 21); *Chronicon Roskildense*, ch. 1 (*Scriptores minores*, vol. 1, p. 14); *Chronicon Lethrense*, ch. 2 (*ibid.*, p. 44–45).

110 [...] *tot gentium feritates suo subiugavit imperio*, [...] (*ibid.*, p. 112).

frontation of the idea of a Roman World Empire and current legal theory in historical fiction.

Saxo Grammaticus develops these ideas further and moves the dispute from Svend's stories about a distant past to the Valdemarian Age. The "Gesta Danorum" also tell us about confrontations between Danes and "Saxons" in the distant past, highlighting Danish superiority (*imperium Danorum*).¹¹¹ Saxo also adopts Svend's description of Knud the Great's huge empire, but multiplies it at the same time. Taken altogether, what might be called a Danish *imperium* occurs 13 times, seven times before Charlemagne and six times afterwards. The early, mythological instances contain the lordship over the "East", i.e. Eastern Europe between Byzantium and the Baltic (*Orientis imperium*), the subjection of Sweden (*Danorum imperio Suetica subiaceret*)¹¹² and King Frode Fredegod's huge empire at the time of Christ's birth. Saxo's depiction of Frode's rule over twenty other kingdoms is consciously modelled upon and chronologically paralleled to the *Pax Augusta*.¹¹³ Twice we find the formula *Frothonis imperio adicere*,¹¹⁴ and his ever growing, pacified sphere of influence is called *imperium Danicum* which other rulers and peoples cannot withstand;¹¹⁵ it stretches to the last corner of the world.¹¹⁶ There is no doubt: Frode is the ruler of the (Nordic) world, a second Augustus. Later on, in the time of King Gorm and his son Gøtrik, Saxo speaks of an *imperium gentis nostrae* over the Saxons, just before Charlemagne's conquest of Saxony due to sheer luck, i.e. the mighty Gøtrik's unexpected death.¹¹⁷

In Harold Bluetooth's time, the "Gesta Danorum" seem to suggest a Danish thalassocracy after the conquest of Wendish territory: the ferocious

111 *In Saxones vero [...] adeo Danorum insoluit imperium [...]* (GD 6,5,18).

112 *Orientis imperium*: GD 2,1,8; Sweden: GD 2,6,1.

113 Skovgaard-Petersen, Inge: *Da tidernes herre var nær. Studier i Saxos historiesyn*. Den danske historiske forening: Copenhagen 1987, pp. 34, 39–40; Leegaard Knudsen 2000, p. 27. Cf. the beginning of GD 5,12,0, where Saxo uses the phrase *pax per omnes gentes reficere*. The twenty kingdoms are mentioned in GD 5,8,6.

114 GD 5,8,6; 5,10,2.

115 GD 5,13,1: [...] *ii soli, ceteris obsequentibus, Danicum detrectare viderentur imperium*.

116 GD 5,13,3: *imperio ipsius ultimos humanarum rerum terminos adiecisset*.

117 GD 8,16,5–8.

warfare of Harold's fleet on the *Oceanus septentrionalis* from different naval bases like Jónsborg is considered more important for the *Imperium Danicum* than campaigns on land.¹¹⁸ Knud the Great's North Sea realm is not treated as an empire until its decline: the election of King Magnús the Good in Norway after Knuds's death and Edward's succession to Harthacnut are viewed as secessions from a Danish empire, a fact Saxo bemoans: *ea nox parvulo temporis momento vetustam Danorum dominationem diuque maiorum virtute elaboratum finivit imperium*.¹¹⁹ One finds, however, the prospect of a new imperial sphere, namely the *Danorum imperium Sclaviæ sempiternum*, as it is called in the context of the Danish conquests south of the Baltic Sea in 1162¹²⁰ and in fact mirrored in Danish royal titles since Knud VI.¹²¹

Saxo's theoretical discourse about empire is also to be found in the last three books of the "Gesta Danorum", i.e. in most recent history.¹²² This is also mirrored in the sharply increasing number of instances of the term *Imperium Romanum*.¹²³ Three key aspects of interaction are Valdemar's at-

118 GD 10,2,1.

119 GD 10,21,6.

120 GD 14,30,7: *Igitur, ne Walogastum, eodem exemplo desertum quo captum, post discessum suum hostibus redderetur, præsertim Danos, si eo fruerentur, sempiternum Sclavię imperium habituros existimans, Absalonem, Burisium Suenonemque, tunc Arusii pontificatu insignem, eius municipes efficere statuit, quibus et filium Christophorum sociavit, quo plus a ceteris in auxilio suo fiducia reponeretur.*

121 A *terminus post quem* for the title *Danorum Slauorumque rex* is given by a charter from 21 October 1194 (Christensen, C. A. / Nielsen, Herluf / Weibull, Lauritz (eds.): *Diplomatarium Danicum. 1. række, 3. bind. Diplomer 1170–1199 & Epistolę abbatis Willelmi de Paraclito*. Reitzel: Copenhagen 1976–1977, no. 201, pp. 314–315).

122 The discourse begins with the year 1162, the same year when the Danes secure their *imperium Sclavię sempiternum*.

123 The *Imperium Romanum* is mentioned explicitly seven times (14,17,15; 14,28,14; 14,28,16; 15,5,6; 15,5,7; 16,3,3; 16,4,4); not included are the many references to the *imperium* without the adjective *Romanum*. On Saxo's use of world chronicles and his view of the Roman Empire in general, cf. Skovgaard-Petersen 1987, esp. pp. 196–203; Friis-Jensen, Karsten: "Saxo Grammaticus's Study of the Roman Historiographers and His Vision of History". In: Santini, Carlo (ed.): *Saxo Grammaticus tra storiografia e letteratura*. (I convegni di Classiconorroena 1). Il Calamo: Roma 1992, pp. 61–81.

tendance of the Imperial Diet at Saint-Jean-de-Losne and Laon in 1162, the meeting of the rulers in Lübeck in 1181 and Knud IV's rejection of vassalitic status in 1182. We find the same themes as in Svend Aggesen's story: ridiculing the emperor and refuting imperial rule. In Valdemar's case, the meetings with Frederick allow for a direct comparison of the two rulers – much to Frederick's disfavour: not only is he portrayed as a tricky hypocrite, but also as rather unworthy of the imperial crown he bears. When Valdemar arrives at the crowded imperial camp in Lübeck in 1181, there is no appropriate order at the emperor's table. He picks a seat, careful not to make a show of himself, but all the surrounding noblemen marvel at his sight and consider him to be *imperio dignus*; compared to him, the emperor appears like a homunculus or *regulus*.¹²⁴ Despite his humble conduct, Valdemar's imperial qualities cannot be concealed.

