

medieval worlds
comparative & interdisciplinary studies

No. 2/2015

EMPIRES

ELEMENTS OF COHESION AND SIGNS OF DECAY

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Volume 2015.2

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Elements of Cohesion
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ÖAW

AUSTRIAN
ACADEMY OF
SCIENCES

medieval worlds
comparative & interdisciplinary studies



Der Wissenschaftsfonds.

The journal is funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) project OAJ-52.

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ISSN 2412-3196 Online Edition

Media Owner: Institute for Medieval Research

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Cover design, layout: Anneke Gerloff

Austrian Academy of Sciences Press

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<http://hw.oeaw.ac.at>, <http://verlag.oeaw.ac.at>

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Editor's Introduction: Empires – Elements of Cohesion and Signs of Decay

Walter Pohl

The first issue of *Medieval Worlds* (1/2015) has provided a broad overview of ›Approaches to Comparison‹ and of interdisciplinary projects being pursued in that context. This, the second issue, departs from a more focused thematic frame for comparison, the decay of empires. The comparison of empires has emerged as one of the most productive strands in today's comparative and global history. Mayke de Jong reminds us in her contribution to the present issue that this is a relatively recent research interest. It emerged as a key topic in the 1990s, after the swift fall of the Soviet Empire and at the moment when the US seemed to reach unchallenged worldwide hegemony. The focus was both on modern and on ancient empires, especially on Rome and China.¹ In medieval studies the topic was less prominent. That was not least because medieval European empires raised major problem of definition: when and to what degree were Byzantium and the Holy Roman Empire ›empires‹? And which of the European steppe ›empires‹, those of the Huns, Avars, Bulgars, Magyars, Chasars or the Golden Horde, could confidently be defined as such? However, the fates of numerous Asian empires provide ample opportunities for wide-ranging comparison.

What medieval Europe can add to the debate consists primarily of examples of self-styled ›empires‹ in a state of tension between imperial pretences and limited means, more often than not in a defensive mode – were these empires in decay? However, the notion of decay may to some extent be a modern projection, inspired by the implicit comparison with the much better means that modern empires had at their disposal. If we define ›empires‹ in terms of direct control of their populations and territories, pre-modern empires and states usually pose problems of definition, although they all have their moments of glory. Yet what modern scholars have often interpreted as signs of decay does not necessarily indicate ›failed empires‹. As Jürgen Osterhammel has argued, historical empires typically were rather weak states and left much of the direct rule to regional or ethnic units.² If we look at the social whole and the way in which empire is embedded in it, we can spot many ways in which ›society in the imperial mode‹ remained robust and creative although an expansive political dynamic had long stopped. Therefore, rather than imposing modernity-based definitions on pre-modern empires, it may be worthwhile to historicize our concepts and to measure the success of imperial ›visions of community‹ also by the standards of their own times.³

Some of the contributions assembled here address this problem head-on, for instance, in the cases of the Carolingian and the Safavid empires. Both Mayke de Jong's and Andrew New-

1 See, for instance, Morris and Scheidel, *Dynamics of Ancient Empires*; Scheidel, *Rome and China. Comparative Perspectives*; Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*; Fibiger Bang and Kołodziejczyk, *Universal Empire*; Gehler and Rollinger, *Imperien und Reiche in der Weltgeschichte*.

2 Osterhammel, *China und die Weltgesellschaft*, 69-85.

3 Pohl, Introduction; cf. Pohl *et al.*, *Visions of Community*.

man's contributions challenge established notions that both empires experienced extended phases of decay, or indeed, little but decay. According to received opinion, the Carolingian empire had been in decline almost since Charlemagne was crowned emperor in Rome in 800 CE, and until the dynasty lost its last power bases and the imperial title was discontinued about a century later. However, as de Jong argues, this raises two fundamental questions: do we define empire by the imperial title, or by the imperial range of expansion and dominion that had started well before 800? And as to the topic of decay, by what standards do we measure the success or failure of empires? Signs of subsiding expansive dynamic and inner conflict may not be sufficient to diagnose pervasive decline. Andrew Newman forcefully proposes a very similar argument about Safavid Iran in the seventeenth century. One striking common feature in both cases is the increasing influence of – Christian/Shi'ite – clerics and a conspicuous wealth of religious texts. In modern historiography, that has quite naturally been taken as proof of decline, whereas the extension and impact of intellectual and cultural production in the Frankish ninth and the Iranian seventeenth centuries have hardly been acknowledged. In both worlds, a still momentous imperial framework facilitated the creation of fundamental features of medieval Latin Europe, and of the modern Iranian state. Already in the 1970s, Peter Brown and others made similar points about the later Roman Empire.⁴

Simon McLean supplements de Jong's argument with a study of marriage alliances in the post-imperial West in the early tenth century. Even though power politics had now assumed a much more regional flavour, the imperial past continued to provide important resources for those who were skilful enough to handle them. Carolingian memories could supply elements of political cohesion, as long as they were not used to bolster exaggerated pretensions that inevitably rouse adversity. Throughout the Western Middle Ages, imperial modes of representation remained a valuable symbolic asset and a familiar political idiom, which could inspire high hopes but rarely fulfill them. The Holy Roman Empire remained a grandiose construction, but its actual power hardly ever corresponded to modern definitions of empire. Thus, the modern European nations all carry their legacy of imperial ambitions and gestures, but at the same time the relatively stable national landscape of medieval Europe prevented the establishment of a powerful new empire.⁵

Other contributions in this volume explore a somewhat wider range of phenomena connected to elements of cohesion of states and empires. Jeroen Duindam offers a fascinatingly rich panorama of the workings of dynasty in late medieval and early modern Eurasia and Africa, showing, among other things, that dynastic rhythms do not necessarily coincide with the dynamics of empire. Dynastic rule allowed both for a concentration and a diffusion of power. It provided one way in which imperial conquest could be translated into continuity; however, the volatility of dynastic succession could hardly be controlled permanently, and attempts to harness it to the needs of the polity used a great variety of rules, discourses and institutional practices. Thus, dynasty did not pertain to one ›form of government‹, but was part of a more pervasive social practice.

Susan Reynolds sums up her extensive recent research on the medieval nation, which responds to a controversial debate on whether nations were a modern phenomenon, or whether

4 Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*.

5 See Hirschi, *Origins of Nationalism*.

they were primordial and could therefore also be medieval.⁶ She argues that a distinct feeling of attachment to a polity which is perceived as a natural given is what turns a state into a nation. Therefore, the debate between ›modernists‹ and ›primordialists‹ should not so much be about the workings and the efficacy of a national states, but about ›national‹ or ethnic notions and attitudes, which are certainly present in many cases in medieval Europe.

Glenn Bowman looks at holy places in and after the Ottoman Empire and at the ways in which they might in some circumstances be shared by different confessions. As he argues, the range of potential responses to the mixing of populations around holy sites poses the problem which forces operate to found, maintain or fracture that communality, and how they relate to the framework of empire. And Johannes Preiser-Kapeller then presents an overview of a cluster of comparative projects in Vienna that use the tools of digital network analysis. After giving a very useful general introduction into the uses and problems of network analysis, he presents the impressive results of several comparative studies of political networks and conflict, mainly in late medieval empires: in the Byzantine and the Holy Roman Empire, but also in several other Eurasian empires. Digital network analysis is a method that can, as long as the data are sufficient, add significantly to our understanding of the complexity, the internal workings, and the vulnerability of empires. Both Bowman's and Preiser-Kapeller's contributions raise issues of governance and the integration of heterogeneous populations with diverse interests.

What all these elements – dynasties, ethnic/national identities, holy places, networks – have in common is that they could serve as factors of integration for empires and large-scale polities; but they could also provide alternative nodes of cohesion. Smaller dynastic units reduced or replaced the empires of the Han, the Romans and the Abbasids, just as ethnic and national sentiments in medium-scale units repeatedly diverted loyalties from empires that, in the long run, failed to mobilize similarly intense feelings of belonging. Both dynastic and ethnic/national legitimacy could then be extended to imperial horizons. The same could be said about forms of religious cohesion such as those sketched in Bowman's contribution on Islamic holy places. Both the late Roman Empire and the early Caliphate at some point had been almost co-extensive with Christianity and Islam respectively. When the close link between political and religious loyalties dissolved, a loose religious frame came to unite an *oikoumenē* of smaller states. Both Christianity and Islam could successively be reconverted into imperial modes, and legitimize further empires. Carolingian, Ottoman or Safavid history can serve as examples. Finally, different forms of regional and supra-regional networks were indispensable for imperial dominion to take root among its elites. But these networks could also shift their focus and withdraw their support from imperial rulers, or could be re-configured around alternative centres of power.

This issue certainly does not offer any comprehensive overview of its topic, let alone definitive answers to the questions sketched above. Many of the contributions merit further discussion, and we will gladly come back to the points raised here, or to additional ones in future issues. The open issue *Medieval Worlds* 3⁷, due out in July 2016, offers a first opportunity to engage in these debates.

6 See, for instance, Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*; Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*; Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*; Smith, *Nation in History*; Scales and Zimmer, *Power and the Nation*; Afanasiev and Matheou, *Ethnicity and Nationhood*.

7 See call for papers: <http://medieval.vlg.oeaw.ac.at/index.php/medievalworlds/announcement/view/5>.

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The Empire that was always Decaying: The Carolingians (800-888)

Mayke de Jong*

This paper examines the potency of the concept of ›empire‹ in Carolingian history, arguing against the still recent trend in medieval studies of seeing the Carolingian empire as having been in a constant state of decay. An initial historiographical overview of medievalist's perceptions of ›empire‹ over the past century is followed by a discussion of how Carolingian authors themselves constructed, perceived and were influenced by notions of ›empire‹. Biblical scholars like Hraban Maur initiated an authoritative discourse on imperium, which in turn, after the 840s, heavily influenced later authors, perhaps most interestingly Paschasius Radbertus in his *Epitaphium Arsenii*. While the writings of these authors who looked back at Louis's reign have often been interpreted as revealing a decline of imperial ideals, they must rather be seen as testifying to a long-lasting concern for a universal Carolingian empire.

Keywords: Carolingian empire; Historiography; imperium; Louis the Pious; Staatlichkeit.

According to most textbooks, the first Western empire to succeed its late Roman predecessor suddenly burst upon the scene, on Christmas Day 800 in Rome, when Pope Leo III turned Charles, King of the Franks and Lombards, and *patricius* (protector) of the Romans, into an *imperator augustus*. Few events have been debated so much *ad nauseam* by modern historians as this so-called imperial coronation of 800, which was probably not at all a coronation; contemporary sources contradict each other as to what happened on that Christmas Day in St. Peter's church.¹ Charlemagne's biographer Einhard claimed that the vigorous Frankish king »would not have entered the church that day, even though it was a great feast day, if he had known in advance of the pope's plan«. This became the basis for a grand narrative that survived well into the late twentieth century: that this great Germanic warrior had never wished to become emperor, but was tricked into it by a devious pope with his own agenda. Without necessarily admiring Germanicness, historians still tend to distinguish between a Frankish and ›Rome-free‹ conception of empire and a papal version thereof.² Furthermore, the prevailing consensus has been that the imperial title was something like a cherry on Charlemagne's already plentiful cake: there is not a possibility he became a different ruler after 800. All things considered, the great Charles could have done very well without this sudden intervention by Rome's bishop.

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1 Nelson, Why Are There so Many Different Accounts; Schieffer, Neues von der Kaiserkrönung Karls des Großen. Still authoritative: Classen, *Karl der Große*.

2 Nelson, Kingship and Empire, 70, with reference to the distinction first made by Carl Erdmann in 843. Mayr-Harting, Charlemagne, the Saxons, and the Imperial Coronation. There is a long German tradition of restricting the Carolingian meaning of *Romanum imperium* to Rome and the papal territories. A recent example: Müller-Mertens, Römisches Reich. For a pertinent critique, see Sarti, Frankish Romanness and Charlemagne's Empire, forthcoming in *Speculum*, October 2016. I thank the author for giving me a preview of her article.

According to a strong and persistent trend in modern historiography, the ensuing Carolingian empire did not even last a century, and it was in a constant state of decay; almost from the very moment of its inception. Its modest glory is still exclusively associated with Charlemagne, who was the only Carolingian emperor with whom later empire builders deigned to identify with. When the Great Charles died in January 814, and his weak and overly pious son Louis succeeded, things went downhill rapidly. Or did the decay already start when the once vigorous king retired to Aachen after 800, an old emperor unable to keep his unruly daughters in check?³ Certainly decline had well and truly started by 830, when Louis was faced with the first of rebellions, and at the very latest it started after Louis' death in 840 and during the subsequent division of the empire among his remaining sons in 843.⁴ For then onwards, Carolingian imperial history was a muddle of competing members of the dynasty, so difficult to remember that it was something of a relief that the last legitimate emperor, aptly named Charles the Fat, was deposed in 888.⁵

This was the story of the Carolingian empire as I encountered it in the early 1970s as a student of medieval history at Amsterdam University, in the extensive French, English and German bibliographies that we were expected to master. By then, the Germanic conqueror had become a patron of learning, and a champion of the heady dreams of European integration, complete with a European *Karlspreis* that has been awarded in Aachen since 1950.⁶ Otherwise, our interest in the history of Carolingian empire was minimal, for, like all medieval political history in general, it was worlds removed from the *Annales*-inspired cultural history that was *en vogue* in the 1970s. Compared to Montaillou, medieval politics seemed rather dreary and predictable, what with lay aristocrats who were always out to undermine rulers, and bishops and abbots who were not much better; they all belonged to this power-hungry elite that soon managed to wreck the Carolingian empire. In any case, as we learned from Geoffrey Barraclough, an empire was an ideal that had little to do with political reality,⁷ and the latter was hard to get at anyway, for all sources relevant to Carolingian political history had been produced by clerics, and were therefore far removed from the rough and tumble of actual politics.

Admittedly, well into the 1980s this also remained my uninformed view of the matter. I must have transmitted it to students, without realising how much this gloomy perspective on Carolingian politics owed to the still authoritative publications from the late 1940s and 1950s that I had taken on board as a student. In the aftermath of the Second World War, empire and conquest had become tainted and therefore frozen topics, along with the entire migration period and its so-called Germanic tribes.⁸ By the 1970s Dutch students specialising in medieval history were either attracted by the archive-based local or regional history of the later middle ages, or, in the case of early medievalists, in French *histoire des mentalités*. The latter legitimated the transformation of stuffy old church history into an exciting and novel study of early medieval religion, largely inspired by cultural anthropology. It was only much

3 Nelson, *Women at the Court of Charlemagne*.

4 Booker, *Past Convictions*; Gravel, *De la crise du règne de Louis le Pieux*.

5 For a succinct but effective critique of the traditional view of the later Carolingian empire, see McLean, *Kingship and Politics*.

6 Awarded to the euro in 2002, represented by the President of the European Bank, Wim Duisenberg.

7 Barraclough, *Ideal and Reality*.

8 With the notable exception of Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*, a book I only came across in the 1990s.

later, through studying Carolingian monastic ritual, in the mid-1980s, that I was confronted with the importance of monasticism for early medieval state formation; the next step was investigating the interface between early medieval religion and politics, and discovering that political history could be interesting as well as challenging.⁹

Around the same time, British and American historians began to break out of the restrictive framework of the rise of modern national states, showing that although early medieval kingdoms were indeed different, they did work as political communities in their own right, both at the practical and ideological level, and not just as forerunners of France or Germany.¹⁰ In order to rule, kings depended on the consensus and cooperation of their aristocracies, but the reverse also pertained: members of the elite competed for royal favour.¹¹ That Carolingian literacy had a broader base than was hitherto assumed, had profound implications, not just for understanding the participation of lay magnates in government, but also for the realisation that the religiously articulated political discourse had not just been produced by clerics for their own consumption, or as a top-down ecclesiastical ideology to be imposed on a passive laity.¹²

These new approaches first and foremost focused on the Frankish kingdoms and regions, while Carolingian *empire* did not attract much scholarly attention. This tide started to turn around the year 2000. The upsurge of interest, which still continues, has two distinct yet complementary features. First, the predominantly Christian ideology of ›empire‹ is now taken seriously, as a force with an enduring impact outside a restricted clerical elite, and well beyond the later reign of Charlemagne and the early years of Louis. Secondly, ›empire‹, both in the sense of the title and the realm, is considered worth fighting for until the very end of the Carolingian dynasty. Of course the start of a new millennium has nothing to do with this revived interest in Carolingian empire, and all the more with the previous decade, which saw a fundamental shift of perspective with regard to both early medieval state formation and literacy. This opened the way for a reappraisal of the viability of this large-scale polity, also in terms of shared ideas on an imperial order that were not necessary detached from, or opposed to, ›political reality‹.

In the rest of this contribution, I will elaborate some more on these changed and changing perspectives, without claiming to offer anything like a complete historiographical survey; these comments are written from my own vantage point as a Dutch early medievalist trained in the 1970s. I then turn to the ninth century itself, and to some of the reflections on Carolingian *imperium* and its decay on the part of authors of the second half of that century. At the time, there were indeed voices that expressed feelings of loss and nostalgia for a glorious and peaceful Carolingian past, when *augustus* (either Charlemagne or Louis) still had the realm in hand. These references to an older and orderly imperial world that was lost after the division of 843 have often been cited in modern research as proof of the decline of the empire, but it was precisely during this so-called period of decay, from the 840s onwards, that the most explicit visions of Carolingian *imperium* were expressed, amidst much lament about the dismal present. Division, strife and upheaval formed a powerful impetus to voice hopes and

9 De Jong, *Carolingian Monasticism*.

10 Two examples that influenced my own work: Geary, *Vivre en conflit*; Davies and Fouracre, *Settlement of Disputes*.

11 Nelson, *Politics and Ritual*; Nelson, *Frankish World*. One of the first explorations of this theme: Wood and Sawyer, *Early Medieval Kingship*.

12 McKitterick, *Carolingians and the Written Word*; McKitterick, *Uses of Literacy*.

aspirations for the retrieval of a lost world of united imperial rule. Whether these ideals had already been alive for earlier generations experiencing Frankish empire is a moot point, for they were not articulated as clearly as in the period of so-called decay of the Carolingian empire. All we can say is that this discourse of lost imperial unity and grandeur was very much part of the political reality of the second half of the ninth century.

Kingdoms versus empire (1945-2000)

There is no need to explain why after 1945 the Carolingian empire was no longer a popular topic of research – or any empire, for that matter. In the late 1940s the prominent Belgian historian Francois-Louis Ganshof published some influential articles with revealing titles such as ›Charlemagne’s Failure‹, and ›The End of Charlemagne’s Reign: A Decomposition‹. These articles were only translated into English in 1971, which helped to secure the long-term impact of these ideas, generated in the immediate aftermath of World War II.¹³ Charlemagne as an imperial success-story definitely went out of favour, as did the Frankish empire as a whole. As Ganshof put it, this had been a ›conception divorced from reality held by empire-minded clerics, who saw in Charles a Roman emperor God had invested with a universal magistracy for the defence and exaltation of faith and Church‹.¹⁴ Despite concerted attempts, especially in capitularies issued in 802, the imperial title gained in 800 added nothing to the usual business of Frankish kingship, and neither did it enhance relations with the papacy.¹⁵ In Ganshof’s words, ›the imperial mirage, compounded of the ideas and images brought back from Rome, must have quickly dissipated when it came in contact with realities: all the more rapidly in that the concept of empire was a clerical concept, which Charlemagne himself no doubt never fully grasped‹.¹⁶ His conclusion: this empire was already far along the road towards decomposition when in 814 Louis the Pious succeeded his father.¹⁷

The Belgian historian was less scathing about Louis than his Austrian colleague Heinrich Fichtenau, whose *Das Karolingische Imperium* (1946) painted a bleak picture of this failing ruler towards the end of his reign: ›An emperor without might or resources, a father in conflict with his sons, a pious Christian who heaped guilt on himself whenever he acted and even more so when he let things be‹.¹⁸ Charlemagne had still been able to keep this empire in hand, but under Louis, everyone went back to a self-interested mode, most of all the so-called reformers who had seemingly adopted a monastic agenda but in fact pursued their own. In the English translation of 1957 the main title remained the same, but in fact Fichtenau distanced himself from his original theme of empire and its (im)possibilities: his last three morose chapters on imperial decline under Louis were omitted, as was an elaborate comparison with Byzantium. Instead, much on court culture under Charlemagne was added, while Aachen was no longer compared with Constantinople but discussed in relation to Jerusalem. The entire focus of the book had now shifted to Charlemagne, as a mighty king inspired by biblical models such as David and Solomon.¹⁹

13 Ganshof, *L'échec de Charlemagne*; Ganshof, *Charlemagne’s Failure*; Ganshof, *La fin du règne de Charlemagne*.

14 Ganshof, *The Last Period of Charlemagne’s Reign*, 240.

15 Ganshof, *The Last Period of Charlemagne’s Reign*, 243.

16 Ganshof, *The Last Period of Charlemagne’s Reign*, 247.

17 Ganshof, *The Last Period of Charlemagne’s Reign*, 250; for Ganshof’s relatively benign view of Charlemagne’s successor, see his *Louis the Pious Reconsidered*, 179-180.

18 Fichtenau, *Das karolingische Imperium*, 290; somewhat more optimistic: Halphen, *Charlemagne et l’Empire carolingien*, 305: after 840, the empire continued to exist, adapting to new circumstances.

19 Fichtenau, *Carolingian Empire*, transl. Munz.

While the empire moved behind the horizon, interest in Christian kingship and its Old Testament inspiration was clearly on the rise.²⁰ This was well received in quite different research communities that tended to operate mostly within a national context as well as separately. In German post-war medieval scholarship the ›new constitutional history‹ (*Neue Verfassungsgeschichte*), a legacy from the 1930s, was still dominant.²¹ This meant that royal power was seen entirely as the result of the personal ability of rulers to claim the loyalty of a fickle and greedy aristocracy. Within this *Personenverbandsstaat*, bishops merely represented the ecclesiastical face of aristocratic family interests, and successful kings were successful lords, first and foremost.²² Without the charisma and conquests of a Charlemagne, an empire encompassing all of Latin Christianity was no more than an idea in the minds of ambitious clerics. Given the language barrier, I doubt that British historians of the 1970s were all that familiar with this typically German brand of ›othering‹ early medieval politics,²³ but through a different route, namely their openness to social anthropology, they became sensitised to the alterity of the distant past as well. Peter Brown, who moved to the United States in 1978, as well as Michael Wallace-Hadrill who remained in Oxford, are influential cases in point: they were both inspired by anthropologists such as Mary Douglas and Max Gluckman, and brought this perspective to their study of, respectively, late antiquity and the early middle ages.²⁴ For Wallace-Hadrill and the generation he taught, be it directly or indirectly, it was Frankish kingship that mattered, not the imperial title which, it was agreed, did not affect Charlemagne's running of his vast realm in any significant way.²⁵

These two research traditions, German and British, came together in the work of Timothy Reuter, a historian of German-English ancestry, who was familiar with current German ›constitutional‹ historiography as well as with the anthropologically-inspired British work on early medieval social and political history.²⁶ In 1985, Reuter published a seminal article with immediate relevance to the theme of the empire, arguing that throughout the dynasty's history, plunder and tribute had been vital elements in the creation and consolidation of Carolingian royal power; this aggressive type of warfare had not been sustained by a general levy, but rather by a gift-economy in which rulers were dependent on the loyalty of the military elite and its war-bands. With the end of Carolingian military expansion, shortly after 800, the lack of booty made it increasingly difficult to raise such armies. The last truly aggressive campaign was Charlemagne's against the Avars (796). Under Louis the Pious, military ex-

20 Ewig, *Zum christlichen Königsgedanken im Mittelalter*; Schramm, *Kaiser, Könige, Päpste* II, 176-341, with various publications from the 1950s on Charlemagne as king and emperor.