In the context of Knud IV's rejection of vassalitic subordination, it is archbishop Absalon, the late Valdemar's close friend, Knud's teacher and actually the real hero in the “Gesta Danorum”, who answers to Siegfried III of Weimar-Orlamünde, Frederick's envoy, in the same way Svend Aggesen has Thyra answer Otto the Great: Knud's rule over Denmark is equal to Frederick's over the *Imperium Romanum*.¹²⁵ When Siegfried, at the same time King Valdemar's son-in-law, insists on Knud's subordination on the emperor's behalf, the archbishop points out one major difference between Thuringia, Siegfried's homeland, and Denmark: the former will succumb to the emperor's force at any time, the latter will not.¹²⁶ By this speech, Absalon corrects a “mistake” in history, as Frederick had practically tricked Valdemar into accepting him as his liege in 1162.¹²⁷

As a consequence, we find the same paradoxical construction in Saxo: the Romano-German realm is always called *Imperium Romanum* and the idea that Charlemagne justly conquered and ruled for instance Saxony – if

124 GD 15,5,7.

125 The discussion: GD 16,3,1–16,3,3, Absalon's statement in 16,3,3: *Proinde Syfridum nosse debere Kanuto Cæsarique æquum regnandi ius esse neque minore cum libertate hunc Danici regni quam illum Romani imperii gubernacula continere.*

126 GD 16,3,4.

127 Valdemar's trick in 1162: 14,28,14–16. Cf. Leegaard Knudsen 2000, pp. 29–35.

only due to the Danes' absence – is also present. Nevertheless, the emperor's arguments in favour of his universal rule are refuted. Accepting them would mean to “sell the nation's inherited freedom” (*haereditaria patriae libertas venditum*), as Saxo calls the vassalitic subordination of the Wendish lords Bogislav and Casimir.¹²⁸ One motivation for this dualism might be that the Danish historiographers needed the imperial bogeyman in order to underline his heroic defeat. But at the same time, albeit in different historical contexts, Svend and Saxo are applying the concept of imperial rule to Danish kings, too. They are therefore in a precarious situation. If Saxo deals with the idea of an *imperium gentis nostrae*, one may argue that a consequent application of for instance Hugh of Fleury's or the papal curia's concept of empires as simple, regional realms was impossible, although it certainly was available. While it would have supplied the Danish writers with political arguments against the emperor, it would at the same time have counteracted the current position of the Danish kings in the Baltic. The latter had developed markedly between the finalisation of Svend Aggesen's chronicle and the “Gesta Danorum”.¹²⁹ As a result, only the historical, eschatological argument for imperial rule is rendered mute: empires have to be conquered with just cause, like the *Imperium Danicum* in Frode's time and again in the Valdemarian Age. Thus, Saxo unifies two lines of argument: firstly, events from mythological history validate the current status typologically, like in Svend's chronicle. Secondly, discipline and bravery, two properties frequently stressed in the Danes as opposed to German turgidity, luxury and effeminacy, constitute its foundations both in the past and the present. The latter argument contains a fine and surely intended irony because Otto of Freising has Frederick answer something similar to the Romans who offer to acclaim him emperor: Barbarossa declines, because he already possesses

128 GD 15,1,11.

129 Both chronicles end in 1185, but Saxo's foreword stresses the Danish expansion after this date, for instance the fact that Valdemar II penetrated the *Imperium Romanum* (GD Praefatio 1,6). On the Danish expansion, see Riis and Villads Jensen, Kurt: *Korstog ved verdens yderste rand. Danmark og Portugal ca. 1000 til ca. 1250*. Odense 2011, esp. pp. 186–198, 437–447; Lind, John H. et al.: *Danske korstog. Krig og mission i Østersøen*. Høst & Søn: Copenhagen 2004, pp. 160–188, 199–231.

imperial status through his predecessors' might and valour.¹³⁰ The “Gesta Danorum” invert the argument and use it against the claims of the rather unimpressive *regulus* who calls himself Roman emperor and relies upon his predecessors' accomplishments. Danish supremacy over all the other surrounding *nationes* is a recurrent topic also in mythological prehistory, where kings like Frode Fredegod conquer a huge *imperium*.

Scandinavians and Byzantine Emperors

Byzantium and the Eastern Empire are part of this scheme. Saxo suggests a parallel development of Denmark and Greece in ancient times, because the Nordic Gods are actually humans from *Bizantium*, and the Danish sphere of power expands to the Greek border.¹³¹ This favourable connection is maintained in later history, again employing a typological pattern.¹³² On his crusade, King Erik Ejegod travels to Constantinople via Rus', i.e. along the old route already used by Odin and once governed by King Frode.¹³³

130 *Gesta Friderici* (Waitz, II,30, p. 137).

131 GD 1,7,1; 3,4,1–15 (*Bizantium*) and GD 5,8,8; 9,4,20–35 (Danish rule over Eastern Europe).

132 Skovgaard-Petersen, Inge: “The Way to Byzantium. A Study in the First Three Books of Saxo’s History of Denmark”. In: Friis-Jensen, Karsten (ed.): *Saxo Grammaticus. A Medieval Author between Norse and Latin Culture*. Museum Tusulanum Press: Copenhagen 1981, pp. 121–133. The following results are partly taken from my doctoral dissertation *Skandinaviens og Byzans. Bedingungen und Konsequenzen mittelalterlicher Kulturbeziehungen*. (Historische Semantik 23). Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 2015, esp. pp. 392–676.