21 Schneidmüller, *Von der deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte*; Pohl, *Staat und Herrschaft im Frühmittelalter*.

22 See the critical appraisal of this view by Patzold, *Bischöfe als Träger der politischen Ordnung*; Patzold, *Episcopus*.

23 Pohl, *Ursprungserzählungen und Gegenbilder*; Pohl, *Staat und Herrschaft im Frühmittelalter*, 16-27. The obvious exception is Karl Leyser, but his work is much closer to the Anglophone historians inspired by social anthropology than to German traditions of institutional history.

24 Wood, John Michael Wallace-Hadrill; Wood, *Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages*, ch. 15 (›The Emergence of Late Antiquity‹). Wood, *Transformation of Late Antiquity*, to appear in *Networks and Neighbours*.

25 The great exception was the Austrian refugee Walter Ullmann, who became Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge (1949) and professor of Medieval History (1972). In many ways Ullmann was part of a Continental and pre-war generation of historians of ideas, to which Percy Schramm and Ernst Kantorowicz also belonged. His grand vision of the top-down (›hierocratic‹) authority of popes and emperors that supposedly dominated early medieval political structures was politely but effectively undermined by his two most prominent pupils, Janet L. Nelson and Rosamond McKitterick, who trained their own students very differently, respectively at KCL London and Cambridge University.

26 Timothy Reuter died prematurely in 2002. His collected papers have been edited by Nelson, *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, including *Plunder and Tribute* and its sequel of 1990, *End of Carolingian Military Expansion*.

peditions had become purely defensive ones. By then, the super-rich Frankish empire had turned into an attractive target for plunder, and ›the very success of Frankish imperialism in the eighth century had led to a shortage of victims who were both conquerable and profitable, which forced the aristocracy to revise its profit-and-loss assessment of warfare.‹²⁷ The only way out was internal expansion, that is, to say, the use of ecclesiastical property. As Reuter argued, most of Ganshof's ›decomposition‹ of the last phase of Charlemagne's reign had in fact been the result of military stagnation. Of course forgiveness and humility of the kind displayed by Louis the Pious became more desirable as resources dried up; the internal crisis of 830 were only a matter of structure and time, not of personalities or ideologies.²⁸

This struck a chord with the mostly Anglophone historians who were exploring the early medieval past as a foreign country,²⁹ but also with the German tradition of the Carolingian realm as *Personenverbandsstaat*. In Germany, also in the 1980s, a fierce debate erupted about ›Staatlichkeit‹: did anything of the sort exist in the Carolingian age? Johannes Fried answered this question in the negative, maintaining that ninth-century Frankish sources showed no sign of transpersonal or abstract concepts of a political community. The only possible exception was the notion of *ecclesia* which did seem to denote the Christian empire, but Fried dismissed this as mere ›clerical thinking‹, far removed from actual politics.³⁰ Hans-Werner Goetz begged to differ, countering that the concept of *regnum* did refer to a territorial unit that existed regardless of personal ties between a ruler and his magnates, but he as well tended to ignore the connection between *ecclesia* and empire, for his case was built on the Carolingian discourse on *regna*.³¹

All parties involved, including the majority outside Germany that remained unaware of the controversy on Carolingian *Staatlichkeit*, could accept Reuter's no-nonsense approach. It posed a welcome challenge to a version of the Carolingian empire that was still very much around in the 1980s: a rather starry-eyed notion of this splendid cultural predecessor of the current European Community, as it had been presented in 1965 during the great exhibitions on Charlemagne in Aachen, and had lived on ever since, especially in the public domain. For Reuter and many others at the time, this was mere ›ideology‹ produced by naïve modern historians and ninth-century clerics alike. Please note the negative connotation that the term *Ideologie* still has in German, and more in general, in a Marxist context. Economic and social structures determined the outlook of the normative sources, not the other way around.

With hindsight, the almost total absence of church and religion in these debates is striking. First and foremost, churchmen were seen as the providers of the ideology of the empire – often called the ›rhetoric of reform‹ but they were outside the hard-nosed world of politics, and if they entered it, it was as the clerical face of a self-interested aristocracy intent on countering royal attempts at centralisation. Reuter's views do raise some serious questions: was Louis the Pious really as adverse to warfare as he has been made out to be, and, more importantly, did royal/imperial control of monastic property not compensate to a large extent for the slower pace of conquest?³² But by the early 1990s, when a big European-funded

27 Reuter, *Plunder and Tribute*, 265-267.

28 Reuter, *Plunder and Tribute*, 265-267.

29 De Jong, *Foreign Past*.

30 Fried, *Karolingischer Herrschaftsverband*; see also Fried, *Gens und regnum*.

31 Goetz, *Regnum*.

32 Objections voiced at a later stage by Halsall, *Warfare and Society*, 91-92; see also McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 135-6, 288-291.

research programme on the *Transformation of the Roman World* started, Reuter's perspective on empire still prevailed, and, with some exceptions, neither religion nor the Carolingian empire occupied a central place on its agenda.³³ The main themes investigated between 1992 and 1997 were the social and economic transformations between c. 400 and c. 800, and the emergence of post-Roman kingdoms in the West with an ethnically-defined identity: ›Kingdoms of the Empire‹, as the title of one of the publications of the ensuing series called it.³⁴ Above all, this programme enabled a major confrontation between a multitude of national research traditions of which the participants had not been aware of. As it turned out, nationalism was not a thing of the past; i.e. in the early 1990s, the Yugoslav state broke up, and a series of vicious wars followed.³⁵ And this was of course part of the collapse of a contemporary imperial state, the Soviet Union. So, in fact, weren't large empires always bound to decline and fall?

It is significant, I think, that the ›Carolingian‹ volume (c. 700-c. 900) of the *New Cambridge Medieval History*, published in 1995, does not feature ›empire‹ or *imperium* in its general index, nor in any of the chapter titles except in the one on book production.³⁶ All the same, there are signs of change there as well. For example, in Janet Nelson's contribution, which was not on empire but on ›Kingship and Royal Government‹, a topic on which she had just published an important book, *Charles the Bald* (1992), which inspired younger historians to work on later Carolingian rulers and reigns.³⁷ The notion that empire had not fundamentally changed Charlemagne's government remained in place, but plunder and tribute as the sole source of aristocratic loyalty was firmly rejected; royal control of church lands is signalled as an important alternative resource. The Carolingian empire's process of so-called dissolution, Nelson maintained, was also one of resolution and reformation; however, it did not implode.³⁸ The year 1995 also saw the publication of a collection of articles on early medieval immunities and the ways in which these had underpinned, rather than undermined, royal resources.³⁹ Nelson contributed to this, but also Reuter himself, who thereby helped to create a paradigm shift that went straight against his earlier work – surely the mark of a great scholar.

The overall emphasis on the otherness of early medieval societies of the 1980s may have gone overboard a bit, but all things considered, these new approaches to the early medieval political order, inspired by anthropology and social history, provided a much-needed antidote against the anachronistic association of political history with national states or their so-called precursors.⁴⁰ This in turn prepared the ground for a fresh look at the Carolingian empire. Matthew Innes' *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages* (2000) was the first of

33 Wood, Report. The one exception was the group concerned with ›Rituals of Power‹, led by the archaeologist Frans Theuws, which did not think about empire, but certainly focussed on religion and the Carolingian period; see Nelson and Theuws, *Rituals of Power*; and De Jong *et al.*, *Topographies of Power*.

34 See also Hansen and Wickham, *The Long Eighth Century*; Pohl, *Kingdoms of the Empire*; Pohl, *Strategies of Distinction*. The working group with the highest density of Carolingianists in it focussed primarily on political power and the rituals and topographies associated with it: Nelson and Theuws, *Rituals of Power*, and De Jong *et al.*, *Topographies of Power*.

35 Geary, *Myth of Nations*.

36 McKitterick, *New Cambridge Medieval History II*.

37 Nelson, *Charles the Bald*; her translation of the main narrative of the reign of Charles the Bald was equally influential: *Annales Bertiniani*, trans. Nelson, *Annals of St-Bertin*.

38 Nelson, Kingship and Royal Government, 383-430, at 394-395; compare her earlier Kingship and Empire.

39 Davies and Fouracre, *Property and Power* (see n. 3 above); in a similar vein, Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space*.

40 See above, n. 11.

a series of monographs with a clear (and often charter-based) focus on local and regional politics; how did the integration of such regions into political structures created by rulers and their entourages work, and how did kings gain a foothold in distant localities?⁴¹ At the beginning of the new millennium, an Austrian/German-led working group, an offspring of the European *TRW* programme of the 1990s, began to investigate early medieval ›Staatlichkeit‹, a German notion impossible to translate into English or French, as it turned out, but this misunderstanding proved highly productive.⁴² ›Empire‹ was also a point of discussion, especially in relation to *ecclesia* as a comprehensive concept denoting a multi-ethnic polity.⁴³

By the turn of the millennium, Carolingian *imperium* was definitely back on the agenda. That Johannes Fried publicly declared that Charlemagne had engineered his own imperial coronation, rather than having it foisted on him by the pope, was a sure sign that the mood was changing, even in Germany.⁴⁴ In two major syntheses published in 2005, by Chris Wickham and Julia Smith; empire is largely absent;⁴⁵ its return on the scholarly agenda seems to have been the work of a younger generation. Simon MacLean's study of the last Carolingian emperor, Charles the Fat, reveals the extent to which older historiography had gotten stuck in the paradigm of an empire that was always decaying, awaiting the rise of nations; MacLean also shows how important the imperial title was for competing members of the later Carolingian dynasty.⁴⁶ In a similar vein, Eric J. Goldberg entitled his monograph on Louis the German *Struggle for Empire*.⁴⁷ In that same year, Steffen Patzold deconstructed the tenacious idea that in the 830s a clerical *Reichseinheitspartei* had unrealistically persisted in keeping the ideal of empire intact, in the face of very different political realities of a more Germanic kind. For Patzold (and myself, for that matter) churchmen and lay magnates alike shared a religiously articulated sense of ›ministry‹ and service to a public cause embodied by royal and imperial authority; whenever this corporate identity was threatened, the ensuing fissure did not simply run along the time-honoured lay/clerical divide.⁴⁸ My own book on religious/political discourse during the reign of Louis the Pious (2009) assumed the importance of an ›empire as *ecclesia*‹ as a matter of course: by the early ninth century, the Old Testament notion of the Franks as the elect, a people that had replaced the *prior populus*, Israel, was difficult to maintain, and the *ecclesia gentium* offered a suitable alternative model for identification.⁴⁹ But I wish I had shown even more that humility and atonement were typically *imperial* virtues, and the same could be argued for another of Louis' public virtues once thought of as a private weakness, namely clemency.⁵⁰

The Carolingian World, an excellent textbook produced in 2011 by three prominent pupils of McKitterick and Nelson, shows how rapidly thinking on ›empire‹ has changed.⁵¹ It contains an extensive chapter on ›Inventing the Carolingian empire, 800-840‹, which takes

41 Innes, *State and Society*; Innes, *People, Places and Power*.

42 Airlie et al., *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*; Pohl and Wieser, *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat*.

43 De Jong, *Ecclesia and the Early Medieval Polity*.

44 Fried, *Papst Leo III. besucht Karl den Großen*; see also Fried, *Karl der Große*.

45 Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*; Smith, *Europe after Rome*.

46 MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*.

47 Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*.

48 Patzold, *Eine »loyale Palastrebellion«*; a divide also broken down in Wormald and Nelson, *Lay Intellectuals*.

49 De Jong, *Empire as Ecclesia*.

50 De Jong, *Penitential State*.

51 Costambeys et al., *Carolingian World*, 154-222.

into account Reuter's views, but concludes that the cessation of wars of conquest in the early 800 ›catalysed a dramatic shift in this culture which meant the roles of every member of the elite, from the royal family had to be redefined‹. The term empire ›had to be invented in the imaginations and mentalities of its elites‹.⁵² The familiar mantra that the imperial coronation did not radically alter Charlemagne's rule is reiterated, yet the emphasis is on the greater intensity of the ruler's attempts at effective control, from 802 onwards.⁵³ As to its success, the answer is fairly positive and a far cry from Ganshof's theory of decomposition and Reuter's theory of military collapse of the empire. Hard on the heels of this already influential synthesis, in 2012 Martin Gravel published an extensive investigation of how the Carolingian empire really worked, under Charlemagne and Louis, with upbeat conclusions on the effectiveness of communication between these rulers and their elites, both lay and ecclesiastical, central and peripheral. The subtitle speaks for itself: *Réaliser l'empire sous Charlemagne et Louis le Pieux*. Gravel's sources have been known to known to historians since Ganshof wrote about Charlemagne's failure, yet his interpretation of them is entirely different.⁵⁴

New work on the Carolingian empire keeps appearing. Some of it remains focused on its ideological aspects, but without having to apologise for ideals that are clerical and therefore far removed from political reality; the topics recently explored range from a re-examination of the expression *imperium*⁵⁵ and ›empire‹ as a Christian community writ large⁵⁶ to the impact of Carolingian notions of ›empire‹ on later centuries.⁵⁷ At the same time, the practical side of imperial power and authority has become a central concern to the point of moving centre stage.⁵⁸ As I wrote most of this paper in August 2015, Jennifer R. Davis' new book appeared: unfortunately too late for me to take it on board here. But its title speaks volumes: *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire*.⁵⁹

Carolingian empire and decay: some contemporary voices

The overall image we are left with, after two decades of research, is one of a Carolingian world in which rulers and their leading men shared a strong sense of order, and the determination to implement this in the real world. Conflict was as much a regular feature of ninth-century politics as consensus, and it was behind much of the more articulate reflections on the nature and cohesion of the polity. Bishops and abbots were very much part of the governing elite, controlling lands that were essential to the military survival of the state.⁶⁰ According to ninth-century usage, *imperium* did not so much refer to a clearly-defined territorial unit as to the exercise of imperial authority by the senior member(s) of the Carolingian dynasty who bore the title *augustus imperator*. It was the unanimity between Louis and his sons, including his co-emperor Lothar,

52 Costambeys *et al.*, *Carolingian World*, 159-160.

53 Already signalled in Innes, *Charlemagne's Government*.

54 Gravel, *Distances, rencontres, communications*. For some groundbreaking recent work on early medieval literacy, see Brown *et al.*, *Documentary Culture and the Laity*.

55 Van Espelo, *Testimony of Carolingian Rule*; Sarti, *Frankish Romanness* (see above, footnote 2).

56 Patzold, »Einheit« versus »Fraktionierung«; Phelan, *Formation of Christian Europe*; Kramer, *Great Expectations*.

57 Latowsky, *Emperor of the World*.

58 Notably Gravel, *Distances, rencontres, communications*, but also Garipzanov, *Symbolic Language of Royal Authority*, with a strong focus on images of empire circulating via coins and other publicly accessible media. And, very recently, Conant, *Louis the Pious*.

59 About to appear with Cambridge University Press.

60 De Jong, *Ecclesia and the Early Medieval Polity*. On the pre-Carolingian period, see Wood, *Entrusting Western Europe to the Church*.

that was at stake in 830-833, not the ›unity of empire‹ (*Reichseinheit*).⁶¹ In the territorial sense of the word, this empire ended where the correct Christian cult was no longer practiced. Its boundaries were liturgical as well as political: the right kind of baptismal rite determined membership of the political community.⁶² At the very heart of what we call the Carolingian empire was the ruler's protection of a divinely sanctioned *cultus divinus*, and his duty to extend and enforce this within the boundaries of Christianity under Frankish imperial rule.

This Christian-imperial discourse is not very evident during Charlemagne's reign; it only fully emerged under Louis the Pious, and only really came into its own after 840, when according to traditional modern historiography, the decline of empire was already a fact. The ninth-century imperial discourse lent plenty of support to modern grand narratives about the decline of empire, for apart from triumphalist voices it also features dire complaints about the loss of unity and moral purpose that had once existed. The latter are best understood as witnesses to a growing awareness of what a united Christian polity and its leadership should be like, with ideas that were further articulated through the series of dynastic crises that started in the early 830s.

In the narrative sources in question, the expressions *regnum* and *imperium* were often used interchangeably, as is the case in a brief but celebrated reference to the Carolingian empire: the opening sentences to the *Gesta Karoli* written by the monk Notker from St. Gall, sometime between 885 and 887, very shortly before the last emperor's deposition in 888.⁶³ Notker had no idea of what was coming, so his adaptation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2, 36) is unabashedly imperialist, even though he wrote consistently about *regnum*, rather than *imperium*. After having smashed the lead and clay statue that symbolised the previous four world powers, including the Roman Empire, God had created another with the Carolingians at its head. Charlemagne represented ›the golden head of a second and no less remarkable statue‹, a Frankish empire of which the Greeks and Romans were of course greatly envious.⁶⁴ Notker meant the Byzantines, and the inhabitants of the city of Rome; whereas the latter habitually opposed anyone of importance connected to the apostolic see,⁶⁵ Charles was the Defender of the Church of Rome. This text certainly had eschatological overtones,⁶⁶ but it was also very much part of a highly concrete and terrestrial Frankish imperial imagination in which Charlemagne took ›Persian‹ envoys hunting and proved his superiority.⁶⁷ The very fact that the death and the name of the elephant Abul Abbas, the gift of a fellow emperor from the East, were recorded in the *Royal Frankish Annals* of 810, makes it clear that *imperium* was not just an idea connected with the end of times. This was about inter-imperial one-upmanship involving organs and impressive beasts, symbols of the complementary world rule of Franks, Greeks and Persians. The latter referred to the imperial aspect of the caliphate. However, if Muslims from Spain attacked Franks, they were called Saracens.

A less known but equally strident statement of Frankish imperialism comes from Hraban Maur (d. 856), who as abbot of Fulda got into conflict with his monk and one-time child oblate Gottschalk. In 829 the latter had refused to recognise the validity of his oblation ritual, on

61 Patzold, Eine »loyale Palastrebellion«.

62 Reimitz, Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen.

63 See MacLean, Kingship and Politics, 199-229, with references to older literature.

64 Notker, *Gesta Karoli* I, cc. 1.10, ed. Haefele 1,12.

65 Notker, *Gesta Karoli* I, c. 26, ed. Haefele, 34-35.

66 Nelson, Kingship and Empire, 72.

67 Notker, *Gesta Karoli* II, c. 8, ed. Haefele, 59.

the grounds that only Frankish witnesses had been present, not Saxon ones. Protesting about this to the Emperor Louis and his entourage, Hraban maintained that the Saxons had been conquered and then converted by the Franks. As newcomers to Christianity, they had no right to reject Frankish witnesses; throughout history, under the Persians as well as the Romans, the conquered *gentes* had obeyed imperial rule. As the successor of Roman *imperium*, Frankish rule deserved a similar respect.⁶⁸ In his prolific exegesis, Hraban wrote about many biblical kings in imperial terms, for they governed many peoples; Queen Esther, likened to Louis's wife, the Empress Judith, was a case in point. Esther's husband, King Ahasveros, was an imperial figure because of his multi-ethnic realm.⁶⁹

This was the Carolingian empire as in ruling a multitude of converted *gentes* drawn into the Frankish/Christian fold, but it could also mean the Saxons were becoming an integral part of the Frankish *populus*, as Einhard expressed it. The terminology remained fluid. Einhard is an interesting witness to empire, precisely because his remark that Charlemagne would never have entered St Peter's Basilica on Christmas Day 800, had he known what would hit him, has so often been invoked as proof of some kind of Frankish ambivalence about the imperial title. Humility was one of the key virtues of late antique Christian emperors, however, and in other respects as well, Einhard's *Vita Karoli* is an eloquent testimony to imperial rule: Charlemagne is portrayed as lending his support to the Christians of the East, including Jerusalem, Alexandria and Carthage.⁷⁰ Not only did he order the codification of the laws of all the nations under his rule, he also had old songs in his mother tongue written down, started on a grammar in his native language and used this to rename the months and the winds; how imperial can one get? Notwithstanding Einhard's consistent use of *regnum Francorum* in his post-800 narrative, his is a portrait of truly imperial greatness.⁷¹

Einhard's brilliant literary experiment, with its subtle use of Suetonius' biography of Augustus should not blind us to the fact that the model empire of the past was not so much ancient pagan Rome, but its late antique and Christian successor that came into existence in 313. This world of Constantine, and above all of Theodosius and Ambrose, provided ideal imperial history to Frankish authors. Given that this was also the age of the Fathers – Jerome, Ambrose and Augustine – upon which Carolingian biblical exegesis was built, this Christian imperial past functioned much like biblical history: as an imagined community that constantly impinged on the present. When it comes to assessing ninth-century complaints about ›decay of empire‹, it should be kept in mind that these two yardsticks, biblical and late antique-imperial, underpinned all judgements of decline in the more recent Carolingian past, and often were thought more fundamental than contemporary history. The crucial question in political reflection was, where and when did we fall short of these illustrious examples? One defence of Louis's repeated public penances was that he had been ›like Theodosius‹; one of his detractors called him Ahab, incapable of mastering his Jezebel/Judith.⁷²

68 Hraban, *Liber de oblatione puerorum*, PL 107, cols. 432A-442C; De Jong, *State of the Church*, 251; Patzold, Hraban, *Gottschalk und der Traktat*.

69 De Jong, *Exegesis for an Empress*.

70 Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c. 27, ed. Holder-Egger, 31.

71 McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 7-20, with the arguments for an early dating; for a later one, see Patzold, *Einhard's erste Leser*; Ganz, *Einhard's Charlemagne*.

72 De Jong, *Penitential State*, 122-4, 128-30, 229

This authoritative imperial past did not emerge overnight on Christmas Day 800. The building blocks were there, of course, but erecting the entire edifice took time. The process itself has recently and aptly been summed up under the heading of ›learning empire.‹⁷³ Hence, it is not surprising that an eloquent statement about empire such as Notker’s dates from what modern historians deemed to be the very end of the Carolingian *imperium*. The discourse of empire in terms of *ecclesia* was initiated by biblical scholars such as Hraban, and embraced by those who drafted Louis’ capitularies and conciliar acts, but it only really took off after this emperor’s death in 840 and the ensuing struggle for the empire among his three remaining sons. The battle of Fontenoy in June 841 became a traumatic watershed: many leading Franks died on the battlefield in a way still prevented in 833. By then it was also clear that the three remaining heirs of Louis were not going to rule in unison.⁷⁴ The first references to this lost world, perhaps infused with nostalgia but still very real to the political actors turned authors who had been part of it, date from the 840s and 850s. The Astronomer’s *Life of Louis*, a work written by a member of Louis’ inner circle shortly after 840 is one example; Nithard’s trenchant report on the strife between Louis’s sons in 840-843 is another. The latter author was a well-educated lay magnate, a member of the Carolingian family, who wrote at the behest of Louis’ son Charles the Bald. Dhuoda’s celebrated handbook for her son William in 841 when he joined this king’s court should also be mentioned: a central issue in this text, as in Nithard’s, is the nature of *fides*, the ideal of true loyalty to God and one’s ruler, which was under threat and needed to be reaffirmed.⁷⁵ For the Astronomer and Nithard alike, *imperium* was a key concept, not as a territorial notion but as the joint authority of those participating in imperial rule. Another expression full of meaning used by both these authors was *publicus*: this was the domain of the Carolingian commonwealth, the *res publica*. This was opposed to anything that was *privatus* – the deprived and immoral world of those who pursued their own interests.⁷⁶ Political and personal animosity were behind Nithard’s terse and classically-inspired prose, but his is as clear a statement as any about a severely challenged world of Carolingian ›universal empire‹ (*universum imperium*) as he called it.⁷⁷

These are by no means the only narratives produced after Louis’s death in 840 that tried to come to terms with the dynastic upheaval during and shortly after this emperor’s reign.⁷⁸ The most interesting text, on which I can comment only briefly on here, is the *Epitaphium Arsenii* by Paschasius Radbertus (d. 860).⁷⁹ This monk and one-time abbot of Corbie and one of the most gifted biblical commentators of his day and age, also wrote funeral orations for his illustrious mentors and predecessors, Adalhard and Wala. The former was nicknamed Antony, the latter Arsenius, names chosen by their inner circles at the court and in Corbie from the authoritative past of imperial Christianity. These cousins of Charlemagne became great abbots after an equally illustrious secular career. As in the case of Nithard’s *Histories*,

73 Gantner *et al.*, *Resources of the Past*, see the introduction by Walter Pohl. On cultural memory and the construction of a Frankish notion of empire in ninth-century historiography see McKitterick, *History and Memory*.

74 Nelson, *The Search for Peace*.

75 De Jong, *Carolingian Political Discourse*, with reference to other relevant publications (notably by Janet L. Nelson and Régine Le Jan).

76 Depreux, *Nithard et la Res Publica*; Nelson, *Public Histories and Private History* (repr. in Nelson, *Politics and Ritual*, 195-237); Airlie, *The World, the Text and the Carolingian*.

77 Nithard, *Historiae*, I, c. 2, ed. Pertz, 3.

78 C.f. Booker, *Past Convictions*, on ninth-century texts as pegs for later narratives of decline.

79 A text on which I am presently finishing a book: *Epitaph for an Era*, to appear with Cambridge University Press.

Radbert's *Epitaphium Arsenii* had a huge impact on modern views of the decline of the Carolingian empire, yet the diffusion of these texts in their own day and age was extremely limited.⁸⁰ These were works written for a restricted and court-connected circle, including rulers. Their authors felt marginalised and protested to those in power, appealing to their peers and invoking the values that all those connected to the Carolingian dynasty still shared, whatever the political turbulence and conflicting loyalties of the present.

In this context of post-Fontenoy soul-searching, conceptions of empire further evolved. With authors such as the Astronomer, Nithard and Radbert, there is sometimes a territorial dimension to *imperium*, but often this concept refers to the imperial exercise of authority, under the aegis of an *imperator*.⁸¹ Radbert consistently called Louis the Pious ›Caesar‹ or ›Augustus‹. The second book of the *Epitaphium* was written two decades after the first, in the mid-850s, and is mostly about the role of Charlemagne's cousin, Abbot Wala of Corbie (nicknamed Arsenius by his monks) in the two rebellions against Louis. Wala's pupil Radbert defended his master strenuously after the latter's death in 836, and he had much to say about Wala's struggle for the unity of the ›entire empire‹, in the sense of the joint imperial rule of Louis and his eldest son Lothar that had been torn apart by conflict.⁸² Lothar had been his father's co-emperor since 817, a truly imperial configuration that had been initiated by Charlemagne in 813, when, one year before his death, he made his only remaining son Louis a co-emperor. In Radbert's discourse, *imperium* and *regnum* are complementary and even overlapping concepts, as transpires from enumeration of Wala's motives for getting involved in the rebellion of 830:

»For there is nobody so insane that he would call it a sin to act with sacred counsel, for fidelity, for the life of Caesar, for the sons and imperial rule (*imperio*), for the salvation of the people and the deliverance of the fatherland, for the justice and laws of the emperors (*augusti*), for the stability and unity of the kingdom (*regnum*), and the concord of peace, for the averting of vices and abominations, because of adultery, which is the worst of these, and because of the abuse of the entire empire (*imperium*).«⁸³

This is just one of many instances in which *regnum* and *imperium* have much more than a purely territorial connotation. Radbert, who had been deposed as Corbie's abbot by the time he penned his polemical second book in the 850s, lamented a world of imperial unity he had lost, but this unity was above all the unanimity of the Carolingian rulers and their leading

80 My most recent publication on the *Epitaphium Arsenii*, with references to older literature, is titled Jeremiah, Job, Terence and Paschasius Radbertus. On the transmission of Nithard's Histories, see Booker, Early Humanist Edition of Nithard. Radbertus' *Epitaphium Arsenii* is only extant in one Corbie manuscript, BN 13909, which may have been corrected by the author himself.

81 See Ernst Tresp's edition of Thegan's *Gesta Hludowici*, and Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, with an excellent index which shows in one glance that Louis was very much an *imperator*, but that the *imperium* of which modern historians were in search, plays a minor part. The same holds true for the *Epitaphium Arsenii*: Louis is always referred to, consistently, *Caesar* or *Augustus*, but *imperium* denotes his rule, shared or not with his sons.

82 Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii*, II, c. 10, ed. Dümmler, 76: ›Voluit ut unitas et dignitas totius imperii maneret ob defensionem patriae et ecclesiarum liberationem, ob integritatem rerum, et dispensationem facultatum ecclesiarum: nunc autem, ut cernimus, omnia sunt immutata vel perturbata‹.

83 Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii*, II, c. 11, ed. Dümmler, 78: ›Quia nemo tam insanus mente, qui peccatum dicat agere sancto consilio, pro fide, pro vita Caesaris, pro filiis et imperio, pro salute populi, et salvatione patriae, pro iustitia et legibus Augustorum, pro stabilitate et unitate regni, pacisque concordia, pro depulsione vitiorum et abominationum, pro adulterio, quod ultimum est, et pro contumelia totius imperii‹.

men, referred to by Radbert as the *senatus* or *senatores*.⁸⁴ Like Nithard's *Histories*, this was a partisan narrative; the second book fiercely defended Wala's good intentions in the uprising of 830, and his fundamental loyalty to his emperor, Louis. Yet behind this recent and traumatic struggle for empire there was another, more important past: the late antique Christian empire. By using transparent aliases for his political protagonists, such as Justinian (Louis), Justina (Judith), Honorius (Lothar) and so on, this author deftly evoked an authoritative imperial past. Implicitly, Wala was likened to Ambrose facing up to Theodosius, but since the great man was a onetime general, but never a priest or bishop, a direct comparison with the bishop of Milan would not have been appropriate. Instead, Wala received the byname ›Arsenius‹, after the tutor to Theodosius' son Honorius who, according to tradition, exchanged the imperial court for a monastic life.⁸⁵ Equally deliberate, Louis was denied the honorific alias of Theodosius, probably as a reaction to other authors who, loyal to the old emperor, compared his public atonement of 822 to Theodosius' exemplary penance in 391.⁸⁶ Instead, in the *Epitaphium* Louis became Justinian I, a ruler with a questionable reputation, both as a supporter of heresy and a despoiler of church property.

Obviously, these aliases were intended for a small audience of insiders who knew their Christian imperial history as well as their biblical past, but this select group did not merely consist of monks of Corbie. The issues raised by Radbert in the *Epitaph's* second book were relevant to all those who had been caught up in the political whirlwinds of the early 830s, and were still debating the meaning of it all two decades later. Clearly the fact that Louis had been an emperor, and that they had served under imperial rule, mattered deeply. By the mid-850s, when Radbert added his second book, his ruler was Charles the Bald, a king (*rex*) who had started well with regard to protecting monasteries such as Corbie, but who had been found wanting in the long run.⁸⁷ The imperial unity of the past had been lost because nobody at the time had listened to Wala's dire warnings, with the result that ›up to the present day, none of the rulers can show the commonwealth the way towards justice‹.⁸⁸ So this text was indeed an ›epitaph for an era‹, yet it is also one of the most articulate statements about what imperial rule should entail. This largely overlapped with the *ecclesia*, but the question was how to keep the two orders within it apart. The secular and the clerical domain should remain distinct, so that they would be able to operate in a complementary mode. Without this distinction, there would be no co-operation under the aegis of a legitimate monarch, who allowed himself to be advised by the likes of Wala, an expert on the way in which imperial rule worked. He had even managed to counter corruption in Italy! This is Radbert's message in his funeral oration for a man who is presented as the epitome of service to the *augusti* of his day and age.

84 Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii*, II, c. 1, ed. Dümmler, 61: ›Inde ad comitatum rediens, omnia coram Augusto et coram cunctis ecclesiarum praesulibus et senatoribus proposuit singillatim diversorum ordinum officia, excrescentibus malis, et ostendit cuncta esse corrupta vel depravata‹.

85 De Jong, *Becoming Jeremiah*.

86 Astronomer, *Vita Hludowici*, c. 35, ed. Tremp, 406.

87 Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii*, II, c. 4, ed. Dümmler, 65.

88 Paschasius Radbertus, *Epitaphium Arsenii*, II, c. 6, ed. Dümmler, 66.

Conclusion

In modern scholarship, the *Epitaphium Arsenii* has become one of the key witnesses to the view that decline of the Carolingian empire set in with the crisis of Louis' reign; Einhard's *Vita Karoli* served as the peg for another invented tradition, closely associated with the *Kulturkampf* and the late nineteenth century, according to which Charlemagne would have avoided the empire and the ensuing connection with papal Rome, had he known what was coming. Ninth-century narratives and normative texts have offered plenty of footholds for modern historians who saw the decay of empire everywhere, or who deemed the imperial title superfluous to Charlemagne's already successful rule. He was the only Carolingian emperor that continued to have a real impact on European memory. After him it all went downhill, for a very long time. Yet the very sources that once underpinned this gloomy view of Carolingian empire, now support a much more upbeat approach to this phenomenon. Investigating this topic therefore needs to be a dual operation: studying early medieval sources in conjunction with their subsequent layers of modern interpretation.

In this rather impressionist paper I have sketched some of the changes that occurred since 1945, when those who had lived through World War II were understandably not very enthusiastic about ›empire‹ and all that it stood for. Post-war scholarship on the Carolingian period reveals a constant tension between a modernising perspective, which soon becomes anachronistic if pushed to its extremes, and archaising tendencies that turn the early Middle Ages into an exotic and utterly foreign country. This tension has proven fruitful, provided those involved are aware of it, a tenet that also holds true for research on the Carolingian empire. It is nowadays conducted by a generation that has found a new balance between the modernity and otherness of this period, and no longer has to write about empire in terms of dichotomies: ideal versus reality, or clerical ideology versus aristocratic power. This is a past which does seem like a foreign country at first, but getting to know it is not entirely impossible.

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Cross-Channel Marriage and Royal Succession in the Age of Charles the Simple and Athelstan (c. 916-936)

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This article discusses the marriages of four Anglo-Saxon princesses to Continental kings and princes between the years 917 and 930. These are often interpreted as acts of diplomacy, sealing alliances across the Channel and indicating the dominant position of King Athelstan in early tenth-century Europe. I reinterpret the motivations of the princes by reading the marriages as acts of symbolic communication driven by the uncertainty over the West Frankish royal succession in the 920s and framed by a competition to access a version of Carolingian dynastic legitimacy. This in turn allows us to reflect on the decay of the Carolingian Empire after 888. Because Carolingian-ness was no longer a hegemonic political discourse, I argue that these events belong emphatically to a post-imperial political landscape.

Keywords: Carolingian Empire; marriage; Anglo-Saxon England; Edward the Elder; Athelstan; Charles the Simple; Ottonians; succession; political history; Flodoard of Rheims.

The theme of this issue, decaying empires, is a difficult one to tackle because it is so hard to define what an empire is in the first place. This is certainly true of the ninth-century Frankish Empire of the Carolingian dynasty and its successor in what would become Germany, both of which are customarily included in surveys of historical empires.¹ A vocabulary-based definition is unsatisfactory because the contemporary terms ›imperium‹ and ›regnum‹ are too flexible to be diagnostic.² Nor can we simply assume that there was an empire when there was an emperor: when Charlemagne (d. 814) revived the imperial title in 800 he had already completed most of his imperialist expanding, while his great grandson Louis II (d. 875) enjoyed imperial status despite ruling only Italy and holding no superior power over the kings in other Frankish realms. A structural centre-periphery analysis is also problematic in that the political heartlands of the empire moved around as successive generations of rulers passed. Alemannia, for example, a peripheral area only fully incorporated into Frankish structures in the early ninth century and rarely visited by any ruler for decades afterwards, suddenly became an imperial centre under the late-ninth century emperor Charles III the Fat (d. 888) who had grown up there. And even tracing the hallmarks of Carolingian political order – its legal categories and social practices – might only get us so far, for it has been argued that, paradoxically, they were reified rather than erased in the years after the empire formally ceased to exist.³ In other words, the specifics of the period illustrate the well-known difficulty of developing anything more than the most general taxonomy of empire as a historical phenomenon.

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1 Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 80-90.

2 Reynolds, *Empires*.

3 West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution*.

A more useful definition of the Carolingian Empire lies in the ruling dynasty itself. As Stuart Airlie has persuasively argued, the main driver of Carolingian politics was the ruling family's constant effort to define themselves as the exclusive and natural rulers of the Frankish realms, and to perpetuate the idea that only male-line members of the family could be regarded as legitimate rulers – an endeavour in which they were largely successful. One advantage of this definition is that it substantiates the case for 888 as the key year in the empire's disintegration – a year in which the death of Charles the Fat brought on a succession crisis which marked the end of the dynasty's monopoly on legitimate royal power.⁴ But this is only a starting point for any discussion of when the empire's decline began. Where Airlie persuasively emphasises the revolt of Boson of Vienne in 879 as a key moment in the undermining of the family's hegemony, conventional accounts of the downturn begin much earlier with the death of Charlemagne in 814, the deposition of Louis the Pious in 833, or the territorial division made at Verdun in 843.⁵ The validity of these older narratives has been challenged by specialists but remains very much alive in broader historical discourse, as seen in Niall Ferguson's evocation of a chaotic ›dark age‹ brought about by conflicts between Charlemagne's heirs in the later ninth century, which he presents as a dire warning to those who might wish for a weakening of American ›imperial‹ power in the early twenty-first century.⁶

The present article does not enter such debates directly, but uses them to help think through some of the key events at the other end of the story as the Carolingian Empire unravelled in the decades after 888. How are we to fit this period into our narratives of decline and fall – a period when kings were weak and struggled to assert themselves, but which nonetheless produced at least one, the West Frankish King Charles III the Simple (d.929), a great-great-grandson of Charlemagne, who believed that he had inherited and could restore the imperial glories of the past?⁷ To what extent and in what ways did the kings, queens and princes of Charles's age have to deal with the Carolingian imperial past? Was it regarded as definitely past, or did the empire exert a residual effect constraining the main actors in tenth-century royal politics?

With these questions in mind, the main matter of this article is a reconsideration of four marriages between English princesses and Continental kings and princes from the late 910s to the early 930s. All four brides were daughters of King Edward the Elder (899-924) and half-sisters of King Athelstan (924-39). The first was Eadgifu, sent between 917 and 919 to Charles the Simple, and she was followed by Eadhild, who married Hugh ›the Great‹, Count of Tours, in 926. Then, in 929, as recounted by the English chronicler and aristocrat Æthelweard, ›King Athelstan sent another two to Otto [son of the East Frankish King Henry I], the plan being that he should choose as his wife the one who pleased him. He chose Edith ... The other sister he married to a certain king near the Alps.‹⁸ The story of the marriages was alluded to in several sources from the late tenth and early eleventh centuries on both sides of the Channel, and an author writing for the archbishop of Cologne in the 970s referred

4 Airlie, *Power and its Problems*; Airlie, *Carolingian Politics*.

5 Airlie, *Nearly Men*; Booker, *Past Convictions*.

6 Ferguson, *End of Power*. Against Ferguson see Mann, *Incoherent Empire*; Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, 133-168.

7 Koziol, *Politics of Memory and Identity*, 459-534.

8 Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, preface, ed. Campbell, 1-2.

to them as ›known to nearly all‹.⁹ They were still thought worthy of commemoration in the years around 1120 when the great English historian William of Malmesbury included extensive ruminations on the age of Athelstan in his *Deeds of the English Kings*.¹⁰

The marriages have also attracted the attention of modern historians, and are sometimes interpreted as symptomatic of the decline of the Carolingian Empire and the concomitant rise of the English kingdom, whose rulers were inspired by Carolingian precedent and had imperial pretensions of their own.¹¹ Athelstan is often seen as a ruler who overtook the declining Carolingians to assume the dominant position in European politics, orchestrating a ›foreign policy‹ which included the marriages of his sisters, interference in the politics of Brittany, Francia and Norway through the nurturing of exiled princes, and the brokerage of a series of alliances against Scandinavian raiders.¹² He seems to have regarded himself as a kind of neo-Charlemagne figure, a merger or conqueror of the English kingdoms, and his acquisition of Carolingian royal relics in 926 has been read as a *translatio imperii* signalling Frankish recognition of his seniority.¹³ This interpretation is supported by a second supposition, namely that Frankish politics in this period was animated by principled attitudes towards Carolingian-ness itself – that people considered themselves either pro- or anti-Carolingian, and acted accordingly. Thus, for example, it has been argued that the architect of the 926 mission to Athelstan, Hugh the Great, was motivated to hand over the relics by anti-Carolingian sentiment.¹⁴

That such sentiments may have been in play is plausible – if Charles the Simple and his circle could hold a genuine commitment to the Carolingian past, then others might easily have harboured similarly passionate opinions. But the problem is that to explore the Frankish end of the cross-Channel marriages we have to rely on an author who is notoriously silent about the motivations of the people whose deeds he narrates: Flodoard of Rheims, whose *Annals* provide a detailed and contemporaneous account of West Frankish events between 919 and 966 but almost never deliver commentary or context.¹⁵ There were clearly unspecified issues at stake which influenced the decisions and actions of the main protagonists but which were so obvious to Flodoard that he did not consider them worth spelling out for a contemporary audience. Conclusions drawn from the text are therefore influenced by one's starting assumptions. In what follows, I retell the story of the marriages starting from the assumption that the actors in Flodoard's story were driven not by lingering devotion or hostility to the aura of the Carolingians, nor by a desire to recognise the new ›imperium‹ of Athelstan, but instead by the more immediate matter of the West Frankish royal succession. The succession

9 *Passio S. Ursulae*, ed. Levison, 142-157; Leyser, *Ottonians and Wessex*, 76-79.

10 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 2.131-140, ed. Mynors *et al.*, 206-229.

11 Molyneux, *Tenth-Century English Kings*.

12 For variously strong and weak versions of this thesis, see for example Leyser, *Ottonians and Wessex*, 102-103; Sharp, *England, Europe and the Celtic World*; Ehlers, *Sachsen und Angelsachsen*, 490-491; Ortenberg, *The King from Overseas*. Foot, *Athelstan*, offers a judicious overview.

13 MacLean, *Britain, Ireland and Europe*, 360. On Athelstan's self-perception see Wood, *Stand Strong against the Monsters*.

14 Loomis, *Holy Relics of Charlemagne and King Athelstan*, 440-443; Sharp, *England, Europe and the Celtic World*, 208.

15 Sot, *Un historien et son église*; Lecouteux, *Le contexte partie 1*; Lecouteux, *Le contexte partie 2*; Roberts, *Flodoard*.

was the primary driving force of all early medieval dynastic politics, since anxiety or anticipation about the future of the kingdom was always a pressing political issue. This was never more true than in the West Frankish kingdom of the 920s when, in successive years (922 and 923), one king (Charles the Simple) was deposed and his overthrewer (Robert I) was killed. The man who succeeded them, Raoul of Burgundy (923-36), at least enjoyed a relatively lengthy reign, but as early as 924 he had fallen so ill that those around him feared he was dying.¹⁶ Although he recovered, it was known to all that he was heirless. Given this sequence of events, it is inconceivable that the succession was not at the forefront of the minds of his leading men and neighbours throughout his reign.¹⁷

The character of the relationships between these men, and the ambitions and anxieties that animated them, are not clearly attested, so we have to read between the lines of Flodoard's account and pay close attention to the timing of events and the sequencing of his narrative. That narrative contains a fairly conspicuous dog that failed to bark. Given the precarious nature of Raoul's grip on the kingship, it is remarkable that neither of the most powerful Frankish magnates, Hugh the Great and Herbert II Count of Vermandois, seem to have made an own bid for the throne themselves – all the more surprising in that Hugh was the son of King Robert I and Herbert was a direct descendant of Charlemagne. Historians writing in the early eleventh century, after Hugh's son Hugh Capet (987-96) had become king, could not believe that the Count of Tours had not sought the throne for himself, and many modern historians have assumed likewise.¹⁸ But the fact that he did not make any such move in the 920s or 930s, despite the huge uncertainty surrounding the kingship and the succession, and held back even on Raoul's death in 936, requires explanation. To understand Hugh's actions we must look carefully at his position within the unfolding politics of the succession. As we shall see, the cross-Channel marriages played an important part in these politics – but less as formal diplomatic alliances than as acts of symbolic communication, conveying nonverbal but pointed messages about the positions of the protagonists with regard to the succession question.¹⁹

The first of the four marriages was contracted amidst the turbulent later years of Charles the Simple's reign. Although it is hard to make out exactly what was going on due to the absence of any major narrative source covering West Francia between 901 and 919, it is clear that for much of the 910s Charles's court was a difficult place to be, with tensions building around his apparently preferential treatment of an adviser called Haganon who came from Lotharingia, the middle Frankish kingdom which had been annexed by Charles in 911. This perceived favouritism alienated more established magnates from the heartlands of West Francia who felt they were being treated with less than due respect.²⁰ The king's position was

16 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 924, ed. Lauer, 23.