133 GD 12,7,1. The itinerary is unlikely. More well-informed and earlier sources have Erik travel via Rome (Bergsagel, John (ed.): *The Offices and Masses of St. Knud Lavard († 1131)* (Kiel, Univ. Lib. MS S.H. 8 A.8^o). *Reproduced in Facsimile, Transcribed and Edited. Volume 2: Edition. With an Essay on the Historical Background by Thomas Riis*. Institute of Medieval Music: Copenhagen / Ottawa 2010, p. 190). One may therefore presume that Saxo wanted to view Erik’s crusade as a postfiguration of older connections (cf. Kværndrup, Sigurd: “The Composition of the Gesta Danorum and the Place of Geographic Relations in its Worldview”. In: Nyberg, Tore (ed.): *Saxo and the Baltic region. A Symposium*. (University of Southern Denmark Studies in History and Social Sciences 275). Odense University Press: Odense 2004, pp. 23–37, here p. 34).

Saxo carefully shapes the encounter between the Danish king and the *imperator*, as Alexios is called eleven times, as a meeting between dear friends who are equals.¹³⁴ When the Danish crusader army appears before the gates of the city, Alexios Komnenos is at first afraid that his Scandinavian bodyguards, known to the current reader as “Varangians”, would defect to their compatriots and plunder Constantinople. His spy, however, overhears that King Erik exhorts his men and the Varangians to show absolute loyalty towards the Byzantines and to fight bravely for their emperor: Erik “supplied Greece with the fealty of the Danes”, as Saxo puts it.¹³⁵ One may sense a tone of voluntary subordination to the Eastern Emperor. The king therefore does something which Frederick Barbarossa later on explicitly asks for – and is duly denied. Erik’s conduct leads to a splendid reception; Alexios is deeply impressed. Consequently, Erik is able to avoid the typically asymmetrical gift-giving which is a part of Byzantine diplomacy. This means that he like other barbarians is overwhelmed by a huge gift, containing gold, a splinter of the True Cross, and a silken cloak. Usually, the guest is not able to give an equal gift in return, but has to accept that he is indebted to the emperor. Erik, nevertheless, has foreseen this and brought a “barbarian gift” (*barbarum munus*), something exotic the emperor had not possessed yet.¹³⁶ In the end, Erik has managed to impress Alexios so much that the emperor questions the alleged superior wisdom of the Greeks. He has two pictures painted of the king, one in standing and one in sitting posture, in order to document his impressive stature – a variation of the *topos* already known from the meeting between Valdemar and Frederick. In addition, the palace where Erik was hosted has remained uninhabited ever since.

While some details of this story are informed by a Skaldic poem about Erik, most of them are doubtlessly invented. But they are well invented, all the same. Saxo knows what usually happens when Western strangers are confronted with the Eastern Empire and describes Erik’s encounter with Alexios as an exception.¹³⁷ The experience is also absolutely different from

134 Here and in the following GD 12,7,1–6.

135 [...] *Danorum fidem Gręcię conciliauit*. (GD 12,7,2).

136 GD 12,7,5.

137 On the Byzantine treatment of Barbarian lords in Constantinople, cf. Anca, Alexandru Stefan: *Herrschaftliche Repräsentation und kaiserliches Selbstver-*

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meetings between Danish kings and Roman emperors. Not only does Erik offer Alexios what his counterparts are constantly denied, the characters of the emperors also differ markedly. Alexios appears to be careful and proud, yet honest, friendly, generous and capable of self-criticism. On the other side of the coin, nothing good comes of getting involved with people like Frederick. There is always a hidden agenda, and his conduct alternates between hypocrisy and high-handedness. Danish kings always move on thin ice in their dealings with the *Imperium Romanum*, whereas harmony and friendship characterise Danish-Byzantine relations. This is still the case when “Gesta Danorum’s” narrative ends in 1185 after the Danish victory over Bogislav of Pomerania. The good tidings lead to a splendid feast among the Danish noblemen in Byzantine service.¹³⁸

The model of Scandinavian-imperial interactions from the “Gesta Danorum” is also employed in the kings’ sagas, with the marked difference that meetings with Western Emperors are never described in detail. We are therefore not presented with two equally elaborate impressions in Old Norse texts, but the good image of Byzantine emperors is extremely similar to Saxo’s, especially in sagas finished around the same time as the “Gesta Danorum”. In many respects, the encounter between King Sigurðr Jórsalafari and Alexios in 1110 may be described as the counterpart of the meeting with the Danish king. Actually, Sigurðr does not visit Byzantium on his way to Jerusalem, but arrives with his fleet after a successful meeting with King Baldwin of Jerusalem and his conquest of Sidon. “Morkinskinna”, the oldest of the sagas of Norwegian kings, finished between 1217 and 1222, stresses the differences between Erik and Sigurðr and compares them ex-

ständnis. Berührung der westlichen mit der byzantinischen Welt in der Zeit der ersten Kreuzzüge. (Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme 31). Rhema: Münster 2010, pp. 103–113, 173–196; Shepard, Jonathan: “Byzantine Diplomacy, A.D. 800–1204. Means and Ends”. In: Shepard, Jonathan/Franklin, Simon (eds.): *Byzantine Diplomacy. Papers from the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990.* (Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies. Publications 1). Variorum: Aldershot 1992, pp. 41–71, here pp. 51–71; Haldon, John F.: “‘Blood and Ink’. Some Observations on Byzantine Attitudes towards Warfare and Diplomacy”. In: Shepard / Franklin, pp. 281–294.

138 GD 16,5,11.

plicity in its remarkably lengthy account.¹³⁹ While Alexios in the beginning is unsure about Erik's intentions, Sigurðr is received with great honours, but Alexios nurtures doubts concerning his courtly manners. Sigurðr is therefore careful not to let himself be overwhelmed by the pomp and fuss on the occasion of his arrival. He and his men ride from the Golden Gate to the Blachernai Palace on silk cloths covering the street, and once arrived at the palace, Sigurðr refuses to accept the imperial gifts brought before him twice before they are up to his taste and his expectations. As soon as he is satisfied, however, he answers in perfect Greek. The result is the same as in Saxo: the Scandinavian ruler is able to impress Alexios and is consequently treated as his friend and equal, although the author of "Morkinskinna" characterises his protagonist in a different way. While King Erik impresses as an intimidatingly huge, yet humble and trustworthy man, Sigurðr is more of a snob, versed in courtly manners.