17 On Raoul see Lauer, *Robert Ier et Raoul de Bourgogne*; Felten, Robert I. und Rudolf I. A later source reports that Raoul had a son called Louis who died young: *Chronique de l'Abbaye de Saint-Benigne*, ed. Bougaud and Garnier, 126; Bouchard, *Those of My Blood*, 132-133. The son's absence from tenth-century sources suggests he did not feature in contemporary political calculations.

18 Rudolfus Glaber, *Historiarum libri quinque*, 1.2, ed. France, 14-15; Thietmar, *Chronicle*, 2.23, ed. Holtzmann, 66-7. Different views are summarised by Dunbabin, West Francia, 382-383. Koziol, *Politics of Memory and Identity*, points out he may have been deterred by his father's fate.

19 On symbolic communication see Althoff, *Inszenierte Herrschaft*.

20 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 920, ed. Lauer, 2-5; Koziol, Is Robert I in Hell?; Depreux, Le comte Haganon.

weakened by the death in 917 of his queen Frederun, herself a Lotharingian, and it is in this context that we would see his acquisition of a new wife.

Eadgifu, a daughter of Edward the Elder by his second wife Ælfflaed, was sent to marry Charles sometime between 917 and 919. Edward's intentions are hard to discern, but it is interesting that the marriage coincided with the high point of his reign: in 918 he was recognised as King in Mercia after the death of his sister and beginning in 920 the ›A‹ version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* claims that he was progressively recognised as the overlord of all the peoples in England (and Britain).²¹ Contracting a marriage alliance with a Carolingian may have seemed a fitting way to underline his growing stature to the people of the Midlands and north of England over whom he was attempting to assert authority. There may have been an element of dynastic tree pruning in the decision about which daughter to send: it was also in 917-18 that Edward ejected Ælfflaed from his court in order to take a third wife, also called Eadgifu, and marrying off the (presumably) eldest daughter of his second wife may have smoothed the transition as the arrival of a new queen prompted the realignment of court factions.²² Edward had pre-existing links to parties across the Channel, notably as some kind of honorary lay brother in the community of St. Samson at Dol in Brittany.²³ In addition, his sister Ælfthryth was married to Count Baldwin II of Flanders. Baldwin's death in September 918 may have been seen as a blow to English influence in northern Francia, which the new marriage would help to shore up. That Edward's own new wife was the scion of a leading Kentish family suggests that he was trying to build his influence in the south-east, the gateway to the Continent, at exactly this time.

For Charles the marriage represented an attempt to defend his increasingly embattled status not simply with a wife who was already royal, but one who might be expected to bear him a son. In this respect there was some immediate success, as the new couple had a son in 920 and gave him a kingly name: Louis. But it was in the same year that, according to Flodoard, ›almost all the counts of Francia gathered at the town of Soissons and abandoned their King Charles.‹²⁴ The choice of place was symbolic. Soissons was where, in 751, the first Carolingian King Pippin had been crowned. Charles was a keen student of early Carolingian history and he played on its resonances to remind his followers that he was a descendant of Pippin and, especially, his son Charlemagne. In 893, Charles had had himself inaugurated as king on the anniversary of Charlemagne's death, the 28th of January. In 920, even as he hoped to ensure the future of the Carolingian dynasty, its past was appropriated by his rivals and directed against him.

The king organised a comeback of sorts, mobilising the support of the archbishop of Rheims and the new East Frankish ruler Henry I, and mounting armed raids against opponents around and beyond the frontier with Lotharingia.²⁵ However, Charles's main antagonist Robert of Neustria, whose history of simmering tension with the king went back

21 *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle A*, a. 920-3, trans. Whitelock, 196-199.

22 Jayakumar, Eadwig and Edgar, shows that the conflicts generated by Edward's remarriage still reverberated a generation later.

23 Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 821-822.

24 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 920, ed. Lauer, 2; *The Annals of Flodoard*, trans. Fanning and Bachrach, *Annals*, 3.

25 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 921, ed. Lauer, 5-6.

to conflicts between them and their families nearly three decades earlier, managed to build a superior coalition and in 922 had himself recognised as king at Rheims.²⁶ His victory did not last long. In the summer of the following year, Charles rallied his forces and attacked Robert at Soissons. In the ensuing battle, Robert was killed: according to a later and no doubt apocryphal account, Charles himself ›drove his lance so hard into Robert's sacrilegious mouth that it split his tongue and came out the back of his neck.‹²⁷ Charles nonetheless fled, his support quickly dissolving, and within a few weeks the Frankish magnates had placed on the throne Robert's son-in-law Raoul, the leading magnate in Burgundy. Charles was tricked into a meeting with Count Herbert II of Vermandois, who, carefully shielding his intentions from Raoul, imprisoned him in one of his strongholds. The infant Louis went into exile with his mother to England, where Edward's son Athelstan became king in 924-925.²⁸

As a Burgundian, the main problem faced by Raoul was how to gain purchase in the northern heartlands of Francia, where the political landscape was dominated by his brothers-in-law Herbert of Vermandois and Hugh the Great. Hugh and Herbert were by far the most powerful magnates in the kingdom, and held lands and *honores* (offices) that made them de facto equals to or even superiors of the king Hugh in the area between Tours and Paris, and Herbert, in the region east of Paris.²⁹ The story of the reign is one of perpetually shifting alliances and conflicts between these three figures, enlivened by a walk-on cast of extras including the King of the East Franks and the counts of Normandy, Aquitaine and Flanders.

The second of the cross-Channel marriages can be read as a feature in this competitive political landscape. In 926 Hugh despatched his embassy to the court of Athelstan and acquired the hand of Eadchild, who was a daughter of Edward by Ælfflaed and therefore a full sister of Eadgifu. Flodoard and Æthelweard give us nothing but the bare bones of this encounter, and for a fuller account we need to turn to William of Malmesbury, who tells us that Hugh's ambassador (the son of Ælfthryth and Baldwin of Flanders, and therefore a cousin of Athelstan) carried rich gifts including a dazzling gold crown and a number of spectacular relics: the sword of Emperor Constantine, Charlemagne's lance, a banner of St. Maurice once carried into battle by Charlemagne, and a piece of the True Cross encased in crystal.³⁰ William is a late source, but he did have access to a now-lost book recounting Athelstan's deeds and historians have cautiously accepted his list of the relics given by Hugh to Athelstan, which is circumstantially corroborated by other sources.³¹

Relics exchanged in such contexts were always more than just gifts. The numinous power and rich histories they represented made them, as Julia Smith states, ›political discourse displaced into the realm of cult.‹³² But to which discourse did Hugh's gifts refer? The explicitly

26 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 922, ed. Lauer, 10-11.

27 Adalbert, *Continuatio*, a. 922, ed. Kurze, 156-157.

28 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 923, ed. Lauer, 12-19. Nelson, Eadgifu, points out that it is possible that she stayed in Francia for some time.

29 Lauer, *Le Règne de Louis IV*; Schwager, *Graf Heribert II.*; Brühl, Ludwig IV.

30 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 2.135, ed. Mynors *et al.*, 218-221.

31 Sceptical: Lapidge, *Some Latin Poems*, 62-71. Optimistic: Wood, *Making of King Athelstan's Empire*, 265-266; editorial commentary in William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, ed. Mynors *et al.*, vol. 2, 116-118; Leyser, *Tenth Century in Byzantine-Western Relationships*, 116-117; Smith, *Rulers and Relics*, 91-95; Foot, *Athelstan*, 192-198.

32 Smith, *Rulers and Relics*, 87.

royal/imperial connotations of the objects, and particularly their association with Charlemagne, would be hard to mistake even without William's glosses, and the gifts have usually been seen as a recognition on Hugh's part, perhaps on behalf of the Franks, that Athelstan was now the senior European ruler – that there had been a kind of *translatio imperii* from Francia to Wessex.³³

As already noted, there is good evidence that Athelstan did fancy himself as a Charlemagne-like quasi-imperial ruler, and the symbolic capital provided by the relics played a part in this.³⁴ But pandering to the self-image of the English King does not seem a sufficient motive for the actions of Hugh, embroiled as he was in frantic defence of his territories against Scandinavian settlers in Normandy and struggling to assert his position under the new Burgundian regime in Francia. Even with the prospect of a prestigious bride travelling in the opposite direction, recognition of Athelstan's seniority did not require the surrender of Frankish regalia. A more likely interpretation is that the transfer of these regalian symbols was meant to represent a transmission of Frankish royal power not to Athelstan, but to his nephew and foster son Louis. A hint to this effect may be found in a poem of 927 written to celebrate Athelstan's success in gaining overlordship of Northumbria and Scotland and is addressed to an audience including a ›queen‹ (*regina*) and ›prince‹ (*clito*) residing in the ›royal palace‹ (*palatium regis*), probably Winchester. Athelstan had no queen, and his stepmother Eadgifu is conspicuously absent from the sources for his reign.³⁵ Could the queen therefore have been Charles the Simple's wife Eadgifu? If so, the ›clito‹ – a term implying eligibility for kingship – may well be young Louis rather than, as commonly supposed, the king's half-brother Edwin.³⁶

The ostentatious championing of Louis' claims to succeed Raoul was a manoeuvre that was presumably designed above all to enhance Hugh's position within Francia. A speech to this effect, making the case for Louis' succession by lamenting the injustice of his past treatment and highlighting his Carolingian credentials, was put into Hugh's mouth late in the tenth century by the historian Richer of Rheims.³⁷ Richer's deployment of direct speech served rhetorical purposes and the details should not be taken literally, but it is interesting that he regarded Hugh's expression of such sentiments as plausible, and that he gave them to the Count of Tours rather than to another character in his story.³⁸ Flodoard's contemporary description of Hugh's mission is considerably less florid but also instructive: ›Hugh, the son of Robert, married a daughter of Edward, the King of the English, and the sister of the wife of Charles.‹³⁹ For Flodoard, Eadhild's significance lay in the fact that she was Edward the Elder's daughter and Eadgifu's sister, not that she was a half-sister of Athelstan. His frame of reference here was the network of links created in 917-919: he apparently thought the main import of the marriage was that it associated Hugh more closely with Charles and Eadgifu, not with Athelstan.

33 See the works cited in footnotes 12-13 above.

34 See the works cited in footnote 31 above.

35 Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 199.

36 Poem and commentary: Lapidge, *Some Latin Poems*, 83-93, 98; Bobrycki, *Breaking and Making Tradition*, 246-53. Clito: Dumville, *Aetheling*.

37 Richer, *Historiae*, 2.2, ed. Hoffmann, 97-98.

38 On rhetoric and plausibility see Lake, *Richer of Saint Rémi*.

39 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 926, ed. Lauer, 36; *Annals of Flodoard*, trans. Fanning and Bachrach, *Annals*, 16.

The context of Hugh's mission supports the argument that its primary purpose was to recognise Louis' status as heir. As the son of a king himself, Hugh was better placed than any other major Frankish magnate to adopt this posture – he had a potential claim of his own to renounce, so the gesture carried an implication of magnanimity, especially given the mutual hatred that had apparently been shared by his father and Louis.⁴⁰ However, we need not imagine that his actions were motivated by a principled attitude to Carolingian legitimacy: leaving Louis to grow up in England, deliberately forgotten, had been a perfectly viable option up to this point. Recognition of the young prince can be understood as a manoeuvre in a much more local competition, for Flodoard drops hints that a contest for access to Carolingian-ness played a part in the relationship between Hugh and the other great magnate of northern Francia, Herbert of Vermandois.

The bitter rivalry between Hugh and Herbert which defined Frankish politics for much of this period did not emerge fully into the open until a spectacular falling out in 929, but there is reason to think that there was tension between them before then.⁴¹ During 922 they were on different sides of the armed conflict surrounding the kingship, with Herbert initially backing Charles and Hugh siding with his father Robert. Although they seem to have worked together after 923 as the principal brokers of Raoul's influence outside Burgundy, there are clear signs that Herbert, who was older than Hugh and controlled much more land in the politically crucial territory east of the Seine, quickly became the senior partner.⁴² Close reading of Flodoard gives the impression that Herbert was closer to the king and in a position to influence Raoul's interventions in the north while Hugh was occupied containing raids from the Scandinavians settled in Normandy, which abutted his own area of influence in the west.⁴³ Herbert's superiority was underlined in 925 when he was given possession of the diocese of Rheims, the ecclesiastical centre of the West Frankish realm, in safe-keeping for his son Hugh, who was appointed archbishop-elect despite being less than 5 years old. Herbert exercised his new status by sending legates to Rome, led by Bishop Abbo of Soissons.⁴⁴ By contrast, 926 is the first year in which Flodoard makes no mention of Hugh the Great playing any role in Frankish politics.

As Geoffrey Koziol has stressed, such men did not take demotion lying down, nor were they in the habit of forgetting past conflicts and insults.⁴⁵ The hints that Herbert was eclipsing the Count of Tours therefore help us understand the timing of Hugh's approach to Athelstan in 926. Openly recognising Louis as a king in waiting was a move that did not just position Hugh as a defender of the wronged prince's rights, and a magnanimous renouncer of his own claims, but also communicated his dissatisfaction with the present king, Raoul. We can also read Hugh's manoeuvre as an attempt to occupy some of the ideological ground that supported Herbert's legitimacy, and to remind the Count of Vermandois that he could

40 Hugh's access to English political circles may have been aided by Breton exiles resident in his stronghold of Paris: Smith, *Rulers and Relics*, 89. Pro-Louis sentiment elsewhere in the western kingdom is indicated by charters from the Spanish March which refer to Louis as Charles's rightful heir even during Raoul's reign: Felten, Robert I. und Rudolf I., 40.

41 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 929, ed. Lauer, 43-45.

42 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 922, ed. Lauer, 7-11; Schwager, *Graf Heribert II.*, 115.

43 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 924-926, ed. Lauer, 19-36.

44 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 925, ed. Lauer, 32-33.

45 Koziol, *Politics of Memory and Identity*, 553-555.

not afford to ignore him. Herbert's imprisonment of Charles the Simple had not simply removed him from the game: Widukind of Corvey described Charles's place of captivity as a ›public place‹ (in other words, a place from which power could be exercised).⁴⁶ Even deprived of agency, Charles remained a potential danger to Raoul – the restoration of a Carolingian king was a permanent and visible threat available at Herbert's fingertips. Herbert's position was strengthened by the fact that he himself was a direct descendant of a Carolingian king, Bernard of Italy (d. 818). This was something of which contemporaries were well aware: indeed, the only narrative source to dwell on this connection also dates from the earlier tenth century.⁴⁷ Unlike some of the so-called ›reguli‹ (petty-kings) who took power after the death of Charles the Fat in 888, Herbert had a direct claim to Carolingian descent which he chose not to press.

An ancestry that would have conferred only a marginal advantage in the ninth century, when the political landscape was dominated by Carolingians, in the tenth became a source of singular prestige as Carolingian-ness moved into the realm of nostalgia and kings from historically non-royal families took over leadership of the Frankish kingdoms. In this situation, Hugh's approach to Athelstan and Louis is intelligible as an attempt to gain access to an alternative source of Carolingian charisma and thus to play Herbert at his own game: Herbert had Charles, but now Hugh ›had‹ Louis.⁴⁸ The success of this manoeuvre may help explain why Herbert was then drawn into alliance with Hugh: in 927 Flodoard reports that the two counts, having fallen out with Raoul, travelled east together to meet Henry I, a confirmed enemy of the West Frankish ruler since seizing Lotharingia from him in 925.⁴⁹

As part of this shift of alliances, in 927 Herbert provoked Raoul further by releasing Charles the Simple into a kind of supervised restoration.⁵⁰ This was a risky move, since the potency of the threat that the ex-king embodied lay precisely in the fact that it was latent. In the following year, after apparently inconclusive negotiations with the pope and Henry I, Herbert renewed his commitment to Raoul and returned Charles to custody. Two subsequent events, reported opaquely by Flodoard, make sense if we assume that the succession was still a current issue in 928 and 929. First, just after the deposed king was once more imprisoned, Raoul ›came to Rheims and made peace with Charles, returning Attigny to him and honouring him with gifts.‹ This performance was part of the sequence of events by which Raoul received the renewed allegiance of Herbert and Hugh, and seems to have been his part of the bargain for the conclusion of peace.⁵¹ Clearly Raoul cannot have been literally recognising the kingship of the imprisoned Carolingian, but the orchestration of this reconciliation at the royal centre of Rheims, and the investment of Charles with the great Frankish royal palace of Attigny, certainly communicated a public acknowledgement of his royal status. If the

46 Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum*, 1.30, ed. Hirsch, 42-43.

47 Regino, *Chronicle*, a. 818, ed. Kurze, 73. A Soissons manuscript may indicate an awareness of this past in Herbert's own circle: Reimitz, *Art of Truth*, 98-100.

48 Hugh's marriage to Eadhild restored an indirect family link to the Carolingians to replace the one that had been lost with the death of his first wife – a cousin of Charles the Simple – in 925.

49 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 927, ed. Lauer, 37-38. The immediate spark for the falling out was a dispute over the county of Laon.

50 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 927, ed. Lauer, 39-40. It is clear from Flodoard's account that Herbert was calling the shots, not Charles.

51 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 928, ed. Lauer, 40-43; Richer, *Historiae*, 1.55, ed. Hoffmann, 88-89. Vienne was also ceded to Herbert's son.

beneficiary of this symbolic act was not the captive Charles, then it must have been his son. Louis' claims to succeed were not contested after Raoul's death in 936, and the origin of this acceptance must be looked for earlier. The formal recognition by an heirless king of a successor from another family had a very recent precedent: Charles the Simple himself had been recognised as heir by Hugh the Great's uncle King Odo (888-98) as a means of removing his pretext for rebellion and calming the political situation by rendering the future predictable.

Recognition of Charles's line by Raoul would have served the interests of the counts of Vermandois and Tours by confirming their position as guarantors of Louis' claims. In particular, it reinvigorated the status of Hugh, who had played a prominent role in brokering the return of good relations between Herbert and Raoul.⁵² If Hugh's embassy to Louis and Athelstan in 926 had been intended as a means to encroach on the ideological territory occupied by Herbert, the latter's ›release‹ of Charles may be evidence that it had worked: in staging his opposition to Raoul through ostentatious allegiance to the Carolingians, and then forcing the king to demonstrate the same allegiance, Herbert not only moved towards Hugh's position but showed himself willing to play the game on terms dictated by the Count of Tours. One way to make sense of these superficially opaque events is therefore to hypothesise that by 928 young Louis' claims had been symbolically recognised by all three parties.

This interpretation also helps explain our second obscure event from Flodoard's *Annals*: the tipping over of the latent tension between Hugh and Herbert into the on/off open hostility which persisted until the latter's death in 943. The fact of their falling out does not perhaps need much explaining, but the timing does. In Flodoard's telling: ›King Charles died at Péronne. A dispute arose between Count Hugh and Count Herbert...‹.⁵³ Conjunctions of events in early medieval histories do not simply reveal objective chronological adjacency but can also imply authors' sense of cause and effect: the sequencing of material was neither random nor natural, but an authorial choice. If the political contest of the previous few years had turned on the actors' attempts to advertise their access to various versions of Carolingian legitimacy, then it would hardly be surprising if this new discord was prompted directly by the death of Charles the Simple. Charles was Herbert's trump card, and his demise (on 7 October) meant that Hugh, now positioned as the primary broker of young Louis' prospective succession, was finally able to step out of the shadow of the Count of Vermandois. For most of the next five years it was Herbert who became the outsider in the triangular game of Frankish politics, excluded by a firm alliance between Hugh and Raoul.⁵⁴ There was no clearer sign of this than their joint conquest of Rheims in 931, upon which they installed as archbishop Artold, a local monk who was loyal to Hugh.⁵⁵ Possession of Rheims, and the nomination of his son as archbishop, had been the most obvious symbol of Herbert's political dominance – its removal vividly signified a change of atmosphere.

The focus of the dispute that erupted in 929 was Hugh's acquisition, against Herbert's wishes, of the allegiance of Erluin, Count of Montreuil and Ponthieu.⁵⁶ This was a crucial

52 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 927-928, ed. Lauer, 37-43, refers to his role in various negotiations.

53 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 929, ed. Lauer, 44.

54 A clear summary of the shifting patterns of alliance in this period is provided by Werner, *Westfranken-Frankreich*, esp. 233-241.

55 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 931, ed. Lauer, 51-52; Richer, *Historiae*, 1.59-60, ed. Hoffmann, 91-92.

56 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 929, ed. Lauer, 43-45.

area in the maintenance of communications with England (nearby Boulogne was one end of the most important Channel crossing), and we should ask if this sequence of events was also connected in some way with the arrival on the continent, towards the end of 929, of the third and fourth Anglo-Saxon princesses.⁵⁷ The broad outlines of their arrival can be pieced together from allusions in a variety of sources. Æthelweard reported that Henry I asked that Athelstan send two sisters to the Saxons, the idea being that the king's son Otto would choose the one he preferred, and send the second to the court of a ›certain king near the Alps‹. The latter has been conclusively identified as the brother of King Rudolf II of Transjurane Burgundy, another Louis, who was not a king but had been made Count of the Thurgau in the East Frankish kingdom in the wake of a pact concluded between Henry I and Rudolf in 926.⁵⁸ Entries in the *libri memoriales* (commemoration books) of the great Alemannian monasteries of St. Gall and Reichenau preserve long lists of English and Saxon names associated with the respective courts, and these have been interpreted as footprints of the wedding party as it passed through the region on its way to Burgundy or to the Thurgau. In the Reichenau book, Otto is listed as *rex* (king) – perhaps an indication that the marriage was taken to have elevated him to full royal status in advance of his father's death, assuming the word was not added later.⁵⁹

Beyond this general outline almost all of the details are hard to pin down, and any reconstruction of agency and chronology has to rely on a series of inferences from the sources. There is reason to be suspicious, for example, of the beauty contest described by Æthelweard, in which Otto was invited to choose the sister he most liked the look of. This kind of bride-show is a literary cliché which derived ultimately from the Book of Esther, and its occasional appearance in early medieval sources probably tells us more about ideological categories used to describe powerful women than about the actual negotiations which preceded royal weddings.⁶⁰ Nor do we know exactly when and where Otto and Edith were married. Our best clue to the timing is the vague comment of Widukind of Corvey that the wedding took place ›around the time‹ that Henry received a victorious army in Quedlinburg after a successful campaign against the Slavs.⁶¹ This reception is also mentioned in a charter issued at Quedlinburg on 16 September 929, by which Henry confirmed the dower of his wife Mathilda.⁶² The charter formed part of what historians refer to as Henry's *Hausordnung* (the ordering of his family) and has been interpreted as a response to the arrival of Edith, who may have constituted a threat to Mathilda's position. The entry in the St. Gall *liber memorialis*, moreover, suggests that the wedding party visited the monastery on 15 October, the eve of the patron's feast, and that they had been given treasure by Athelstan with which to patronise the churches of the kingdom.⁶³ The wedding is therefore generally supposed to have taken place at Quedlinburg around the middle of September, with the royal entourage heading off to the south of the kingdom soon after.

57 See Grierson, *Relations between England and Flanders*.

58 Hlawitschka, *Verwandtschaftliche Verbindungen*, 50-57.

59 This has been much debated: Schmid, *Neue Quellen zum Verständnis des Adels, 186-202*; Althoff, *Amicitiae und Pacta*, 59, 124-127.

60 Jong, *Bride Shows Revisited*.

61 Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxoniarum*, 1.36-37, ed. Hirsch, 51-54.

62 *Die Urkunden Konrads I., Heinrich I. und Otto I.*, ed. Sickel, no. 20.

63 Georgi, *Bischof Keonwald von Worcester*.

This is certainly plausible, but there is room for reasonable doubt. The Quedlinburg charter itself does not mention the wedding. The idea of a *Hausordnung* does not refer to a discrete event but rather a series of measures including an earlier gift to Mathilda in 927 and the marriage of the royal couple's daughter Gerberga to the powerful Lotharingian magnate Gisibert in 928.⁶⁴ These measures can be seen as Henry's attempt to capitalise on a series of spectacular military victories by parlaying the reflected glory into a more permanent reputation for his family as a true royal dynasty.⁶⁵ The arrival of Edith certainly formed part of this process, but need not have been its stimulus. Widukind's reference to the wedding, written at least 30 years later, was not precise and may not have been intended as such.⁶⁶ Another chronicle written about the same time, by someone who was close to Otto and had served in his court for years, placed the marriage in 930.⁶⁷ Although we know that Bishop Cenwald of Worcester, Athelstan's legate, was back in England by April 930, the Swabian memorial lists need not represent the physical presence of the royal couple and their entourage in the monasteries. Such lists represented spiritual alliances, prayer-fraternities rather than registers of attendance, and although they are clearly connected to the mission from England they may do no more than reveal the presence at St. Gall of Cenwald or one of his entourage on pilgrimage.⁶⁸

In other words, it remains possible that the despatch of the two sisters was linked to the series of events we have been describing, and that it may have been prompted by the final illness or death of Charles the Simple. The Continental sources tend to ascribe agency in the matter to Henry I, and there can hardly be any doubt that he was fully involved in the process. But the person who was best placed to broker the unions of 929/30, as indeed that of 926, was surely Charles's wife Eadgifu.⁶⁹ No contemporary author states this explicitly, and she is virtually invisible in the sources before 936. But not only was she a sister of Athelstan and of all the women involved, she also had several years' experience at the court of her husband, where she would have become known to all the leading figures in post-Carolingian politics. She had certainly been a significant player at the time of Charles's deposition in 923, to judge from the comment of the historian Folcuin, Abbot of Lobbes (965-90), that ›she too suffered many persecutions at that time.‹⁷⁰ A hint that she remained on the scene is provided by the so-called Gandersheim Gospels, a ninth-century book from Metz that seemingly passed from the West Frankish court to the east during one of the exchanges of this period. The last leaf contains a note added in an English hand: ›Eadgifu the queen – Athelstan King of the Anglo-Saxons and Mercians‹. Eadgifu's name is given prominence here through the ordering and through the fact that it is accompanied by a cross, unlike Athelstan's. Moreover, the book is not known to have been in England, so a Continental context for the inscription is likely. These considerations support the identification with Charles's wife rather than Athelstan's step-mother, and the events of 929-30 provide a likely context.⁷¹ From Eadgifu's point of

64 See the discussion appended to *Die Urkunden Konrads I., Heinrich I. und Otto I.*, ed. Sickel, no. 20.

65 On the *Hausordnung* see Becher, *Loyalität oder Opposition?*

66 Robbie, *Can Silence Speak Volumes?*

67 Adalbert, *Continuatio*, 930, ed. Kurze, 158.

68 Georgi, *Bischof Keonwald von Worcester*. On the methodological point: Butz, *Eternal Amicitia?*

69 Nelson, *Eadgifu*.

70 Folcuin, *Gesta Abbatum Sithiensium*, c. 101, ed. Holder-Egger, 625-626.

71 Nelson, *Eadgifu*; cf. Keynes, *King Athelstan's Books*, 189-93; Foot, *Athelstan*, 58. The other Eadgifu was not prominent in Athelstan's reign: See the works cited in footnotes 35 above.

view, the need to provide a support network for the potential arrival in Francia of her young son was paramount. In 929, this need became suddenly pressing not just because of the death of Charles, but also that of Ælfthryth of Flanders, Eadgifu's aunt.

If, as I have argued, the status of Louis' claim to the West Frankish throne was a defining political issue of the later 920s, and if Hugh the Great's mission of 926 was the ultimate reference point for the marriages of 929, we should finally ask what the fate of Charles the Simple might have meant from an East Frankish perspective. There are glimmers of evidence hinting that a broader coalition was backing Louis even before the arrival of Edith and her sister.⁷² We have already noted the royal character of the gifts taken to Athelstan by Hugh, and in particular their associations with Charlemagne. Among them were two that probably had a provenance further east: the banner of St. Maurice points clearly to Rudolf II of Transjurane Burgundy, under whose patronage that martyr's cult was especially fostered, and the crystallised fragment of the Cross, which is a relic known to have been associated with the East Frankish kings in the ninth century, may have come from Henry I.⁷³ Rudolf and Henry sealed a formal pact of friendship towards the end of 926, as part of which the Burgundian King handed over to the Saxon a Holy Lance and received in return the East Frankish county of Thurgau, which, as we have seen, was placed in the hands of his brother Louis. Rudolf's brother and Henry's son were the recipients of Anglo-Saxon royal brides three years later, and given that Hugh the Great travelled to England with royal gifts which may have originated at their courts, we can speculate that they had backed Hugh's endorsement of King Charles's young son in 926. For Henry in particular this would have been a potentially fruitful and low-risk strategy. Defence of the absent Louis may have given him a kind of legitimacy for his annexation in 925 of Lotharingia, to which he had no historical claim, and which also gave him a motive to oppose Raoul. Indeed, when Hugh and Herbert cemented their opposition to Raoul by making a pact with Henry in 928, his main opponent in Lotharingia was none other than the brother of the West Frankish king.⁷⁴ It is also interesting that Widukind claims, amidst reports of events that took place in the middle of the 920s, that Charles the Simple sent Henry, as a symbol of their mutual love, a relic of St. Denis from his captivity (no doubt a reference to the treaty they had concluded at Bonn in 921).⁷⁵ The cult of St. Denis was, more than any other, associated with the legitimate kingship of West Francia. Widukind's account is not to be taken at face value, but it points to a sense in the East Frankish kingdom that Henry had been sympathetic to the plight of Charles, and therefore perhaps the cause of his son, at about the same time that Hugh the Great sent his mission to England.⁷⁶

Much of this reasoning is hypothetical and depends on inferring motives from the bald descriptions of events found in Flodoard's *Annals* – but no more so than any other attempt to reconstruct the political circumstances of the 920s and 930s. Assuming that the protean matter of the royal succession was the primary issue around which contemporary politics

72 For different reconstructions of the following, cf. MacLean, *Britain, Ireland and Europe*, 359-361; Smith, *Rulers and Relics*, 91-4.

73 On the cult of the Cross at the East Frankish court see Goldberg, »More Devoted to the Equipment of Battle«.

74 Flodoard, *Annales*, a. 928, ed. Lauer, 40-43.

75 Widukind, *Rerum Gestarum Saxoniarum*, 1.33, ed. Hirsch, 45-46.

76 Cf. Thietmar, *Chronicle*, 1.23, ed. Holtzmann, 30, who says the gift transmitted claims to Lotharingia, here reflecting early eleventh century priorities. The East Franks do seem to have acquired relics of St. Denis at some point in the middle decades of the tenth century: Koziol, *Charles the Simple*.

revolved seems to me to make the pieces fit together more coherently than the alternatives. This hypothesis helps us make sense of the timing of the cross-Channel marriages, and helps explain why Louis IV was able to return as king in 936 apparently unopposed. I do not wish to suggest that this outcome was inevitable, but that it came about through the unfolding of events and accumulation of prior claims and commitments. If latent support for Louis ever hardened into something approaching a formal covenant, then it may have been at the two large assemblies arranged by Raoul in 935 after the death of his queen Emma and only months before his own, at which he, Herbert, Hugh, Henry I, Rudolf II and the magnates of the kingdom reached agreement on matters unspecified by Flodoard.⁷⁷ The annalist's blasé description of the new king's arrival in 936, read in isolation, might easily be read as testimony to the unblemished aura of Carolingian blood and the long reach of Louis' patron Athelstan. In reality, as the foregoing suggests, Louis and Athelstan had loomed over Raoul's reign not as agents but as absent presences – Frankish loyalties were dictated not by interventions from outside but by evolving tensions between the Frankish princes themselves.

The competitions which consumed these men and women (for the West Frankish crown, for seniority among the Frankish magnates, for control of territory in the middle portion of the old empire) were zero-sum games whose contours were defined by shifting patterns of alliances and friendships, made and then broken, as they sought to play their rivals against each other. The main actors were animated neither by a passive sense of obedience to Athelstan nor by the principled pro- or anti-Carolingian positions which historians have sometimes ascribed to them. The idea of Carolingian kingship was at stake not as a static focus for allegiance or opposition, but as a discourse which could be manipulated into the service of all sorts of narrower political agendas. It was a position which all the main contemporary players competed to appropriate, each with different and shifting goals in mind.

The potency of this discourse in the 920s was not simply due to the posthumous aura of Charlemagne or to a sense that the ninth-century empire could somehow still be a going concern. Its roots were surely shallower: a consequence of the fact that Charles the Simple had himself instrumentalised Carolingian-ness as the central idiom of Frankish royal legitimacy. It had therefore become an unavoidable aspect of contemporary politics. Despite the reputation of this period for unregulated and violent political conduct, the Franks were not in the habit of deposing their kings, and when they did they were haunted by doubt and recrimination.⁷⁸ Charles and his son Louis, imprisoned and exiled, were not just Carolingians but also living kings, and as such could not be simply forgotten. No debate about the West Frankish kingship and the succession to Raoul could have ignored them. Keeping Charles and Louis in the game, even as they were out of it, thus became a central strategy of the various would-be kings and kingmakers jostling for position. In this context, the marriages of the Anglo-Saxon princesses seem less like stately diplomatic exchanges used to calibrate the prestige of different rulers or seal formal alliances against the Vikings than acts of symbolic communication which articulated and publicised the complex and shifting game of one-upmanship in which the protagonists were engaged.

77 Flodoard, *Annales*, s. 935, ed. Lauer, 60-62.

78 De Jong, *Penitential State*; Koziol, *Is Robert I in Hell?*

What we see in these events, then, is not per se a vestigial allegiance to the idea of a Carolingian Empire, nor a desire to perform the decline of the empire at the feet of the rising King of Wessex, but an instrumentalisation of Carolingian-ness in a context in which it had become a resource rather than a norm.⁷⁹ The version of Carolingian-ness we have been considering is therefore best seen as a phenomenon specifically of the post-empire era rather than as a final chapter in a longer story of decay – though that preference is, ultimately, a matter of taste. Whichever we prefer, the story did not of course end in 936, but it did begin to turn in a new direction. The cross-Channel marriages and the political networks they established were an important but relatively short-lived phenomenon.⁸⁰ Eadhild died in or before 937, Edith in 946 and Eadgifu in or after 951. They were not replaced: as rare as cross-Channel royal marriages had been in the ninth century, they were even scarcer in the late tenth, and for a sequel we need to wait for the wedding of Æthelred II (the Unready) to Emma of Normandy in 1002. In the meantime, West Frankish potentates began to seek brides from the east rather than the north. When Hugh the Great remarried in 937, it was to Hadwig, a daughter of Henry I. Two years later, Louis IV married her sister Gerberga. The political relationships of the tenth-century kingdoms, in which royal women continued to play a vital role, were defined in the next generation above all by these women and their connections with the court of their brother Otto I. England, even under rulers with more power and prestige than Athelstan, faded from their calculations. And although Louis IV continued to insist upon his Carolingian identity and was able to pass his throne onto his son Lothar (954-86), under the latter royal self-representation gradually left behind the familiar idioms of the ninth century and began to emulate new forms pioneered by Otto.⁸¹ But this is the beginning of yet another story – of how tenth-century Europe became the Ottonian Europe, and of how the Carolingian past moved ever more emphatically into the past.⁸²

79 My argument here follows and supports that of Airlie, *Carolingian Politics*.

80 MacLean, *Making a Difference*.

81 Keller, *Zu den Siegeln der Karolinger*.

82 I am grateful to Charles Insley, Jinty Nelson, Edward Roberts and Pauline Stafford for comments on earlier versions of this article.

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›Great men‹, ›Decline‹ and Empire: Safavid Studies and a Way forward?

Andrew J. Newman*

This paper first suggests that the paradigms utilised in the study of the Safavid period in Iran (1501-1722) in the West prior to the 1979-80 Iranian Revolution have since been given a new lease on life by scholars in the field, perhaps coincidentally with the distinctly ›Islamic‹ turn quickly taken by that revolution. Now, as prior to the Revolution, ›great men‹ and ›decline‹ are the organising principle(s) of discussions in Safavid studies. These paradigms dominate the field today, even as both the number of scholars active in the study of the period and the number of the field's sub disciplines have markedly increased in the years since the Revolution.

It will then be argued that the more recent recourse to ›empire‹ as an organising principle for discussing the period has, in fact, only reinforced recourse to the above paradigms. As a result the field's discourse generally heightens a sense of overall Safavid ›exceptionalism‹, as if the period represented a major break with the dynamics of the periods in Iranian history that both preceded and followed.

A more dynamic understanding of empire, however, and finally, suggests that the period less marked a radical break either with Iran's pre-1501 history or with its more recent past and even the present than is conventionally suggested.

Keywords: Iran; Islam; Safavids; empire; Shi`ism; ›decline‹ theory; Middle East; ›great man‹ theory; Iranian Revolution.

The conventional wisdoms: ›great man‹ and ›decline‹

Standing between the Indian subcontinent, Asia and the Middle East of the Eastern Mediterranean, Iran's political, socio-economic and cultural dynamic has historically interacted with those of these other areas, in the process mediating and transforming traditions and institutions received from and transmitted to each.

The Safavid period in Iran, conventionally dated solely with reference to two, entirely ›political‹ events – the 1501 taking of the ancient capital of Tabriz by tribal forces led by the first shah Ismā'il I (d. 1524) and the capture of the then capital of Esfahan to Afghan forces in 1722 – is of especial import as the Safavid period linked the medieval and modern periods of both the history of Iran and that of the region as a whole.

Safavid Iran is often said to have left, in particular, an important legacy for the modern Iranian ›nation-state‹. That legacy includes at least three distinguishing features: the 1722 borders of the Safavid realm approximated those of modern Iran, Persian was well on its way to becoming a key, if not the pre-eminent, language on the Iranian plateau and the Twelver Shi`i branch of Islam that now predominates in Iran was declared the realm's official faith by Ismā'il and had been firmly established throughout by the political end of the period.

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Prior to the Iranian Revolution ›Safavid studies‹ had its own dominant paradigm.¹

When Ismāʿil I and his tribal forces captured Tabriz in 1501 eight different rulers held sway over what would become Safavid territory. Within less than a decade Safavid forces had seized these rulers' lands and created a single political entity that dominated the Iranian plateau. The Safavid socio-political state was dominated by an alliance between a coalition of different Turkic tribes – the Qizilbāsh ›confederation‹ – that was the realm's military backbone and the Tajiks (native Persians) who furnished the political/administrative elements. At the best of times, it was usually maintained, the relations between Turk and Tajik, let alone the relations between the various tribes that made up the Qizilbāsh, were problematic. At times of stress, however, conflict between the two threatened to tear the polity apart. Thus, at the deaths of both Ismāʿil in 1524 and his son and successor Ṭahmāsp in 1576, periods of prolonged civil war ensued as Qizilbāsh members fought among themselves to create a new hierarchy of authority within the confederation and, as they did so, struggled also with Tajik elements. In both periods of internal strife, Iran's enemies – the Ottomans, to the West, and the Uzbeks, to the Northeast – invaded and seized vast chunks of Safavid territory. In both instances, the combination of internal strife and foreign invasions constituted distinctly existential threats.

Discussions of the seventeenth century prior to the Revolution conventionally viewed it as having begun with a burst of cultural and intellectual achievement, in an atmosphere of military, political, and economic stability, due largely to the policies undertaken by ʿAbbās I (1587-1629). He is credited with having repelled the foreign invaders, crushed the power of the Qizilbāsh tribes, encouraged good relations with European political and commercial interests, sponsored a renaissance in spiritual and philosophical inquiry and built magnificent buildings in Esfahan, the city that he designated as capital of the realm.

However, scholars have maintained, later shahs were weak and were increasingly dominated both by haram women and, especially, by the rising political influence of an intolerant, orthodox clerical class. The latter crushed the philosophical renaissance of the earlier half of the century and forestalled any effective Court response to a series of political, economic and military crises that increasingly enveloped the realm. The Afghan invasion and capture of the Safavid capital Esfahan in 1722 were the inevitable result thereof.²

In the years prior to the Revolution those writing on the Safavid period focused on the Twelver Shiʿi scholar Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1699), as the key – and usually the

1 For a discussion of the trajectory of Safavid studies in greater detail, see Newman, *Safavid Iran*, esp. 2f.

2 See, in chronological order, Browne (d. 1926), *Literary History of Persia*; Minorsky (d. 1966), *Tadhkirat al-Muluk*; Lockhart (d. 1975), *Fall of the Safavi Dynasty*. Published as the Revolution was becoming consolidated, Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, summed up the conventional wisdom of the field to that time. See also those additional sources published prior to the Revolution listed in the introduction of Newman, *Safavid Iran*.

only named – figure who both ended the spiritual renaissance encouraged by `Abbās I and whose political influence at court prevented the shah from addressing growing domestic and foreign challenges.³

Following the Revolution, the western-language field expanded exponentially, with many more scholars and a myriad of subfields being added. Before the Revolution, scholars mainly discussed matters relating to Safavid political history. Now, scholars in the field began to explore the Safavid economy and military, relations between Safavid Iran and its neighbours as well as family and women, tribal life and customs, religious life and discourse, religious minorities, science and medicine, art and architecture, painting, metalwork, ceramics, carpets, history writing and court-sponsored and popular literary expression.

Nevertheless, most authors still accept the period as delineated solely with reference to the capture of Tabriz and the fall of Esfahan. Scholars project modern boundaries back to the Safavid period and label variations therein over the period as lands ›won‹ and ›lost‹ and indeed overuse, but fail to define, the term ›state‹, with its implied references to fixed, internationally recognised borders, a common language and a monopoly by the centre of the use of force. Post-Revolution works still refer to the inherent and continuous conflict between Qizilbāsh and Tajik, to the repeated, largely vain, efforts of various shahs to curb the political/military and spiritual influence of the Qizilbāsh, to `Abbās I as ›great‹ and to leaders after him as weak and to the growing power and intolerance of the religious elite. Before and after the Revolution, scholars of the period continue to take as given the inevitable decline and fall of the Safavid ›state‹, the latter as represented by the 1722 Afghan capture of Isfahan.

Preoccupation with the Safavid ›fall‹ and especially dating the first signs of the Safavid ›decline‹ ever earlier in the period, is reinforced by recourse to the critiques of the Safavid system on offer in both contemporary but, and often mainly, post-Safavid Persian-language historical chronicles and a variety of Western-language sources, including contemporary travelogues and commercial and diplomatic records. As prior to the Revolution and so since then, these sources are used in a strikingly uncritical fashion, even though they are often contradictory, offer as ›fact‹ information gathered well after the occurrence of the events in question, or offer it in such detail – a western traveller talking about life at court, for example – as to strain belief. All these sources are, also, the product of usually unexplored vantage points and personal or other agendas that can only suggest their credibility is, at the very least, highly problematic.

3 The same sources uniformly implicate al-Majlisi in both roles. See, Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, 403, 120, 404, 194-195, 366 declared him »one of the greatest, most powerful and most fanatical *mujtahids* of the Safawi period«, and suggested that what »left Persia exposed to perils« – a reference to »the troubles which culminated in the supreme disaster of 1722«, the Afghan invasion – was »the narrow intolerance so largely fostered by him and his congeners«. Lockhart, *Fall of the Safavi Dynasty*, 32-33, 70, 71n1, 72, 72n3 described al-Majlisi as »an extremely bigoted *mujtahid*« and »a rigid and fanatical formalist«, »violently opposed to the Sunnis« who also disliked the Sufis. Al-Majlisi's ›denunciation, and often persecution, of all who did not follow the straight and narrow path of his own choosing‹ aroused the ire of Iranian Sunnis and yet failed to inspire Iranian Shi`a »with any real martial spirit« at »the moment of supreme national crisis in 1722«. Lockhart noted that although »we have no definite proof... it is highly probable that it was this fanatical leader who was responsible for this increase in persecution« of Jews and Armenians that marked the latter half of the second Safavid century. See also Nasr, *The School of Ispahan*, 930. See also Minorsky (d. 1966), *Tadhkirat al-Muluk*, 41; Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 234, 237-38, 251, citing no sources. In 1981, Katouzian, (*Political Economy of Modern Iran*, 70n), a political scientist, without citing a single source, spoke of al-Majlisi as one of the »worldly religious leaders« – the only one named, in fact – who gained a »great deal of political power ... their influence was the cause of a lot of political mistakes which weakened the state, and helped the Afghan invasion.«

A more recent interest in the available Western economic data for the period, although overdue, has in fact encouraged allowing a key, if not a determinist, role in Safavid ›decline‹ to such purely economic trends and events as the movement of specie. Such references were on par with that which dominated Ottoman Studies from the late 1970s as, under the influence of Wallerstein's 1974 *The Modern World System* and the subsequent emergence of ›world system theory‹, that field explored the roots of Ottoman ›decline‹.⁴

The conventional wisdoms: Shi`i studies

The same al-Majlisi has also long been the bogeyman in the western-language field of Shi`i studies.

The Shi`i Muslim maintains that after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD it was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law `Ali (d. 661) who should have inherited the Prophet's spiritual and political authority over the *umma* (the Muslim community). Thus, the Shi`a reject the legitimacy of the succession of the first three of Muhammad's successors (*khalīfa*, caliph) until `Ali himself became the fourth caliph (665–661). `Ali was assassinated and the Shi`a believe that the succession then lay with his male descendants, via his son al-Ḥusayn (also killed, at Karbala, Iraq, in 680). Each of these men is called ›*Imām*‹⁵. Between 10 to 15 per cent of Muslims today are thought to be Shi`i, perhaps as many as 200 million.

Of these, the largest group is the Twelver Shi`a. The Twelvers believe that the Ḥusaynid succession continued down the twelfth Imam who, living under the `Abbāsid dynasty (750–1258), well known for its hostility to the Imams and their followers, for his own safety went into *ghayba* (occultation) shortly after his birth in the 870s. He is alive and it is Allah's judgement as to when it will be safe for him to return.

In unpacking the trajectory of this field, as with Safavid studies, references to the Iranian Revolution are informative.