This is partly due to the authors' preferences: Saxo stresses qualities like asceticism, bravery and humility in the Danes,¹⁴⁰ while the unknown author of "Morkinskinna" is more open to courtly culture,¹⁴¹ something Saxo associates with effeminate Germans. On the other hand, Sigurðr's accomplishments in Byzantium are directly compared to Erik's and found to be more impressive. Firstly, Erik obtained a splinter of the True Cross from Alexios, but Sigurðr from the King of Jerusalem. The latter relic is considered more worthy, because only the part of the cross kept in Jerusalem had been soaked with the Lord's blood.¹⁴² At the end of his visit in Constantinople, the emperor offers Sigurðr either a second gift of gold or games in the hippodrome. The amount of gold is identical to the one mentioned in a Skaldic stanza about Erik, not Sigurðr. As Sigurðr already gained a lot of booty in the Holy Land, he is not forced to take the gold like Erik,

139 *Morkinskinna*, ch. 68–70, vol. 2, pp. 95–100.

140 Skovgaard-Petersen 1987, p. 170; Johannesson, Kurt: *Saxo Grammaticus. Komposition och världs bild i Gesta Danorum*. (Lychnos 31). Almqvist & Wiksell International: Stockholm 1978, pp. 329–333.

141 Ármann Jakobsson: *Staður í nýjum heimi. Konungasagan Morkinskinna*. Háskólaútgáfan: Reykjavík 2002, pp. 191–218.

142 *Morkinskinna*, ch. 66, vol. 2, pp. 87–93. The stanza about Erik of Denmark is cited in *Knýtlinga saga (Danakonunga sögur)*, ch. 81, p. 237). It is from Markús Skeggjason's "Eiríksdrápa" (as note 81, here stanza 28, pp. 457–458).

which “Morkinskinna” stresses.¹⁴³ Instead, he makes the courtlier choice and enjoys the games before he departs and leaves his ships and the greater part of his men behind in Byzantine service. Like Erik, Sigurðr leaves a “Barbarian gift”, namely the artfully carved heads from his ships, which are mounted upon the roof of a church in the city.¹⁴⁴ We are thus presented with two versions of a similar relationship, based upon friendship, equality and a specific reciprocity. Scandinavian kings supply the emperor with soldiers and exotic gifts, while the emperor grants them prestige and money.

There is no doubt that this host and lord over the world’s richest city actually is an emperor. “Morkinskinna” continuously calls Alexios *keisari* or – more rarely – *stólkonungr*. The same applies to “Fagrskinna” and Snorri Sturluson’s “Heimskringla”. They use the text of “Morkinskinna”, although they shorten it drastically, mostly omitting motifs adopted from courtly literature.¹⁴⁵ By comparison, the Romano-German emperors are uninteresting. In “Morkinskinna” and “Heimskringla”, Sigurðr allegedly meets Lothair of Supplinburg on his way back North.¹⁴⁶ Not only is Henry V confused with his successor; “Morkinskinna” devotes less than three lines to the description of the meeting in Swabia. Lothair is furthermore called *keisari af Rómaborg* when Alexios is just the *keisari*. While Lothair’s title is consistent with the idea of *translatio imperii*, it should also be stressed that when the early kings’ sagas speak of the *keisari* or *stólkonungr*, they usually mean the Byzantine ruler, just as early Latin texts from Norway when they mention the *imperator*. In other words: the Romano-German emperor needs a defining attribute, the Byzantine does not.

Admittedly, our Old Norse texts were written under different political circumstances than the “Gesta Danorum” or Svend Aggesen’s chronicle. As we have seen, encyclopaedic texts from Iceland and also Theodoricus monachus adopt stories of imperial victories over the Danes, whereas narrative Danish sources do not. Nevertheless, only one early bishops’ saga

143 *Morkinskinna*, ch. 69, vol. 2, pp. 97–98.

144 *Ibid.*, ch. 70, vol. 2, pp. 98–99. The gift is already found in Theodoricus monachus, ch. 33, pp. 65–66.

145 *Fagrskinna*, ch. 90, pp. 319–320. (partly defective); *Heimskringla*, vol. 3, Magnússon saga ch. 12–13, pp. 252–254.

146 *Morkinskinna*, ch. 70, p. 99; *Heimskringla*, vol. 3, Magnússon saga ch. 13, p. 254.

stresses a close acquaintance between the first Icelandic bishop and Emperor Henry III in order to enhance the former's prestige.¹⁴⁷ In the other cases, the imperial friend is located in Constantinople, both in Danish and Icelandic tradition. Both narrative traditions, intertwined as they most probably are, draw heavily on literary motifs. This is especially clear in the case of "Morkinskinna's" account. Most of King Sigurð's proofs of courtly behaviour are to be found in earlier Latin sources about rulers from the West in Byzantium, which again stresses the impression that the author's knowledge about details from oral tradition was just as thin as Saxo's. For instance, Sigurð's horse throws a golden shoe just as the king had planned, and due to a lack of firewood, he uses walnuts instead at the occasion of a feast for his host, a trick which had already worked for Duke Robert in the "Gesta Normannorum ducum" in 1035.¹⁴⁸ However, the Western models for "Morkinskinna" develop a totally different picture of Western-Byzantine interactions. If they are not openly hostile, the picture of the Byzantine rulers is at least ambivalent. In the case of Sigurð's crusade, we possess a much older account by William of Malmesbury. While it shares the basic facts with "Morkinskinna", it suggests that Alexios did not actually lavishly furnish the king with gifts but wanted to deprive him of the gold he had obtained in Outremer. In William's version, Sigurðr tricks Alex-

147 "Hungrvaka", a chronicle of the bishopric Skálholt (around A.D. 1200) tells the story that Ísleifr, the first Icelandic bishop, met and befriended Henry III in Germany on his way to his consecration in Rome in 1055 (ch. 2, in Ásdís Egilsdóttir, pp. 27–28). The account is not based on facts, as Henry III was in Italy by that time (Köhne, Roland: "Wirklichkeit und Fiktion in den mittelalterlichen Nachrichten über Ísleif Gizurarson". *Skandinavistik* 17(1), 1987, pp. 24–30, here p. 27–28).