As has been discussed elsewhere in greater detail,⁶ prior to the Iranian Revolution ›modernisation theory‹ maintained that Islam would gradually ›disappear‹ under the onslaught of western secularist capitalism, just as the West itself – it was then understood – had become increasingly secularised over recent centuries.⁷

The few in these years who studied Shi`ism either studied it from the seventh century through to the faith's establishment in Iran in the sixteenth century by the Safavids or studied the faith over the centuries since that establishment.

Those who focused on the earlier period privileged the religious text, usually composed in Arabic by a very small number of scholarly elites.

4 In the Safavid case, in particular, concern with foreign trade has come to overshadow interest in the domestic economy although the importance of the latter to the Safavid economy was far greater. Note that although the rural proportion of the population far outnumbered the urban, which may have stood at between 10 and 15% of the total of ca. nine million, the available primary sources – and hence secondary sources – are overwhelmingly preoccupied with the latter. See Floor, *Economy of Safavid Persia*, 2–5 and 301, where he suggests that agriculture employed ›about 80% of the population.‹ For examples of the economic determinist view of Safavid decline, see Matthee, especially his *Politics of Trade* and, more recently, *Persia in Crisis*. In each of these, al-Majlisi reprises his customary role. See Matthee, *Politics of Trade*, 206; Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 185, 192, 201–02, 248, 253.

5 ›*Imām*‹, with a small ›i‹, as it were, refers to a Muslim prayer leader.

6 Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, 1f.

7 See, for example, Lerner, *Passing of Traditional Society*; Halpern, *Politics of Social Change*.

From the Safavid period on, however, the study of the faith overlapped with the study of modern Iran. From this period, the relevant sources for the study of the faith comprised the religious texts, still mainly composed in Arabic, but also a plethora of Persian-language religious and non-religious sources – such as court chronicles – and numerous European-language sources, including commercial and political records, travelogues and missionary accounts, for example.

Generally speaking, prior to the Revolution scholars of both periods noted, focused on and/or accepted the understanding that Shi`ism was mainly an esoteric faith, and stressed the compatibility of certain key aspects of the faith with Sufism, Islamic mysticism.⁸ The high point of the exploration by Shi`i scholars themselves into such compatibilities was supposedly reached in early seventeenth century Iran, during the reign of, and encouraged by, the same `Abbās I, only to be terminated later in the same century at the hands of such rigid, intolerant clerics as Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1699), the very same figure blamed by scholars in Safavid studies for the fall of Esfahan. Thereafter the faith lost its philosophical ›edge‹ at the hands of scholasticism and became rigidly formalist, and ›political‹, in nature.

Thus scholars of both Safavid studies and of Shi`i studies were fixated with great men, the same ›great man‹ in the case of al-Majlisī, and decline. Generally speaking, however, in the years prior to the Iranian Revolution, scholars in both fields also accepted the basic tenet of ›modernisation theory‹, that, as Islam itself, the Twelver faith was of increasingly little relevance in the modern world and, as Islam itself, like religion in the West, would soon ›wither away‹.⁹

The event of the Revolution itself, let alone the distinctly ›Islamist‹ nature that opposition discourse throughout the Islamic/Middle Eastern world so quickly assumed, caught the Academy completely by surprise.

Whatever impact the Revolution in Iran may have had on Iranian society, on other Middle Eastern/Muslim societies and on Iran's relations with rest of the world, its particular impact on the study of Shi`ism was, as with Safavid studies, paradoxically immense and limited.

Just as Safavid studies now comprises a much vaster array of secondary sources so in Shi`i studies, the interested layperson now has at his/her disposal a vast array of monographs, journal articles and book chapters addressing issues in history, art, anthropology, politics, country-based studies, gender studies, international relations and Islamic studies. The range of primary sources – that is Arabic and Persian language materials, not to mention material in the other languages of Shi`ism, such as Urdu – far exceeds the small number of such works available before the Revolution. This is thanks, for example, to Iranian government and Iranian semi-official or private religious foundations' efforts to publish sources long out-of-print of hitherto, and mainly, available only in manuscript form. Non-Iranian communities and organisations likewise gradually established a presence in this arena.

Yet the field of Shi`i studies for the most part continued to subscribe to the same essentialist visions of the faith that had dominated the field prior to the Revolution. Soon after the Re-

8 For a typical, and very influential, example, see Corbin (d. 1978) who stated: »Shiism is, in essence, the esotericism of Islam« (Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 36).

9 One struggles to find references to the faith as ›meaningful‹ or ›relevant‹ in such works as Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*; Avery, *Modern Iran*; Bill, *Politics of Iran* and, on the eve of the Iranian Revolution, Halliday, *Iran*. Note that in Iraq in the early 1970s the Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989) was delivering the lectures that would become his famous *Islamic Government*; the works above contain little if any mention of Khomeini, or even Shi`ism in Iraq. For the text of *Islamic Government*, see Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*.

volution, Arjomand echoed that earlier paradigm by stating that Shi`ism was characterised by ›pious antipathy toward political power‹ but that the Ayatollah Khomeini had politicised the faith by recourse to its earlier ›mahdi-istic‹ tendencies.¹⁰ Kramer's edited volume *Shiism, Resistance and Revolution* presented articles highlighting the supposedly inherently expansionist tendencies of Iran's Shi`i revolution and the imminent takeover of the Gulf and other nearby states by local Shi`i elements if not by Iran itself.¹¹ Nasr, a colleague of Corbin, the former's son V. Nasr and Dabashi also portrayed ›real‹ Shi`ism as essentially apolitical and otherworldly.¹² Amir-Moezzi, a specialist in the earliest history and doctrines of the faith, characterised ›early Imamism‹ as ›an esoteric doctrine‹ that became politicised and changed into ›an ideology‹ in the late-Safavid period at the hands of ›the Doctors of the Law‹. As a result ›political ambition and power‹ took over and the ›jurist-theologian took the place of the Imam‹.¹³

These visions of Shi`ism continued to privilege both Iranian Shi`ism as the normative form thereof¹⁴ and, both before 1501 and after, the religious texts works composed over the centuries by a handful of clerical elites as embodying the faith's normative doctrine and practices, both in the past and the present.

To be sure, the Safavids did declare Twelver Shi`ism the official faith of their Iran-plateau based realm. But, while it is true that today most Iranians are Shi`i it is also true that most of the world's Shi`a are not Iranian – there are more Arab and Indian/Pakistani Shi`a, for example, than there are Shi`a in Iran.

Indeed, the very years since the Iranian Revolution in which these paradigms have taken on new life also witnessed the appearance of a wealth of studies on non-Iranian Shi`ism. These include country studies – on Lebanon, the Subcontinent, Iraq, the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia as well as North America – as well as studies by anthropologists on variations in some ›non-salvation‹ issues of Shi`i doctrine and practice across all these countries. Others have addressed manifestations of the faith in cinema, art and architecture.¹⁵

In spite of such scholarship, however, the prevailing discourse in both Safavid and Shi`i studies found in the works of the especially visible/audible scholars in each field continues to privilege ›great man‹ and ›decline‹ – the former mainly Iranians and mainly urban-based figures at that. Thus one set of ›great men‹ is depicted as having ended the efforts of other ›great men‹ to move the Iranian project forward in a notionally progressive fashion: al-Majlisī ended the intellectual renaissance that was one of the many hallmarks of the reign of `Abbās I and in so doing directly facilitated the end of the Safavid dynasty while nearly 260 years later another religious figure, the Ayatollah Khomeini, crushed the modernising project of the last Pahlavi ruler, Muhammad Reza (d. 1980). To do so both religious figures are portrayed as having politicised a faith whose ›genuine‹ discourse valued the esoteric and the otherworldly. Al-Majlisī and Khomeini are thus implicitly, if not explicitly, two sides of the same coin just as are `Abbās I and the last shah.

10 Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 23, 61-63, 190f, 269-270, citing the statement of Corbin quoted above.

11 Kramer, *Shi`ism, Resistance and Revolution*.

12 See Nasr *et al.*, *Shi`ism, Doctrines, Thought and Spirituality* and Nasr *et al.*, *Expectation of the Millennium*.

13 Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 125-126, 137-139. The original was published in 1992 as *Le Guide Divin*.

14 See, for example, Dabashi, *Iran*, wherein he argued that Shi`ism, as a religion of protest, could only contradict itself when it became an ›ideology‹ and Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent* in which he also addressed ›Islamic Ideology‹. Therein, as well as in his *Shi`ism*, the Muslims/Shi`a are mainly Iranian.

15 On the population figures and on these works, see the introduction to Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, cited above.

The paradigm of empire

The organizing theme of empires has been becoming increasingly popular in recent years, in both the US and Europe, to wit the ›Empire in the Middle East‹ project of Edinburgh University Press,¹⁶ Fred Donner *et al.*, with Cambridge University Press¹⁷ and Jeroen Duindam's ›Eurasian Empires‹ project.¹⁸

To be sure, the term ›empire‹ has been used before with reference to the Safavids. In his 1974 multi-volume *The Venture of Islam*, Marshall Hodgson was perhaps the first contemporary writer to use the term with respect to the Safavids, as well as the Ottomans and the Mughals, when he styled all three as the ›gunpowder empires‹ of the region in the pre-modern period. More recently Dale¹⁹ and Streusand²⁰ also addressed the Safavid ›empire‹. Both Hodgson and Streusand devote separate chapters to each of the three, whereas Dale takes a thematic approach to the question.

It is notable, however, that none of these three authors specialise in Safavid history and that their discussions of the Safavids generally relied on an uneven smattering of secondary sources.

Hodgson addressed the Safavids first of the three empires in *The Venture of Islam*, volume three, entitled *The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times*. In the process, however, his abstraction of Safavid history broke no new ground. Notably, for example, al-Majlisi makes his customary appearance, as a ›dogmatic and bigoted scholar‹; although evidence for this characterization is not cited, from early in this chapter's footnotes Hodgson makes clear his debt to Lockhart. Hodgson refers also to the increasing influence of the ›religious establishment‹ and, in the reign of the last shah, the manner in which the religious scholars (no others of whom are identified) came to dominate politics in the absence of any ›firm hand‹ at the top such that ›the state seemed powerless‹ against the ›rebellion and invasion [that] loomed on many frontiers‹ and resulted in the sacking of Esfahan in 1722.²¹

For Dale, nearly four decades later, al-Majlisi is the most powerful (and only) religious figure in the realm,²² while for Streusand he is, only slightly, more complex.²³

But, that al-Majlisi remains so pivotal a figure when, in reality, those who write about him as such are largely unfamiliar with his voluminous Arabic and Persian-language works let alone the background against which he composed them, attests to the endurance of the ›great man‹ paradigm and, indeed, the larger decline paradigm as well. Indeed, Dale reprises the decline paradigm in a chapter entitled ›Golden Ages‹, and Streusand actually tries to argue for the continued relevance of ›decline‹.²⁴

Perhaps more interestingly/importantly, none of these three offered any definition of ›empire‹, either with reference to any of the three empires under consideration or, more generally, with reference to spatial or historical contexts/characteristics, e.g. European ver-

16 <http://www.euppublishing.com/series/EHIE>; retrieved 30 September 2015.

17 Donner *et al.*, *Empire in the Middle East*.

18 <http://hum.leiden.edu/history/eurasia/>; retrieved 30 September 2015.

19 Dale, *Muslim Empires*.

20 Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*.

21 Hodgson, *Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times*, 16-58, esp. 53, 28n3, 54, 55, 58.

22 Dale, *Muslim Empires*, 190.

23 Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 166.

24 Dale, *Muslim Empires*, 187-188; Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 5.

sus Middle Eastern, ›ancient‹ versus ›pre-modern‹ versus ›modern‹ empires, to discuss, for example, the distinguishing features of the Roman, British and even the American ›empire‹. In fact, Streusand uses the term ›empire‹ for many Islamic period political entities, though Egypt's Mamluks (1250-1517) seem to be a kingdom and the Safavids emerge as both an empire and a polity, the latter after our own fashion.²⁵

Matthee, a specialist in the Safavid period, in a 2010 discussion of the Safavids and empire, did at least offer something of a definition of empire – referring, for example to geography, ideology and ›the status and role of the ruler‹. But, remaining faithful to ›great man‹ and ›decline‹, he did not apply the term when referring to the Safavids in the post-`Abbās I period.²⁶

By way of contrast, by this time, Ottoman studies had long since seen off ›decline‹.²⁷

The Safavid ›empire‹ reconfigured: a way forward?

If some of Safavid Iran's legacies for modern Iran – borders, language and faith – have been noted, other aspects of that legacy have not been well considered to date.

As prior to and during the two centuries of the Safavid period so also for most of Iran's subsequent history to the later years of the twentieth century Iranian society remained overwhelmingly rural/tribal in nature. In addition, its population varied along many different ethnic, linguistic and religious lines.²⁸ Also, despite this latter legacy, a sense of a common but distinctive ›Persian‹ cultural discourse may be said to have become increasingly universally shared. Finally, far from ever featuring a highly centralised state structure ruled by an all-powerful, highly authoritarian ruler, post-Safavid Iran possessed but a very limited central-state structure which ›ruled‹ only by negotiation and compromise with the plateau's many other constituencies – tribes, urban elements such as artisans and merchants, Shi`i religious figures based at home and abroad and even regional and extra-regional elements, the latter also comprising religious, commercial and political figures and forces. Such a system was, in fact, also a feature of Safavid Iran.

Indeed, the Safavid polity recalled more than not many features of both Mongol and especially the Timurid ›systems‹, in their patronage of a range of religious discourses (Muslim and non-Muslim) and icons of distinctly Persian culture, as well as the post-Timurid regional polities' reliance on the region's Turkic tribal elements for military muscle and on the native Persian (Tajik) class for administrative expertise.

At the same time, although Safavid Iran was not known for its massive territorial aggrandizement, *pace* the Roman Empire and, more contemporaneously, the Ottoman Empire, the Safavids did carve out a single entity from the many smaller polities previously extant across the Iranian plateau.

25 Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 24, 135-200.

26 Matthee, Was Safavid Iran an Empire? On his continued ›commitment‹ to Safavid ›decline‹, and to al-Majlisi's role therein, see Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*.

27 See İnalçık and Quataert, *Economic and Social History*, especially Faroqhi, Crisis and Change, her contribution on the stereotypical view that the Ottoman Empire reached its peak during the reign of Sulayman ›the Magnificent‹ (reg. 1520-1566). See also Lowry, *Nature of the Early Ottoman State*.

28 Iran itself remained a predominantly rural society – tribal and peasant in nature – until some time in the late 1970s/early 1980s. See above n4; Floor, Hospitals in Safavid and Qajar Iran, 37-116; and the 2011 population census: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/2010_PHC/Iran/Iran-2011-Census-Results.pdf, retrieved 30 September 2015.

In fact, over its years as the long-lasting dynasty in the history of Islamic Iran the Safavid period witnessed the generation of a complex political, socio-economic and religio-cultural paradigm across the plateau whose legacy informed the longer-term Iranian and, therefore, the larger regional, dynamic up to and through the late twentieth century.

The Safavid empire period did link the medieval and modern periods of Iranian history but in ways that far transcend political dates, military events and economic trends.

A more dynamic definition of the term ›empire‹ in the pre-modern period might focus as much if not less on the latter as on more fundamental developments in/transformations of society and culture and the longevity of the legacy thereof. This model values consideration of political developments and dateable events and the goings-and-comings of elites, but also as, if not more, importantly, the evaluation of the evolution of social and also cultural dynamics. The latter includes the assessment of ›cultural markers‹ and their growing acceptance both across a region but also throughout all sectors of its society, not merely among the minority urban elite. A judgment on the ›success‹ of such an empire would include assessment of the extent to which a given society was so transformed that its distinguishing features are visible generations if not centuries after its political ›end‹, and perhaps even well beyond its political boundaries at the broadest point of its territorial expansion.

In such a broader, more complex sense, then, Safavid Iran was an ›empire‹.

A brief sketch of this more inclusive model would commence by noting that the historical nature of the plateau's society as a multi-cultural entity entails discussion of the impact of the several sets of invasions across the plateau by various waves of Central Asia-based tribal elements – the Saljuks in the eleventh century but, more especially, the Mongols and Timurids in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries respectively – and, in the wake of the political disintegration of the latter, the rise of the Turkish Aq Qoyūnlū and Qara Qoyūnlū tribal polities that dominated the region immediately prior to the Safavids. The foundations of the latter two lay in a working alliance between the different Turkic tribal elements that arrived on the plateau with these invading forces and Tajik elites who provided the administrative expertise needed. The politico-cultural discourse of all of these polities mirrored, and so spoke to, those of both constituencies. But, the latter two tribal polities in particular did not succeed in institutionalizing the links between these and the political establishment or even creating any distinctive, widely accepted and long-lasting cultural legacy that drew in and earned the loyalty/confidence of these, let alone any other, constituencies for longer than the reign of one ›great man‹.

The Safavid Sufi order, originally both a quietist and Sunni movement based in Ardabil in the fourteenth century, gradually evolved into a militant messianic movement more reflective of the Shi`i/Sufi messianic and egalitarian discourse then widespread across the plateau in both the rural and urban settings, i.e. among both Turks and Tajiks.

The influx of supporters from both, initially the Qizilbāsh coalition of tribes – many of whom were among the tribal levies of the two earlier Turkish polities – encouraged the order and the tribes to interact with each other through successive military campaigns, via marriages and later the granting of lands and titles/posts. Tajik elites were also incorporated into this dynamic and together Turk and Tajik elements came to dominate the nascent centre of the Safavid movement/dynasty over the fifteenth century.

The military success of Ismā`il I, did consist of, firstly, taking Tabriz in 1501 and then, secondly, taking the territories of the eight or so existing polities on the plateau over the next ten years. But the polity that was established during his reign was a joint Turkish/Tajik project of which he was more a transcendent spokesman than an absolutist ruler.

This Turkish/Tajik dynamic dominated later shahs even as members of the Qizilbāsh coalition and their Tajik allies jostled, sometimes violently, for pre-eminence within that dynamic at such crucial junctures as the deaths of the first two shahs, Ismā'il and his son Ṭahmāsp. Crucially, however, neither of these civil wars entailed questioning the continued legitimacy of the Safavid order/house.

By the 1629 death of `Abbās I, great-grandson of Ismā'il I, working arrangements between these two were more regularized than they had been over the sixteenth century. The result was that the accession of subsequent shahs – no sitting Safavid shah died other than a natural death – was an ever smoother, peaceful process, unmarked by the twin, existential challenges of internal civil strife and consequent foreign invasions that followed the deaths of Ismā'il and Ṭahmāsp.

The ruling Turk/Tajik alliance was also evolving over the period, gaining and losing ›members‹. Turkish elements whose support for various losing candidates for shah, for example, were eliminated and the seventeenth century was marked by the addition of yet further constituencies into the realm – new tribal elements, local Armenian and other Christian elements, Shi`i clerical elites and non-elites, a growing local middle ranking artisanal and commercial class and even, across the seventeenth century especially, foreign commercial, political and religious elements.

Safavid society did remain predominantly tribal and rural in nature: the political centre remained politically pre-eminent but the accrual of absolutist power by the shah and his house remained limited by the diffusion of power among members of the Turk/Tajik military/political coalition. Well connected to society precisely because of its dependence on the support of the plateau's different constituencies, the court itself had to be and was responsive to evolving socio-economic and political challenges, domestic and foreign, and cultivated allies among all in the pursuit of strategies for stability in the face of such challenges.

That tribal/rural nature, the notion of ›alliance politics‹ and the consequently limited extent of central government power remained features of Iranian society until well into the later twentieth century.²⁹

Although Twelver Shi`ism was declared the realm's ›official‹ religion at the capture of Tabriz in 1501, the new faith in fact made few concrete inroads among elites of the Turk/Tajik coalition over the sixteenth century; elites' at best nominal conversions from Sunnism to the new faith were accepted over this century. Among the ›popular‹ classes in both rural and urban settings, the same Shi`i/Sufi messianic discourse that brought the Safavids to power remained widespread. Put off by the heterogeneous spiritual discourse of the house and the populace, Ottoman military prowess and the civil wars that broke out at the deaths of Ismā'il and Ṭahmāsp, few orthodox sixteenth century Twelver clerics abandoned their homes in the Arab centres of the faith to the West for Iran, even though those homes were located in territory under the control of the Sunni Ottomans.

The faith received a boost beginning in the reign of `Abbās I as association with the faith and its spokesmen was a means by which the centre sought to legitimize/embed its authority in the face of the series of the existential internal and external challenges that followed the 1576 death of Ṭahmāsp. The Turk/Tajik-dominated centre as well as the newly incorporated constituencies patronized clerical elites and embellished the realm with religious material infrastructure – mosques, schools, shrines, etc. – marking their common, and very public, acceptance of the polity's spiritual and, hence, political legitimacy.

29 Indeed, Martin, in her discussion of the Qajar period (1795-1925), characterizes these arrangements as ›the politics of pact‹. See Martin, *Qajar Pact*. See also Abrahamian, *History of Modern Iran*.

The establishment of such infrastructure in this period and the control over the receipt and distribution of the religious taxes that the Shi`i *ulama* had by this time established as representatives of the hidden Twelfth Shi`i Imam were the bases for the position of material independence from the political centre that the clerical estate came to enjoy within Iranian society. This clerical power and material independence, another legacy of the period seldom noted by Western scholars as rooted in the Safavid period, was the basis for clerical political activism against the political centre in Iran in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The plateau has also had a long history of multi-confessionalism prior to the appearance of the Safavids on the scene. The Safavid period also saw the non-Muslim population, domestic and foreign, receive the recognition and support of the centre. The Armenian community of Julfa, in Eastern Anatolia, was forcibly relocated to the newly-designated capital of Esfahan during `Abbās I's reign, for example, to deprive the Ottomans of, and to give the Safavids control over, the Armenian merchants' domination of long-distance trade routes and enlist their support in, and tax, the export of Iranian silk to Europe. The newly arrived Armenians were, however, encouraged to establish their own distinctive religious infrastructure – a good deal of which remains visible today.

To be sure, combinations of domestic and foreign political and economic challenges/crises together with natural calamities – famine and disease, for example – did result in local Jews and Christian elements occasionally being scapegoated by the centre and its associates for their ties with Western elements. Western missionaries were welcomed by the Centre as representatives of potential allies of their home countries against the Ottomans, though the outreach efforts of these foreign Christians among Iranian Christians generated opposition from local Christian elites and, therefore, their court allies and Muslim elites as well.

This complex confessional dynamic, rooted both in the pre-Safavid period and only further enhanced in the Safavid period, was another aspect of the Safavid legacy, and would in fact become even more complex in later centuries.

As to non-religious cultural discourse, the period witnessed the further development of distinctly Iranian styles of art, architecture, literature, as well as the role of the Persian language. Patronage was important to developments in these realms of activity. In the 17th century, patronage by both Turk and Tajik court elements and also by non-court elite and middle class elements played a key role in the embedding of a common, distinctly Iranian cultural heritage across the plateau whose legacy, as that of Twelver Shi`ism, survived and thrived in succeeding centuries.

This said, although Persian did become an important language on the plateau, tribal and other ethnic dialects continued to be widespread. These and, in certain regions, languages such as Arabic and varieties of Turkish, and the cultural (and religious) traditions associated with the speakers thereof, held their own through the period and into the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Turkish dialects are often acknowledged as forming Iran's second language such that in some areas and among classes/professions Persian was, and still may be, the country's second language.³⁰

As to changing foreign and particularly Western forms of involvement in Iran over the period, Safavid Iran's main protagonists over the 16th century were the Ottomans to the West, and to a lesser extent the Uzbeks to the Northeast and the Mughals in the Subcontinent,

30 For a recent study of language distribution in western Iran, see Aliakbari *et al.*, *Language Distribution*. The authors note the four main language of the province in question as Kurdish (and its dialects), Luri, Laki (the latter two being tribal dialects) and Arabic.

all Sunni in orientation. The presence in the region of the Portuguese and other Western elements in the same century is also notable. Especially following the Ottoman defeat at Lepanto in 1571, the Safavids were keen to create an alliance with the European powers against the Ottomans. To this end, once `Abbās I had stabilised his internal position, he encouraged ties with these powers.

But the period was also known for the rise of the great Western trading companies. The presence of the English and Dutch East India Companies in Iran in `Abbās I's reign soon eclipsed that of other European powers, the Portuguese especially. Ties with the former were cultivated for both political and economic reasons, in particular for their interest in Iranian silk, the domestic trade monopoly in which was won by the New Julfa Armenians. Over the century Western interest in Iran's silk dwindled in favour of sources further East. However, both companies' export of specie, of which Iran had none of its own, contributed to domestic price inflation that, in combination with a series of natural calamities, disrupted the realm's social fabric. A combination of European and local dynamics saw the Dutch move much further East while the English remained in the Persian Gulf area.

Western missionaries and other travellers also made their way to and through Iran over this period. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Russians also appeared on the scene, even joining the Ottomans in invading Iran in the years after 1722. With the Russians' arrival the stage was set for the ›Great Game‹, the Russo-British confrontation that would be especially fateful for Iran in the later eighteenth century and well into the twentieth century.

Concluding remarks

Safavid studies has long been dominated by references to the ›great man‹ and to ›decline‹. Reliance thereon was a feature of pre-Iranian Revolution discussions of the period and has remained so over the decades since, despite the expansion in the field's membership and sub disciplines. The discourses of ›great man‹ and ›decline‹ privilege the political and economic, mainly urban, realms while downplaying, if not ignoring, references to social, religious and cultural trends and events. Recent references to a Safavid ›empire‹ have only reinforced the recourse to these two paradigms.

An ›empire‹, in the sense reconfigured herein, encompasses activities across more realms than fewer and leaves a legacy beyond its own immediate political end-date.

Such a modelling – addressing a wider, inclusive, not a narrower, exclusive, range of trends and events – suggests that the period bequeathed a broad range of legacies to successive generations on the plateau, if not also beyond, that remained visible well into the later twentieth century at least. In this, then, Safavid Iran was an empire and a successful one at that.

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Dynasties

Jeroen Duindam*

Dynasties are prominently present in world history. King lists, with individual reign names and dynastic era names, were a common form of time reckoning – a habit that persists in modern Japan. Rule across the globe most often took shape around a single person, attended by a household providing personal and administrative services, in a location that stood out from its environment. The term ›dynasty‹ did not originally relate to government by a single person or family. Greek *dynasteia* denotes lordship or sovereignty in general. In his *Politics*, Aristotle uses *dynasteia*, usually translated as ›rule of the powerful‹, when he refers to oligarchies dominated by a handful of families tending towards hereditary power.¹ Did dynasty pertain to one ›form of government‹, or should we understand it as a more pervasive social practice? This paper reconsiders the idea of dynasty by examining it in a global perspective. Different forms of kinship generate different types of dynasties. Moreover, dynasty was never based only on kinship rules and the hazards of reproduction: succession took many forms and the same holds true for the cultural representations of dynastic power. Which variants of dynasty can be found across the globe, and how were clans of royals constructed?² How important was pedigree for the authority of these dynasties?

Keywords: dynasties; succession; kinship; kingmaking.

I. Concentration versus diffusion

Women: transmitting royal power

Considering a wide range of examples of dynastic power in Africa, Europe, and Asia, I have been struck by the variation in arrangements for succession. Notwithstanding the variety, there is a common point that needs to be underlined first: only in rare cases did women hold priority as candidates for sovereign power. Women were accepted as sovereign queens in the absence of male candidates in a number of polities in Europe, Africa, and Asia, yet more often they reigned temporarily in the name of junior sons, or held power in subsidiary roles. No women formally ruled either in Ming and Qing China, or in the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman empires. In the millennium between 1000 and 2000, moreover, I see no cases where a long line of women succeeded to the throne – although the successful rule of one woman and the absence or weakness of male candidates did lead to a sequence of women on the throne in several cases.³

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- 1 Aristotle, *Politics*, book II, chapter 10, 11; book IV, chapter 5 presents *dynasteia* as ›rule of the powerful‹, hereditary rules of families in an oligarchy. On dynasty and its various meanings in antiquity see Martin, *Dynasteia*, 239: ›Herrschaft weniger über viele‹; oligarchy without isonomia; Bearzot, *Dynasteia*; Meier and Strothmann, *Dynasteia*. Chinese *chao* (court, government, reign, dynasty, audience) does seem to relate more closely to imperial or royal power.
- 2 This paper presents themes elaborated at greater length in Duindam, *Dynasties*; references point to relevant specialised literature or, in cases where information is dispersed, to *Dynasties*. This paper also builds on results of the Eurasian Empires research project, organised jointly with three other applicants and bringing together nine researchers, see <http://hum.leiden.edu/history/eurasia/> (retrieved on 31 October 2015).
- 3 See Duindam, *Dynasties*, 89-127, for examples of sequences of female rulers in Aceh, Patani, Japan, Korea, England, Russia, Scandinavia, and perhaps most notably Africa. For the singular example of a ca. 200 year sequence of female rule, the Lovedu rain-queens, see Krige and Krige, *The Realm of a Rain-queen*; Krige, *Divine Kingship*.

Women thus were rarely the preferred candidates for supreme power, yet succession could be organised through the female line even where men prevailed. Matrilineal descent was particularly present in the ›Malayo-Polynesian world‹, from Madagascar to South-East Asia and West India, and in the ›matrilineal belt‹ created by Bantu migration from West to South-East Africa. In matrilineal polities, women were seen as the true vessels of royal blood: the status of fathers was indifferent. Nevertheless, males still commonly held sovereign power. This led to tensions between male paramount power and legitimate succession through the female line.⁴ The king's sons were barred from succession, which necessarily should go to a male borne by a female royal – usually the king's uterine brothers or his sisters' sons. Succession, in other words, was ›sideways‹ or ›horizontal‹.⁵ Direct vertical, ›downwards‹, next-of-kin succession was barred, and there were usually multiple options for sideways succession. Matrilineal succession therefore tended to lead to competition among rivalling candidates. Interregna risked tearing apart the body politic, but, on the other hand, the prospect of future rule could help to maintain cohesion among contending parties. Candidates needed to build support for their position among stakeholders in the royal venture. The throne could be contested violently, but peaceful alternation and circulation among a number of lineages was also possible.

At the other extreme, more familiar for students of modern European history, we find male primogeniture, which defined the eldest son as the heir. Primogeniture concentrated power in the ›downwards‹ vertical line, by withholding rights of succession from younger brothers, daughters, and their offspring. Male collaterals and the offspring of women from the patriline were no longer eligible for the throne, or only in the absence of a king's son. The rights of the first-born son were strong in many places and periods. In the early modern age, primogeniture combined with the indivisibility of the patrimony gradually became the rule for sovereign families as well as for high nobles in Europe.

Concentration	Diffusion
Downwards – Vertical – Filial	Sideways – Horizontal – Fraternal
Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Fixed	Open – Contested – Alternating

The table printed here shows these two extremes. It should be noted, however, that in practice intermediate and criss-crossing forms predominated. Kings of the matrilineal Asante federation could not enforce the succession of their sons, but by marrying them to royal women, they enabled their grandsons to rule again. What in one respect appears as matrilineal succession to kingship, hence can also be understood as the alternation on the throne of two male ›patrifications‹.⁶ Patrilineal succession, moreover, was not necessarily either downwards or fixed. In numerous African patrilineal polities, the succession of the king's eldest son, or all the king's sons, was prohibited, often without stipulating any alternative fixed succession pattern. Competition among a wide group of candidates sharing a single

4 On matrilineal descent, see Schneider and Gough, *Matrilineal Kinship* with a comparative analysis by David Aberle on 655-727; see a classic description of the tensions inherent in matrilineal succession by Richards, *Some Types of Family Structure*, 246-251.

5 Goody, *Sideways or Downwards?*

6 Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, 327-373.

distant ancestor was the likely outcome here as in most matrilineal constellations.⁷ Until the decades around 1600, the outspokenly patrilineal Ottoman sultans, borne by slave concubines, practiced mostly downwards but violently competitive succession, with the sons of a dying sultan battling for primacy – and, notoriously, killing their brothers along with their pregnant concubines and children after ascending the throne. Mughal princes until the late seventeenth century likewise engaged in bloody competition once their father's authority showed signs of weakening. Safavid practice differed. The French traveller Chardin described at some length the presence of blinded princes at court in Isfahan, a result of the ›Politique Persane, qui ne permet pas qu'on laisse la vue à aucun enfant mâle du Sang Royal, excepté aux deux ou trois plus proches.⁸ The act of blinding was also extended to the sons of princesses: the Safavids maimed rather than killed princes and apparently considered succession through the female line a legitimate option. European royal families, limited in numbers as a consequence of monogamous marriage, did develop a clear preference for eldest-son succession, but this did not prevent the persistence of partitions. Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand I divided his patrimony among his sons; only in 1665 under Leopold I were these territories once more united in one hand.

Dynastic clans: reduction, proliferation, control

The hazards of demography were the Achilles' heel of dynastic power. Royals were necessary to safeguard dynastic continuity, yet ambitious relatives were a challenge for rulers. The need to provide for royals and to maintain the authority of the head of the house was an ongoing concern. A major difference sets apart dynasties in Christian Europe from all others: the requirement of monogamous marriage. Polygynous reproduction was the rule, although individual princes incidentally may have preferred a single favourite spouse. Polygyny entailed the rapid proliferation of princes and princesses, particularly in cases where collateral houses, likewise practising polygyny, were allowed to survive. By the 1640s the descendants of Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1368-1398) numbered between 100.000 and 200.000; paying their stipends presented a serious challenge for the state coffers. Scions of the upper-level collateral houses, no longer eligible for the throne, could be adopted into the main line to prevent extinction. This solution, used repeatedly in China, was also adopted by the Tokugawa shoguns and the Japanese imperial house. The Song and Qing imperial clans do not seem to have expanded as rapidly as did the Ming; yet, they too, numbered in the tens of thousands by the end of the dynasty.⁹

The Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal cases show that polygyny did not necessarily lead to the inflation of numbers in the dynasty: violent competition among the incumbent ruler's sons reduced numbers in every generation. After ca. 1600 (ca. 1700 for the Mughals) princes were allowed to live, although they had to accept confinement in the palace and the strict control of their reproduction. This changeover took shape gradually and without long-term

7 See examples in Beattie, *Bunyoro*; Drucker-Brown, *Ritual Aspects of the Mamprusi Kingship*, 135-146; Goody, *Succession to High Office*, 172-175; Ottino, *Ancient Malagasy Dynastic Succession*, 254; on contested and circulating succession among descendants of a single ancestor, and combinations of matrilineal and patrilineal descent in Europe, see Whitaker, *Regal Succession among the Dálriata*; McGowan, *Royal Succession in Earlier Medieval Ireland*; Frost, *Monarchy in Northern and Eastern Europe*.

8 Chardin, *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin II*, 50. Chardin underlines that sons of princesses were likewise blinded: this suggests a stronger presence of the female lines than in the Ottoman Empire.

9 General introduction in Wang, *Ming Prince and Daoism* and Robinson, *Princely Courts of the Ming Dynasty*; on numbers of Ming, Qing and Song princes see Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 91-95, also note 117 on 328-329; Chaffee, *Branches of Heaven*, 271-275.

planning. Mehmed III (1566-1595-1603) was the last sultan to be sent out to govern as a youngster; his thirteen-year-old son Ahmed ascended the throne directly from the palace, and left his four-year-old brother alive.¹⁰ In 1640 Queen-mother Kösem Sultan barely managed to convince dying Murad IV (1612-1623-1640) to let live his only remaining brother Ibrahim, whose untested reproductive powers were now the only hope for the dynasty. Pruning the dynastic tree was not necessarily a violent process. In many African kingdoms royal status wore off with the generations: a king's sons held higher rank than grandsons, sons of grandsons no longer were eligible. In the kingdom of Buganda, brothers of the new king were told they were henceforth barred from succession: Their descendants became ›peasant princes‹, bamabundugu, or ›princes thrown away‹.¹¹

How was dynastic entitlement remembered and proven? This question was relevant mostly where collaterals were allowed to proliferate. In China a special bureau kept track of the dynastic clan. Everywhere, genealogies – notoriously pliable instruments – can be found. A remarkable African example underlines the relevance of performance and flexibility. In the scriptless kingdom of Mamprusi, drummers recited the names of all royals eligible for succession. However, candidates needed to be present during the performance, and they were expected to remunerate the drummers – persistent failure either to attend or to pay sufficiently could lead to oblivion.¹²

Dynastic princes appear to have been dealt with in two ways globally: either by sending them out to the frontier to prove their valour, or by concentrating them at the centre, under some sort of surveillance. The Ottoman, Mughal and Safavid cases moved from the first to the second option. A French Africanist summarises the situation of princes in similar terms: ›Ou bien ils sont étroitement associés au trône et on les retrouve dotés de fonctions importantes au sein de la cour ou bien ils sont écartés du trône quelquefois de manière violente (mutilation ou mise à mort)‹.¹³ Ethiopian sources refer to the ›Mountain of Royals‹ (*Amba Geshan*), where ›all sons of the reigning king who were eight years old or more, and all male descendants in the male line of former rulers of the reigning dynasty‹, were kept in custody.¹⁴ Throughout Africa, royals eligible for succession could choose to move away and found their own kingdoms – in the margins of their father's realm, or in more distant locations, which was one reason for the recurring waves of migration. In China, the Ming followed a middle course, by seriously restricting the movement and activities of prestigious princes in their own fiefs. The Qing required the presence of the imperial princes in and around Beijing, but did give them important tasks in government. While for Early Modern Europe, the term ›domestication‹ is an overstatement at best as a description of the position of nobles at court, it comes somewhat closer to the prestigious but constrained role of royals.¹⁵ However, many

10 Recent literature stresses the gradual and *ad hoc* nature of this changeover in the Ottoman case, see Duindam, *Dynasties*, 132-135; I thank Günhan Börekçi for allowing me to read two forthcoming papers: Börekçi, Smallpox in the Harem and *ibid.*, On the Power, Political Career and Patronage Networks. On the Safavid changeover, see Babaie *et al.*, *Slaves of the Shah*; on Safavid collaterals and their careers see Geever, Safavid Cousins on the Verge of Extinction.

11 Richards, *African Kings and Their Royal Relatives*, 148.

12 Drucker-Brown, *King House*, 177.

13 Mounier, *dynamique des interrelations politiques*, summarising on 374 Tardits, *Princes et serviteurs du royaume*, 9-21.

14 Beckingham, *Amba Gesen and Asirgarh*, quotes from 182-183 and 185; see also Haberland, *Untersuchungen zum äthiopischen Königtum*, 62, 82-89, 184-185.

15 On Norbert Elias and ›domestication‹ see Duindam, *Versailles, Vienna, and Beyond*; more generally also Duindam, *Myths of Power*.

dynastic scions served as viceroys, provincial governors, and military commanders. The extremes can be found, but there was middle ground that left more room for the royals to move; from centre to periphery seems to have been more common here.

Marriage, alliance, exchange

Concentration and diffusion were also influenced by dynastic alliances: where did princes seek their wives, and to whom did they wed their offspring? Ottoman sultans, in the course of the fourteenth century, did contract dynastic marital alliances; yet with their rising pre-eminence they dropped this habit.¹⁶ Slave concubinage in the harem now helped to underline the singular relevance of the male dynastic line. Ottoman sons did not survive the ascent of a brother to the throne in the earlier period, and could not wed or reproduce freely in the later period. Daughters, however, were increasingly wedded to leading administrators. The most successful pashas and viziers, starting out as the ›slaves of the sultan‹ ended up as sultanic in-laws. The upper echelon of state servants was connected to the dynasty through daughters whose sons could no longer claim succession rights.¹⁷ The Mughals used marriage and the harem to integrate the elites of their recently conquered and highly diverse domains. They wedded Persian and Rajput princesses and included daughters of subjected nobles in their harem. In 1581 the Spanish Jesuit Father Monserrate explained that Akbar took women ›... with him in honourable custody, both as a reminder and proof of his own victorious glory, and as hostage in order to prevent any insurrection ...‹.¹⁸ Akbar married more than the four women sanctioned by Islam: ›in order to ratify peace and to create friendly relationships with their vassal princes or neighbouring monarchs.‹¹⁹ Mughal daughters were expected to find their partners among scions of elevated houses, or remain unmarried – a common experience for patrilineal princesses, whose towering status did not fit easily in the hierarchical relationship between man and woman.

The African context is interesting here in several respects. In matrilineal settings, the sexual profligacy of princesses, often contrasting sharply with local norms, underscored the insignificance of the male line – and in practice made it difficult to assert claims of fatherhood.²⁰ Can the ›licentiousness‹ of these princesses be seen as the mirror-image of the patrilineal harem? Without a doubt, harems were an essential part of matrilineal and patrilineal polities throughout Africa. They served as a reservoir for the exchange of women cementing alliances between royal and chiefly lineages, with both parties acting as wife-receivers as well as wife-givers.²¹

Chinese emperors sought consorts among *literati* families holding high office, or among families of military commanders.²² The concentration of power in the hands of consort families in the long run convinced emperors and their advisors to select spouses from the lower echelons rather than among leading administrative and military elites. Conquest dynasties showed a strong tendency towards endogamy, seeking brides and concubines in their own

16 Peirce, *Imperial Harem*, 29-31; 38-39.

17 Peirce, *Imperial Harem*, 65-72; Dumas, *Perles de nacre du sultanat*, 125-194.

18 Monserrate, *Commentary of Father Monserrate*, ed. Banerjee, 143.

19 Monserrate, *Commentary of Father Monserrate*, ed. Banerjee, 202.

20 Duindam, *Dynasties*, 98-100.

21 Krige, *Divine Kingship* elaborates this at length for the Lovedu rain-queen, see other examples in Duindam, *Dynasties*, 114, 117, 154.

22 See Holmgren, *Imperial Marriage*; Chaffee, *Marriage of the Sung Imperial Clanswomen*; Rawski, *Ch'ing Imperial Marriage*.

group. The Qing populated their inner court with maids and consorts from the military banners, comprising Manchus with their Mongol allies and early Han Chinese supporters. Rules for succession would privilege the empress' first son, vis-à-vis younger sons and concubines' sons – yet the primacy of the male imperial line rendered these distinctions flexible in practice. The alliances of dynastic sons and daughters, on the whole, followed the example of their ruling relatives.

From the later Middle Ages onwards in Europe marriage among sovereign equals became the rule, tying together ruling houses in a dense web of succession rights. This dynastic web implicated many polities in the same expectations and rivalries: the near-extinction of one house was eagerly watched from across the frontiers. Europe's gradually more fixed forms of succession may have reduced the level of internal succession strife, but many wars were triggered here by succession disputes. Marriages contracted among rivalling houses time and again raised the issue of female succession rights. The clear preference for rule by men and succession through the male line should not obscure the marked significance of the female line for dynastic status and inheritance in Europe.²³

Overall the rights of succession appear to have caused tension, whereas kinship without this specific entitlement encouraged friendship and alliance. In African patrilineal polities, matrilineal kin were often employed in high positions and served as confidants, whereas princes holding succession rights were kept at bay. However, the opposite positions can be found in matrilineal polities: clearly, we always need to consider relatives in both male and female lines.²⁴

Kingmaking: positions and preferences

Succession procedures can be framed in time-honoured and unequivocal rules. Anybody studying succession practice, however, will note that such rules were frequently disregarded.²⁵ This was inevitably the case where the predetermined candidate was lacking; it became a distinct possibility where the candidate was physically or intellectually incapacitated. The leaps and bounds of dynastic succession were smoothed out in histories; continuities were created to cover usurpations. In open forms of succession the inbuilt moments of contention were likewise fitted afterwards into a view of permanence. It is difficult to ascertain the actions of individuals and groups involved in the process that started with the illness and death of an incumbent ruler and ended with the acclamation of his successor. Several stakeholders influenced dynastic succession, holding different positions and advocating contrasting courses of action.

Incumbent kings were not invariably happy with the priority of the firstborn son, and might have wanted to designate their preferred successor. Particularly in long reigns, the relationship between ruler and heir-apparent could sour easily. In 1676 the Qing Kangxi emperor eagerly nominated as heir apparent his eighteen-month-old son Yinreng, but gradually escalating conflict led to the downfall of Yinreng in 1708; an event wrecking the emperor's health and spirit. Eighteenth-century king Yongjo of Korea experienced a similar misfortune, ending in the enforced suicide of his son. In 1718 the protracted conflict between Peter the Great and his eldest son Aleksej ended with the unexplained death of the tsarevich in prison. Chinese emperors after Kangxi strengthened their powers of designation. Peter con-

23 See a strong example in Wolf, *Königliche Töchterstämme*.

24 See a similar statement in Hohkamp, *Transdynasticism at the Dawn of the Modern Era*.

25 On succession in general, Goody, *Succession to High Office*; Burling, *Passage of Power*; examples in Bes, *Toddlers, Widows, and Bastards Enthroned*.

firmed his right of designation, but failed to exert it.²⁶ Designation was exceptional among other European monarchs. Here too, however, numerous painful conflicts between kings and their likely successors surfaced: George II and Frederick Prince of Wales and William-Frederick and his son Frederick – later the Great – of Prussia can be cited as examples. Conversely, where other bodies served as kingmakers, ruling kings were disposed primarily to ensure the continuity of their house by arranging succession in their lifetime, *vivente rege* or *vivente imperatore*, as Leopold I did for Joseph I, or Maria Theresa and Francis Stephen for Joseph II.

While kings could cherish their powers of designation, senior administrators appreciated order and predictability, and hence preferred fixed succession or argued in favour of the rapid appointment of an heir. High *literati* officials pressed the Ming Wanli emperor to appoint an heir apparent and commence his education. At times advisors actively advocated a succession during the lifetime of the incumbent ruler: in the late 1690s Manchu grandee Songgotu recommended that Kangxi abdicate in favour of his son.²⁷ Generations of royalty often formed the nuclei of competition, with companions and mentors of the likely successor preparing for their future rule; another reason for the troubled contact between ruler and heir.