148 Van Houts, Elisabeth (ed.): *The Gesta Normannorum ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni 2. Books V–VIII*. Clarendon Press: Oxford 1995, pp. 83–85. Cf. Vries, Jan de: "Normannisches Lehngut in den isländischen Königssagas". *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 47, 1931, pp. 51–79, here pp. 67–73; White, Paul A.: *Non-native Sources for the Scandinavian Kings' sagas*. Routledge: New York et al. 2005, pp. 108–109; Hill, Joyce: "Burning Walnuts: An International Motif in the Kings' Sagas". In: Anlezark, Daniel (ed.): *Myths, Legends, and Heroes. Essays on Old Norse Literature in Honour of John McKinnel*. University of Toronto Press: Toronto et al. 2011, pp. 188–205, here pp. 195–202.

ios and escapes from Constantinople with his treasures.¹⁴⁹ The two versions are thus diametrically opposed, and that is the usual case when it comes to the pictures of Byzantium and its emperors – even though Scandinavian authors pick motifs from other Western texts, which in turn stresses their decision to portray the emperors in a favourable light.

What remains is the question in which contexts and why other, more “Western” titles for the Byzantine emperors like *Grikkjakonungr* emerge. The kings’ sagas and “Gesta Danorum” do indeed seem to suggest a conscious use, as the aforementioned title also appears, albeit in a different, earlier context. Haraldr inn harðráði served in Byzantium between ca 1034 and 1043 after the defeat and death of his half-brother Óláfr Haraldsson in Norway. His story deviates from the pattern described above, as he is the only member of a royal family ever to be described as a recipient of orders and to be treated unjustly in this context.¹⁵⁰ To be precise, the conflict arising at the end of his service is not the emperor’s fault to begin with. Harald’s troubles start when he and his Varangians are joined together with the Byzantine army under the command of a certain *Gyrgir*, obviously meaning Georgios Maniakes. “Morkinskinna”, but also the related younger sagas present the ongoing quarrel between the two leaders like a series of contests between two Scandinavians in a Scandinavian environment, i.e. in front of their respective followers. In reality, such behaviour by a foreign mercenary was unthinkable. The hierarchical structure placed Maniakes far above barbarian warlords. Ahistorical as the narrative is, it shows Haraldr to be the superior in wit

149 Mynors, R. A. B. / Thomson, R. M. / Winterbottom, M. (eds.): *William of Malmesbury: Gesta regum anglorum. The History of the English Kings 1*. Clarendon Press: Oxford 1998, V,409, p. 740.

150 *Morkinskinna*, ch. 11–15, vol. 1, pp. 88–117. Research literature on Haraldr in Byzantine service is both abundant and problematic, as Byzantine and Scandinavian sources contradict themselves in certain important details. Cf. for instance Blöndal 1978, pp. 54–102; Ciggaar, Krijnie N.: “Visitors from North-western Europe to Byzantium. Vernacular Sources: Problems and Perspectives”. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 132, 2007, pp. 123–155; Shepard, Jonathan: “Middle Byzantine Military Culture, Harald Hardrada and Tall Stories”. In: Gvozdetkaja, Natalja Yu et al. (eds.): *Stanzas of Friendship. Studies in Honour of Tatjana N. Jackson*. Dmitry Pozharskiy University: Moscow 2011, pp. 473–482.

and bravery and leaves Maniakes behind with a damaged reputation and a serious grudge. The latter duly coins this into partly false accusations: Haraldr had allegedly misappropriated booty. Empress Zoe, who herself has amorous interests in the foreigner, voices suspicions about a hidden affair with the empress' niece Maria, a person Byzantine sources do not mention. The affair is never uncovered due to the lovers' resourcefulness, although the ruler has traps set for the lovers. In the end, however, the calumnies prevail, and the Norwegian prince and his men are cast in a special prison, which is inhabited by a huge, poisonous snake. It is needless to say what happens next. As a result, Haraldr combines different great heroes in his character: he is both a second Tristan and a second Sigurd.

The "King of the Greeks", on the other hand, is punished for his poor judgement: Haraldr attacks him in his bed chamber and gauges out his eyes, thus avenging his dishonour before he leaves.¹⁵¹ Trying to reconcile this story with Byzantine sources without cutting it into small pieces seems to be a hopeless business. The only Byzantine source which mentions Haraldr indicates some sort of disagreement between him and Constantine IX, who was not blinded, and mentions Harald's escape.¹⁵² Nevertheless, the logics of the fictitious story itself are clear, and so is the use of the title: only in this context do historiographical sources from before ca 1250 call the Byzantine ruler *Grikkjakonungr*. This phenomenon is even to be found in Saxo, who also tells a version of Harald's conflicts in which the hero slays a dragon, is subsequently pardoned and does not blind the emperor: here, the Byzantine ruler is also called *rex*, as opposed to Alexios a few books later.¹⁵³ Sources which as a rule address the basileus as "emperor" do not do so with Constantine IX, the only Byzantine ruler ever to treat a Scandinavian unjustly.

151 *Morkinskinna*, ch. 15, pp. 112–113. The passage even contains two Skaldic stanzas which go back to Harald's personal account and corroborate the fact that he boasted of such a deed.

152 Litavrin, Gennadij G. (ed.): *Kekaumen: Sovety i rasskazy* [*Kekaumenos: Consilia et narrationes*]. *Poučenie vizantijskogo polkovodca XI veka*. Aletejja: Sankt-Petersburg 2003 v; § 81, pp. 298–300.

153 GD 11,3,1.

The Semantics of Byzantium

One may therefore deduce a seemingly conscious and byzantinophile use of imperial titles, which coincides with favourable and rather ample representations of the Eastern Empire and its court. This use of titles does not remain stable for much longer than the earlier decades of the 13th century; as already mentioned, later Kings' Sagas like "Knýtlinga saga" or Sagas of Icelanders with their many Varangian episodes show a greater variation. Nevertheless, the picture of the two empires, mirrored in the use of titles and the adaptation of the *translatio imperii*, was formed in the decades between the late 12th century and ca 1230. The careful representation of Scandinavian rulers' conduct at the Byzantine court in the "Gesta Danorum" and the Kings' Sagas as well as the impression of close and frequent contacts were obviously influenced by eyewitness knowledge of the last generations of Scandinavians in Byzantine service, as they were also noticed by the conquerors of the Fourth Crusade. There were probably even Scandinavians in the service of the Latin Emperors.¹⁵⁴ The picture derived from this cultural relation would remain stable in Scandinavian literature for centuries to come. Not only do *Íslendingasögur* like "Laxdæla saga" or "Grettis saga" send their heroes to Byzantium to earn fame and honour in imperial service; Byzantium also serves as a stage for a large number of late medieval bridal quest romances. These original *Riddarasögur* are considered fairly conventional in comparison to other courtly romances from continental Europe, as they employ a modular technique of combining different standard motifs,¹⁵⁵ but one of their distinctive features is the representation of Byzantium.

154 One Miracle Catalogue of St Þorlákr Þórhallsson, Bishop of Skálholt, mentions a miracle performed in Byzantium among the Varangians in the Latin Empire around 1206. The original Latin *vita* was written in 1199 and translated immediately into Old Norse. The miracle catalogue in question was written between 1200 and 1211 (Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups önnur, in: Ásdís Egilsdóttir, pp. 236–237). Cf. Ciggaar, Krijnie N.: "St. Thorlac's in Constantinople, Built by a Flemish Emperor". *Byzantion* 49, 1979, pp. 428–446.

155 Cf. Glauser, Jürg: *Isländische Märchensagas. Studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island*. (Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie 12). Helbing und Lichtenhahn: Basel / Frankfurt am Main 1983, pp. 101–128, 158–160.

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This differs radically from the impression usually found in texts from continental Europe. These generally show a characteristic ambivalence in their depiction of Byzantium. They admire Byzantine wealth and show at the same time their contempt for “Greek” perfidy and effeminacy.¹⁵⁶ Such models were definitely available in the North, as is demonstrated by the *Riddarasögur* which were translated from French Romance at King Hákon IV’s court from about 1226 onwards.¹⁵⁷ A good example is “Karlagnús saga”, a collection of Old Norse translations from the “Cycle du roi” and Pseudo-Turpin’s chronicle from the 13th century. Especially the translation of the “Pèlerinage de Charlemagne”, originally from the middle of the 12th century, illustrates this typical Western, competitive view of the Byzantine emperors: the whole reason for Charlemagne’s crusade is a statement of his wife that Hugon of Byzantium is a more kingly king than the mighty Charles himself.¹⁵⁸ After visiting Outremer, the returning pilgrims are received splendidly in Constantinople in the king’s hall with its many wonderful devices.¹⁵⁹ King Hugon orders the Franks’ conversations

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- 156 Cf. Ebels-Hoving, Bunna: *Byzantium in Westerse Ogen 1096–1204*. Van Gorcum: Assen 1971, esp. pp. 260–269; Ducellier, Alain: “Une mythologie urbaine: Constantinople vue d’Occident au Moyen Âge”. *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Moyen Âge, temps modernes* 96, 1984, pp. 405–424; Petrinis, Fedra: *Sailing to Byzantium: The Byzantine Exotic in Medieval French Literature*. (doctoral thesis): New York 2004, pp. 215–231. The stereotype of the “perfidious Greek” with its ancient roots is treated by Hunger, Herbert: *Graeculus perfidus – Ἰταλὸς ἰταμὸς. Il senso dell’alterità nei rapporti greco-romani ed italo-bizantini*. (Unione Internazionale degli Istituti di Archeologia, Storia e Storia dell’Arte in Roma. Conferenze 4). Unione Internazionale [...] in Roma: Rome 1987. The different attitude in Old Norse romance is also stressed by Barnes 2014, pp. 147–151.
- 157 Cf. Glauser, Jürg: “Romance (Translated Riddarasögur)”. In: McTurk, Rory (ed.): *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*. Blackwell: Oxford et al. 2005, pp. 382–387; Barnes, Geraldine: “The ‘Discourse of Counsel’ and the ‘Translated’ *Riddarasögur*”. In: Quinn, Judy / Heslop, Kate / Wills, Tarrin (eds.): *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World. Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*. (Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 18). Brepols: Turnhout 2007, pp. 375–397.
- 158 Loth, Agnete / Patron-Godefroit, Annette / Skårup, Povl (eds.): *Karlagnús saga. Branches I, III, VII et IX*. Reitzel: Copenhagen 1980, ch. 1, pp. 234–236.
- 159 Here and in the following *ibid.*, ch. 4–16, pp. 250–300.

to be listened in, who according to their custom boast with the feats they think they can accomplish in Byzantium. These include Charlemagne cutting down Hugon's best fighter, Olivier, sleeping with his daughter, Roland blowing off the emperor's beard and clothes, Bishop Turpin diverting a river and flooding the city, Oddgeirr inn danski (Ogier le Danois) pulling down the entire hall and so forth. In his wrath, Hugon forces the Franks either to carry out these feats or to die. With God's help, however, the Franks manage to carry out some of their boasts, leaving Hugon in shock and awe. In the end, Hugon accepts Charlemagne as his liege.¹⁶⁰ Thus, Frankish superiority is demonstrated with the help of God, Charlemagne is the kingliest ruler on earth, and the queen's statement from the beginning of the story is rendered mute.

The same attitude towards Byzantium is to be found in Western bridal quest stories such as the "König Rother", also from the 12th century: he is courting the daughter of Constantinus, ruler of the "Greeks", but her father tries everything in his power to stop Rother. He conforms to the stereotype of the perfidious Greek, while at the same time lacking in wit, military prowess and self-control, in short: he thinks of himself as superior, but is shown to be the Westerner's inferior in every single respect. Therefore, he has to consent to the marriage after Rother saved Byzantium in a fight against the heathens.¹⁶¹

The essence from these stories is quite clear. In order to establish peaceful coexistence, the arrogant and hostile Greeks have to be bullied into accepting Western superiority. Interconnections between these texts and crusader chronicles like the "Gesta Dei per Francos" – and thus between collective memory from the crusades and courtly literature – are undeniable. It is precisely here where the sagas differ.¹⁶² In the numerous Old Norse bridal quests, Byzantine rulers are viewed as friends, even if the narrative pattern is very similar to that of for instance "König Rother". In "Bærings saga" from the

160 Ibid., ch. 16, p. 296. The formula is *giorunzt ek þinn maðr* ("I make myself your man.").

161 Bennewitz, Ingrid / Koll, Beatrix (eds.): *König Rother. Mittelhochdeutscher Text und neuhochdeutsche Übersetzung von Peter K. Stein*. Reclam: Stuttgart 2000, esp. pp. 44–58, 92–110, 220–256, 338–356.

162 Cf. here and in the following also Barnes 2014, pp. 92–97, 158–181.

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early 14th century, an exiled Prince from Holstein meets and befriends the *Grikklandskeisari* Emanuel at the French court in Paris.¹⁶³ Bæringr, who was the only one able to beat the emperor's best knight, follows the Byzantines to Constantinople, which they find besieged by heathen enemies. After he managed to kill all the leaders of the invaders and their army was beaten, he is offered the hand of Emanuel's daughter in marriage. The marriage is postponed to a later date, since Bæringr first wants to reconquer his father's lands in Saxonia, Holstein and Frisia. He is not given trouble by the "Greeks", but actually by the Western Emperor's daughter, who tries to seduce him without success and subsequently makes mischief between her father and Bæringr. In the end, however, Bæringr prevails with Byzantine help; he is able to take revenge on his father's enemies, to establish peace with the Western Emperor, whom he later succeeds, and to marry the Byzantine princess Vindemia. In the case of "Bærings saga", the turning point of his fortune as an exile is his meeting with Emanuel of Byzantium. He is the one to support the young prince in his aspirations, while the Westerner plays the part of the suspicious, dangerous host. It is even possible that the "perfidious Greek" himself is the protagonist of a bridal quest story, as is the case with "Dámusta saga", also from the 14th century.¹⁶⁴ Dámusti is the son of a "Greek" nobleman, and he actually kills King Jón of Saxony who asked for the hand of Gratiana, the daughter of emperor Katalaktus. The latter bears the same name as Michael IV Katalaktus, the emperor who received Haraldr Sigurðarson in the Kings' Sagas. Dámusti's deed certainly was a grievous crime, although it was committed with the "wise men's" approval, and he is punished immediately through Gratiana's alleged death. Afterwards, the desperate protagonist is told by the Mother of God to visit Gratiana's grave and to free her from imprisonment by a monster, which had put her into a death-like sleep. Dámusti and Gratiana marry and have a son, who later on manages to repulse the

163 "Bærings saga". In: Cederschiöld, Gustaf (ed.): *Fornsögur Suðurlanda. Isländska bearbetningar af främmande romaner från medeltiden. Magus saga jarls, Konraðs saga, Bærings saga, Flovents saga, Bevers saga*. Fr. Berlings boktryckeri och stilgjuteri: Lund 1884, pp. 85–123, here esp. ch. 13–18, pp. 95–102 and ch. 31–32, pp. 118–122.

164 "Dámusta saga". In: Tan-Haverhorst, Louisa Fredrika (ed.): *Þjalar Jóns saga. Dámusta saga 1. Teksten*. Willink & Zoon: Haarlem 1939, pp. 48–108, here esp. ch. 1, pp. 48–50, ch. 4–6, pp. 58–69, ch. 17–18, pp. 104–107.

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Saxon avengers of the murdered King Jón. Thus, the “perfidious Greek” is the winner of the story, something utterly unthinkable from a continental perspective. Some years later, the couple decides to separate and end their lives as hermits in repentance for their sins.

If we search for interconnections between these Norse stories and collective memory, we have to return to the early Kings’ Sagas. Descriptions of Constantinople, as they are to be found in many Original *Riddarasögur*, like “Dámusta saga”, usually go back to “Morkinskinna” or similar texts. Even if descriptions are derived from Western tradition like in “Kirjalax saga”, which uses “Karlagnús saga’s” depiction of the imperial palace and its splendour,¹⁶⁵ the conflicting orientation of “Eastern” and “Western” figures is never adopted, and no city in the West is ever described in such detail as *Miklagarðr*. The best friend abroad in Old Norse Romance is the Byzantine ruler. The same applies to earlier Sagas of Icelanders. Usually, they only mention trips abroad or follow a major figure briefly into Byzantine exile, especially when an avenger follows the migrant who had committed a killing at home. The only exception is “Grettis saga”, again from the early 14th century. Here, Þorsteinn drómundr, Gretti’s half-brother, follows Gretti’s killer to Constantinople, where he takes revenge and is subsequently arrested.¹⁶⁶ After being released from prison with the help of Spes, a Byzantine noblewoman, he starts an affair with her. The model for this elaborate *Spesar þáttur* inside the story with its reminiscence to Tristan and Isolde is quite clearly “Morkinskinna’s” account of Haraldr Sigurðarson in Byzantium; his synchronous stay in the city is also mentioned explicitly. After a divorce, Þorsteinn and Spes return to the North. Later on, just like Dámusti and Gratiana, they separate and live as hermits to repent for their unjust treatment of Spes’ husband.

Our examples should serve to illustrate that Byzantium and its rulers fulfil an important function in late medieval Norse texts from different genres. Although many motifs are derived from continental models, the representation of Byzantium goes back to *Konungasögur* from the early 13th

165 *Kirjalax saga*, pp. 86–87. Cf. *Karlagnús saga*, pp. 254–256.

166 Here and in the following, Guðni Jónsson (ed.): *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar. Bandamanna saga. Odds þáttur Ófeiggssonar*. (Íslensk Fornrit 7). Hið íslenska fornritafélag: Reykjavík 1936, pp. 1–290, here ch. 86–90, pp. 271–286.

century, when witnesses to the relations were still alive. This fact suggests a deliberate choice, just as is the case with the earlier choice of titles in the context of common Western European knowledge. Byzantium and its semantics are a key element in Scandinavian attitudes towards empires and imperial conflicts as well as Scandinavian self-representations under different circumstances, which can be shown through both statistical and narratological analysis. The key period for this was the decades around the year 1200. In the case of Denmark, the phenomenon is easily explained by the political situation. In Norway and Iceland, the stressing of good relations with Constantinople may be related to the search for prestige in the struggle between different political factions.

Conclusion

It is indisputable that Byzantium and its rulers possessed an aura in Old Norse literature which the West and Charlemagne's successors could not in the least keep up with. At best, medieval Western emperors and their courts, relevant as they are for universal history, are rather uninteresting, at worst, they are viewed as both hostile and ultimately inferior. This split in Scandinavian attitude towards emperors and empires, just as the specific way of naming them, may be described as the result of different factors working at different times: on the one hand, concepts of universal imperial rule became increasingly unpopular all over Europe. Not only were neighbouring communities hostile to the idea by implication, as is to be seen in the case of Danish elites, but educated Scandinavians could watch the ever widening gap between political theory and reality. This disenchantment with imperial splendour, as it is still visible for instance in "Hungrvaka", is not only clear in Svend Aggesen's and Saxo's mockery of the imperial self-image, but even more lucid in "Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar", which was written around 1264/65. The Norwegian king is portrayed as a friend of Frederick II, but the saga is well-informed about the fact that "the empire fell down" after his death, as Sturla Þórðarson puts it.¹⁶⁷ In addition to this, a story about a Norwegian legation

167 Hákonar saga, ch. 324, vol. 2, p. 159: *En eftir hann fell niðr keisaradómrrinn, svá at engi hefir verit síðan, þar til er þessi bók var saman sett [...]*. "But after him, the empire fell down, so that no-one has been [crowned emperor] since, until this book was compiled".

to Denmark and Saxony in 1260 in the later part of the saga mentions that seven German rulers elect the Romano-German king, making it one of the earliest references to their number and hinting at a later date of composition than the earlier parts of the text.¹⁶⁸ This kind of notoriously instable rule was not what Hákon strived for. Matthew Paris, who had been to Norway in 1247–1248, mentions that Pope Innocent IV offered Hákon to crown him emperor after Frederick had been declared as dethroned in 1245. Hákon declined, just as the Danish king Erik Plovpenning had apparently done in 1239.¹⁶⁹ Not only did he maintain good relations to the Staufien party and was obviously informed about the political mess in the empire; his model was France, its courtly culture, which found its way into Old Norse literature under his rule, and hereditary monarchy, which he managed to introduce in 1260.¹⁷⁰ As time advanced, the western empire lost more and more of its nimbus and its justification, which was also due to an increase of papal claims to universal power.¹⁷¹ This may be one reason for the Danish kings in the Calmar Union to abstain from imperial self-representation. The same is valid for Sweden as an imperial power after the Thirty Years War: when Karl XII was hailed as *imperator Scandinaviae* in a panegyric by Magnus

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- 168 Hákonar saga, ch. 364, vol. 2, p. 210. The passage is not contained in the oldest text witnesses (Wolf, Armin: “Die ‘sieben Männer, die den Kaiser wählen sollten’. Neues zur Datierung der Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar”. In: Stolleis, Michael (ed.): *Die Bedeutung der Wörter. Studien zur europäischen Rechtsgeschichte. Festschrift für Sten Gagnér zum 70. Geburtstag*. Beck: Munich 1991, pp. 565–578, here pp. 572–574). As German sources do not mention the number of seven electors before 1275, Wolf (ibid., pp. 575–578) suggests that this part of the saga was written around the same time and that Sturla Þórðarson, the Icelandic author, was informed about the fact by Ingibjörg, King Hákon’s widow.
- 169 Richards Luard, Henry (ed.): *Matthæi Parisiensis monachi Sancti Albani Chronica majora 5*. (Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores [Rolls Series] 57,5). Her Majesty’s Stationery Office: London 1880, p. 201. For Erik Plovpenning, see note 20.
- 170 Helle, Knut: *Norge blir en stat, 1130–1319*. (Handbok i Norges historie 3). Universitetsforlaget: Bergen / Oslo / Tromsø 1974, pp. 81–87.
- 171 Cf. Miethke, Jürgen: “Politisches Denken und monarchische Theorie. Das Kaisertum als supranationale Institution im späteren Mittelalter”. In: Ehlers, Joachim (ed.): *Ansätze und Diskontinuität deutscher Nationsbildung im Mittelalter*. (Nationes 8). Sigmaringen 1989, pp. 121–144; Drews, pp. 48–62.

Rönnow in 1706, the theoretical claim to overlordship over the neighbouring countries was exploited in Danish propaganda and even used as *casus belli* against Sweden in the Great Northern War. Rönnow got into serious trouble at home.¹⁷² Such imagery was obviously uncalled for.

On the other side of the coin, the emperors at the Bosphorus enjoyed great popularity in the North from the 12th century to the end of the Middle Ages. Obviously, their remote location and the marvels of Constantinople contributed to their ongoing success in all kinds of narratives. Yet, there must be another reason. In the end, the Byzantine Empire had “fallen down” in 1204 just like the Staufen Empire some decades later, although no Scandinavian source ever mentions this defeat, which also meant a loss of face to the city’s Scandinavian defendants. Initially, however, an integral element of Byzantine foreign politics seems to be responsible for friendly Scandinavian attitudes towards the “Greeks” and the repeated decision of different authors not to adopt the typical “Western” view on empires. Instead of trying to enforce universal imperial rule, the Byzantines had developed a highly successful method of employing their cultural heritage and their wealth in order to exert control: this special form of *soft power*,¹⁷³ as it is understood and described in the stories of the Nordic crusader kings, secured the acceptance of a vague overlordship and the inflow of military manpower by granting money and imperial prestige to barbarians abroad. The Romano-German Emperors and their court had nothing of the sort to offer. In our Scandinavian case, Byzantine *soft power* proved to be the most important, and perhaps, the most successful imperial concept of the Middle Ages.

172 Dahlberg, Elena: “Reusing Horace”. In: Steiner-Weber, Astrid (ed.): *Acta conventus neo-latini Upsaliensis. Proceedings of the Fourteenth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies (Uppsala 2009)*. Brill: Leiden / Boston 2012, pp. 329–338, here pp. 329–331. The poem is cited on pp. 330–331. It bore the title *Hercules Genuinus Carolus Duodecimus Magnae Scandinaviae Imperator*.

173 Cf. Shepard, Jonathan: “Trouble-shooters and Men-on-the-Spot. The Emperor’s Dealings with Outsiders”. In: *Le relazioni internazionali nell’Alto Medioevo*. (Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo). Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo: Spoleto 2011, pp. 691–733, here p. 722–723; Magdalino, Paul: *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos 1143–1180*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1993, p. 105.