Polygynous reproduction entailed the coexistence of several women with sons who could have hopes for the throne. Hierarchies differentiated formal queens or empresses from concubines, yet nevertheless preferred concubines' sons could ascend the throne in the absence of empress' sons – and sometimes in their presence. Competition among mothers was common; numerous clashes between mothers and spouses can be found; incidentally even conflict between grandmother and mother occurred.²⁸ In China, strong patrilineal preferences, paradoxically, enabled dowagers to act as kingmakers and regents: the utter impossibility of sovereign female rule qualified these women to act as go-betweens between male incumbents.²⁹ This situation brings to mind the powerful queen-mothers at the French court, barred by the Salic Law from succession.³⁰ Appointing males who could claim the throne for themselves as temporary substitutes for the sovereign was asking for trouble: ineligible were preferred as regents and kingmakers.³¹ In many African kingdoms, queen mothers, the female counterparts of paramount kings rather than their spouses or biological mothers, were a predominant force in succession. The same can be said about the Ottoman sultan mothers from the late sixteenth century onwards. Upon the death of Mehmed III in 1603, the queen mother (*valide sultan*) took priority over the grand vizier and religious leadership in organising the succession of the boy-sultan Ahmed. Until the rise of the Köprülü grand viziers in the 1650s, the *valide sultan* would remain a dominant figure, in government as well as in

26 Wu, *Passage to Power*, 31; Spence, *Emperor of China*, 123-139; Haboush, *Confucian Kingship in Korea*, 230-232; see a portrayal of the rising tensions between King Yongjo and prince Sado from the perspective of Sado's wife in Haboush, *The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong*, 241-336; Bushkovitch, *Power and the Historian*; Bushkovitch, *Peter the Great*, 339-425.

27 Wu, *Passage to Power*, 56-59; 69-70.

28 Among many examples: Ethiopian empress-dowager imprisoned her son's wife; Valide Sultan Turhan Hatice (Mehmed IV's mother) had Murad IV's mother Kösem Sultan strangled; see Duindam, *Dynasties*, 218 note 173, 122 and the literature cited there.

29 Ebrey, *Succession to High Office*, 56-59.

30 This argument is elaborated in Fanny Cosandey's dossier for the *Habilitation à diriger des recherches*, see for example Cosandey, *Puissance maternelle et pouvoir politique*.

31 Richards, *Social Mechanisms*, 183-184; Duindam, *Dynasties*, 146-148.

matters of succession. ›Inner court power‹, a mixture of women, eunuchs, and preferred companions emerged as a counterforce against the established powers of outside dignitaries, most notably the grand viziers whose tenure had now become short and insecure.³²

Inner court power, leaving few formal records and taking shape in quarters inaccessible to most, remains somewhat impenetrable. Who controlled the situation there? The ruler or his servants and favourites? The death of rulers could be kept secret by close attendants, pre-empting outsiders by deciding the succession before they could intervene. ›Outside‹ administrators complained about the inner court and used it as a comfortable scapegoat: rulers listening only to women and eunuchs rather than to their stern advisors inevitably fell prey to decline and dissolution. In 1666, after the death of Safavid Shah Abbas II, a court eunuch inverted these labels when he accused the leading outer court councillors of appointing a very young prince only to retain power in their own hands: his insistent plea led to the succession of a more mature prince – who in the end became a victim of inner-outer court rivalry.³³ A remarkable variant of inner court power can be found in several South African kingdoms. Competing candidates for the throne needed to be of pure royal blood as well as to have rain-making powers. However, a final test awaited them. Only the candidate able to open the door of ›a special hut in which the previous ruler had died‹ would be acclaimed as the legitimate heir. The act of ›the opening of the door‹ was seen as a divine ratification, but it was effected by a person inside the hut – an apt emblem for inner court power as seen elsewhere.³⁴

More distant groups stepped in as kingmakers. Throughout history, palace guards were a necessary weapon in the hands of kingmaking elites, and they could have their own priorities. Whether or not guards interfered in the succession process, they were likely to expect accession donatives from the new ruler. Satisfying the household troops by paying donatives was arguably the essential moment in the series of accession rites of Ottoman sultans.³⁵ The janissary household infantry, however, also formed a *trait d'union* with Istanbul guilds, crafts and, arguably, public opinion. All dignitaries needed to ensure the loyalty of the household troops – and sometimes they used the tensions persisting between the *sipahi* household cavalry and the janissaries.

Where leading officeholders, religious dignitaries, and councils of elders had established roles as kingmakers, their first priority was to maintain this position and prevent fixed hereditary procedures as well as free designation by the incumbent king. Once there was a choice, there was potential for negotiation, confirmation of privileges, and specific compensations. Acclamation traditionally formed part of the kingship traditions in Europe, either with an element of choice effected by a group of dignitaries, or as an embellishment of hereditary succession. The succession of the two supreme dignities of pope and emperor was fixed in elective procedures in the later Middle Ages. The electors of the Empire, after 1519, used every election to confirm their position vis-à-vis the new emperor, and made sure their requests were registered in print. Monarchies in Scandinavia and Central Europe alternated between heredity and election, with Poland developing the largest-scale and longest-lasting example of royal elections, whereas heredity became stronger elsewhere. In the Mamluk sultanate the election of a new sultan from among the emirs alternated with phases of hered-

32 Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, and the articles by Börekçi cited in note 10.

33 Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 35, 56-58; see a short version of the story in *Kämpfer, Am Hofe des persischen Grosskönigs*, ed. Hinz, 37-38, and a detailed version with speeches and letters in Chardin, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin en Perse*, ed. Langlès, 397-573, with the key speech of the eunuch-tutor at 435-437.

34 Krige, *Divine Kingship*, 60.

35 Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty*, 86.

itary succession. In the fifteenth century, ›one generation rule‹ and election was reconfirmed as the basis of the Mamluk state.³⁶ In the Mongol context, acclamation by the council (*kuriltai*) was a necessary condition of rule, but it mixed with the incumbent khan's powers of designation and a preference for primogeniture. The same conflicting traditions can be found in the Russian case until the early nineteenth century. Throughout Africa, many forms of kingship can be found, with greatly diverging kingly powers; yet councils were present in most polities and they expected to be consulted on succession. While the Asante queen mother (*asantehemaa*) was a powerful force deciding succession, kingship here remained contingent on the support of elders and the population. A king (*asantehene*) who was widely seen as incompetent or debauched risked destoolment. Kings handing over their stool, the symbol of their rule, voluntarily were treated graciously, while others faced a painful process of destoolment: ›... he might have his Stool suddenly pulled from beneath him, so that his buttocks came in contact with the ground; he was also liable to be dragged on the ground; he was abused and slapped by the women and children.‹³⁷

II. Legitimacy

Methods of succession, reproduction, affiliation, and the practices of kingmaking created very different types of dynasties. Each of these categories could stimulate inclusive or exclusive dynasties, engendering alternation and diffusion, or, conversely, the concentration of power and wealth. For Aristotle's view of *dynasteia* as competing families tending towards hereditary power, many examples can be cited in constellations that we normally see as typically monarchical. Indeed, in this respect the line between monarchy and aristocracy (or, following Montesquieu, between monarchy and republic) could be very gradual. Dynasties were present across the political spectrum – from the famous republics in Europe and African kingdoms with alternating paramount leadership to the Chinese empire or full-blown hereditary European kingdoms. Elective kingship, no exception in history, likewise suggests that rule by one person could go together with the alternation of competing dynasties. Extending the idea of dynasty from paramount rulers to elites, it becomes even more pervasive. Kingdoms and empires were constructed as pyramids of households, hierarchically ordered networks of families connected by ties of loyalty and the expectation of compensation. Royal power everywhere relied on the distribution of honours through these networks, centred on the court. None of the strikingly different methods of elite recruitment and elite legitimation – including heredity, enslavement, and examinations – could prevent the overall strength of patrimonialism and patronage.

Dynasty, in this wider sense, was the prevalent mould of leadership as well as the model for most elites. Yet how important was pedigree as a source of legitimacy for ruling houses? Did rulers present ancestors and genealogy as the main underpinning of their authority? Family, inheritance, and succession were not necessarily dominant here.

Dynastic longevity and cyclical views

Considering dynasties in history, we tend to concentrate on a few remarkable cases: Ottomans, Habsburgs, or the Japanese imperial line. In Africa, usually more marginal in discussions of dynasty, the Solomonids of Ethiopia or the Sefuwa dynasty of Kanem-Bornu around Lake Chad can be added. These families, it seems, were able to cling to power over many centuries. On closer in-

36 See Whitaker, *Regal Succession among the Dálriata*; McGowan, *Royal Succession in Earlier Medieval Ireland*; Frost, *Monarchy in Northern and Eastern Europe*; Wolf, *Königliche Töchterstämme*; Levanoni, *Mamluk Conception of the Sultanate*, 385.

37 Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 146.

spection, demographic mishaps rapidly patched up by ad hoc responses can be found behind the continuity of these dynasties. Reproductive crises in the family were frequently solved by adoption, as was the case in Japan; historic continuity could be suggested by appropriating the names and deeds of earlier dynasties, as was practiced by the Solomonic dynasty. Most dynasties, as most other families, did not last very long. Elite families were always torn between safeguarding continuity by having many children and maintaining status and wealth by reducing the numbers of children – or alternatively, as we have seen, by curtailing the rights of numerous progeny. In addition, sovereign rule brought the risk of death on the battlefield or in palace coups.

Dynastic longevity was the exception. Roman imperial dynasties, created through adoption and marriage and depending on the acclamation of the soldiery, were, on the whole, short lived. This pattern continued in the Byzantine Empire: the long list of emperors reigning between 395 and 1453 includes only three dynasties able to maintain their hold on the throne for more than a century.³⁸ Several Chinese dynasties lasted substantially longer, as can be seen in the table below.³⁹

Han	202 BCE-CE 220
Tang	618-906
Song	960-1276
Ming	1368-1644
Qing	1644-1911

These five dynasties, all lasting more than 250 years, were flanked by numerous less-enduring dynasties as well as by chaotic ›times of troubles‹. Among the Islamic Caliphal dynasties, only the Abbasids matched, or trumped, Chinese dynastic longevity. Interestingly, supreme caliphal status persisted after the tenth century, even though the dynasty no longer was a major political and military actor. After the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 an Abbasid ›puppet caliph‹ was brought to Cairo, in support of the Mamluk Sultan's legitimacy. The Mamluks, Turkic slave-soldiers ruling an Arabic population, prolonged the presence of the nominal Abbasid caliph in Cairo until the Ottoman conquest of 1517. Henceforth, the Ottomans used the title in their diplomacy, though without the benefit of an Abbasid pawn.⁴⁰ In Japan imperial authority was inviolable, but actual power was wielded by others: regents, retired emperors, or shoguns. The separation of reigning and ruling, and the sacred character of the supreme sovereign, may help to explain the exceptional longevity of the imperial dynasty.⁴¹

Overall, the lifespan of a dynasty was a fraction only of longer-lasting religious and imperial traditions. Dynasties, in fact, were expected to come and go, to ascend to power through violence, restore a righteous order, gradually submit to a process of moral degeneration that entailed increasing luxury and exploitation of the people, and finally fall prey to a vigorous rebel who would establish a new dynasty, resuming the same sequence. ›Prestige‹, Ibn Khaldun stated in the introduction to his world history, ›lasts at best four generations in

38 On the Macedonian, Komnenian, and Palaiologan dynasties; see Bréhier, *Institutions de l'Empire byzantine*, 1-52; for an overview of the imperial institution, the family, and changing modes of succession; a brief discussion of the principle of dynasty in Byzantium can be found in Pazdernik, *Dynasty*.

39 Ebrey, *Succession to High Office*, 51.

40 On the Ottoman use of the caliphal dignity, mostly in competition with the pretensions of the Moroccan Sa'di sharifs, see El Moudden, *Idea of the Caliphate*.

41 Shilloney, *Enigma of the Emperors*.

one lineage.⁴² This rule, he argued, held true for royal dynasties as well as for tribal leaders and nobles, and even for urban ›houses‹; the only exception was the prophet himself. Any ruler forgetting that his personal humility and respect were the foundation for the people's obedience, Ibn Khaldun noticed, would in the end lose power. Cyclical moral-religious views were equally strong in China. Dynasties would risk losing the ›Mandate of Heaven‹ once they disregarded the well-being of the people. The Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang feared his sons' wrongdoings would undo his mandate:

»People are the mandate of Heaven. He who has virtue Heaven will give it to him and people will follow. If he does not have [virtue], Heaven will withdraw [the mandate] and people will leave him. Now Zhou, Qi, Tan and Lu [Zhu's sons] have indiscriminately bullied and humiliated the soldiers and the people in their fiefs, will Heaven take away the mandate from them?«⁴³

Religious sanction

Dynastic power was always, in one way or another, related to a higher, religious underpinning. I cannot find examples where this element was absent, whereas it clearly occupied a central place in most kingship traditions. In the case of the caliphs and the sharifs, descent from the Quraysh and the prophet's inherited religious authority were inextricably mixed with dynastic prestige. More often dynasties strove to demonstrate their legitimacy by connecting their house to religious traditions. The Habsburgs appropriated the legend of Leopold Margrave of Austria and strove to have this imaginary forebear canonised; French royalty could look back on Saint Louis. Religious occasions, stressing the humility of all before god, made room for petitioning and pardoning in Europe as well as in the Islamic world. In Europe, traditions such as the Royal Touch and the Maundy Thursday *Pedilavium* underlined the connections between royalty and divinity. The reciting of the Friday Prayer sermon (*khutba*) in the name of the ruler (sometimes with his predecessors) accompanying the rise to power of new leaders in the Islamic world was as important as the minting of coins with their image. These practices indicated sovereign royal power: they were not typical for any particular dynasty, neither were they specifically dynastic.

The magical-religious underpinning of dynastic power was particularly strong in Africa and China. The sacrificer-emperor safeguarded the harmony of heaven and earth: seasons, floods, droughts, epidemics, and cosmic events were all seen as depending on the emperor's moral rectitude and correct performance of rites. The relative seclusion of Chinese emperors in the inner court and their curious mixture of stylised omnipotence and frequent reliance on the rule of senior advisors, bring to mind instances of African ritual kingship. The ominous powers of ritual kings made necessary many precautions: nobody should directly meet the king's gaze; the king's feet should not touch the ground and royals needed to be moved by their dignitaries, usually within a very limited perimeter. Yet the king's responsibilities for weather, harvest, and the harmony between ancestors and living were awesome.⁴⁴ Rain-making sacrifices formed part of the Chinese emperor's ritual portfolio.⁴⁵ In 1832, during a drought persisting in spite of the Daoguang emperor's zealous ritual activity, the supreme ruler considered himself responsible: ›I tremble as I consider the causes of the drought: the fault must be mine.«⁴⁶ The capacity to make rain and withhold it from rivals was seen as the

42 Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 105.

43 Chan, Ming Taizu's Problem with His Sons, 87.

44 See a lucid summary in Blier, *Royal Arts of Africa*, 29.

45 See a recent discussion in Snyder-Reinke, *Dry Spells*.

46 Rawski, *Last Emperors*, 227. On Carolingians and religious-moral responsibility, see De Jong, *Penitential State*.

strongest weapon in the hands of the Lovedu rain-queen, whose qualities gave rise to the only example of protracted female succession on the throne in recent history. This parallel between the status of the ritual ruler in China and Africa suggests that scale and development are not necessarily always the best criteria for comparison.

Conquerors and imperial continuity; charisma, Veralltäglicdung, and decline

The cyclical view in China fitted with a long-term and relatively consistent imperial-political culture that started with the legendary sage-kings, was rephrased and consolidated by the writers of the warring states period, to be reinvented and canonised at various points in Chinese history. Conquest dynasties undoubtedly maintained their own traditions in governing their own peoples as well as tributaries, and imposed some of their practices on the Chinese population – the Qing queue comes to mind here. Yet in ruling the Middle Kingdom, they all necessarily accepted core elements of the Chinese imperial tradition, including the ideal of unity, the central role of the emperor, the political predominance of literati advisors at the centre and in local networks, and the legitimacy of popular rebellion against an exploitative ruler, as a consequence of the mandate of heaven.⁴⁷ The combination of Roman and Christian legacies dominated the changing patchwork of kingdoms and empires in Europe. From Rome via Charlemagne to Napoleon, rulers with imperial ambitions hijacked the Graeco-Roman mythology and the imperial tradition to strengthen their legitimacy. At the same time, they were all part and parcel of the Christian tradition. This overarching framework, and the artefacts, formulae and social practices pertaining to rule in each of the smaller competing European polities, were more important than specific dynastic prestige – or, more accurately, dynasties were successful because they were able to render self-evident the connection between their house and these powerful traditions.⁴⁸

Everywhere dynastic power was a bric-à-brac of personal and familial merits with long-standing traditions and earlier examples, not necessarily coherent over time and varying according to occasions and audiences. The Qing, in particular, were *virtuosi* in the combination of many rulership styles: their dynastic communication differentiated between Han Chinese and various peripheral peoples. Whereas the dynastic cycle and the mandate of heaven allowed the consolidation of outside conquerors (notably the Yuan and Qing) as well as social upstarts (the Han and Ming founders), violent succession elsewhere was more often covered by appropriating the accumulated history of preceding dynasties. New dynasties posed as successors of prestigious earlier houses, through farfetched genealogies, by paying cultural obeisance to these dynasties, or by cultivating ties in practice. Timur employed a male Chinggisid ›puppet-khan‹ at his court and married a Chinggisid princess, adopting the title of son-in-law of his great example. Unable to claim the caliphate, he showed great respect for Islamic tradition and demonstrated his zeal by building monuments. In addition his personal legend, the hero rising from rags to world power, took precedence over the modest dynastic claims of his own Chaghadayid house.⁴⁹

The example of Chinggis raises the question how personal dynamism relates to institutional consolidation. Conquerors and founders reached power as outsiders, yet their example would be imitated – by their progeny as well as by wholly unrelated princes. Founders started out as heterodox rebels grabbing power in a moment of disorder and social mobility; moving to the throne they rewarded their companions and restored order. Once they were in power the confirmation

47 See the powerful synthesis by Pines, *Everlasting Empire*. Note that Pines presents these continuities as ideas rather than as reality, establishing a middle way between the older assumption of Chinese cultural continuity and numerous critics who rightly pointed out the immense changes and movements in Chinese history.

48 See on genealogy and other components of dynastic legitimacy Pohl, *Genealogy*.

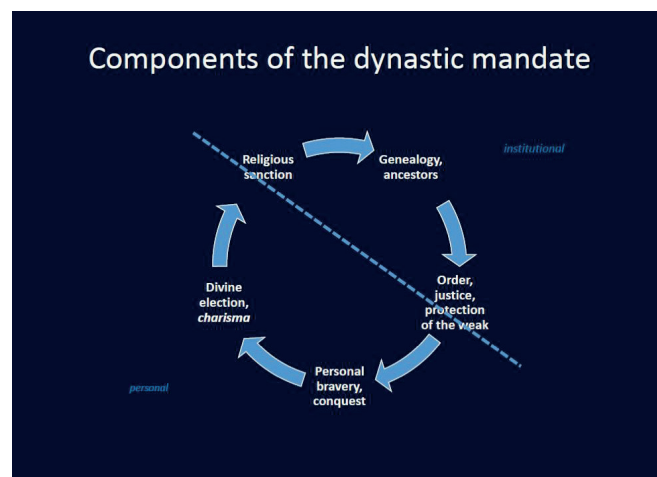
49 Manz, *Tamerlane's Career and Its Uses*; Manz, *Tamerlane and the Symbolism of Sovereignty*.

of tradition became imperative. Pacification and consolidation under succeeding generations entailed the proliferation of administrators and institutions. Administrative institutions took away a share of the burdens of ruling – and in the process also reduced the personal power of the figure at the heart of the constellation. These successors, *nourris dans le serail*, might have been at pains to emulate the personal heroism (and violence) of the founder but often lacked the mentality and the conditions. The personal charisma of individual rulers (most often founders) and the institutional legitimacy created through continuity and tradition can be found in most dynasties.

Were short-living dynasties the building-blocks of persisting imperial traditions? Did empires survive many dynasties? Although the Roman-Byzantine and Chinese traditions seem to suggest this strongly, the idea is misleading. At the political level discontinuities and change characterised empires as well as dynasties: alternating phases of expansion and retraction, integration and devolution, can be found in most empires. At the level of cultural traditions a *longue durée* was present, though it was neither uniform nor unchanging. A mixed bag of conventions, images, and artefacts, varying according to political contingencies and personal preferences, could show remarkable persistence. Conversely, the sudden rise of conspicuously successful founders – Constantine, Chinggis, Timur – could give rise to lasting legacies, even if the empires of these founders tended to collapse in one or two generations.

Forms and audiences

The dynastic mandate everywhere echoed the requirements of good rulership: religious sanction, pedigree (combined with religious sanction in the case of the caliphs and sharifs), good governance (particularly justice and the protection of the weak), bravery on the battlefield, which in the form of battle luck could be read as divine election.⁵⁰ East Asian models of rulership stressed the exemplary moral rectitude and ritual propriety of the ruler and made less room for martial heroism – but individual emperors might have disagreed and founders came to the throne through violence by definition.



50 Globally many terms relate to the European concept of charisma, with its double meaning of divine election and personal magnetism. Farr-i Izadi (divine spark, divine effulgence) is often mentioned in the context of Persian kingship, see e.g. Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, xxx, xxxiii, 21, 26, 132, 211; on divine blessing or charisma (*barakat*) as being hereditary see 214, 295; both terms can also be found in Mitchell, *Am I my brother's keeper?*, 45-47. A Turco-Mongol variant can be found in Turkish *kut*, fortune or battle luck, see Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty*, 57; Mongol *Qutlug* was included in the titles of many rulers. *Wahyu* (divine inspiration or consent) is mentioned in Moertono, *State and Statecraft in Old Java*, 60-61; *tuah* (fortune) in Andaya, »A very good-natured but awe-inspiring government«, 63; the comparable concepts of *wahyu* and *perwaba* are discussed in Ras, *Geschiedschrijving en de legitimiteit*, 536.

Celebrations, festivities, and daily court rituals showed the dignity of rulership to outsiders. East Asian rulers were on the whole far more secluded and less interactive than their West Asian, South Asian, and European compeers. A similarly withdrawn style can be found in some more ritualised examples of African kingship. Neither in China nor in Japan was the image of the ruler present on minted coins, as it was in West-South Asia and Europe. There is no room to examine these differences at greater length here. Neither can I spend much time on the overstated opposition between the instrumental (>fabrication<) and the affective understanding (>mentalities<) of ritual. Contemporaries were well aware of the practical impact of a flamboyant show, even if, at the same time, they were deeply touched by it.⁵¹ Rituals in China or Japan, performed in isolation by the emperor and his staff, would be timed according to familiar calendars, and the absence of spectators did not mean that these events passed unnoticed.

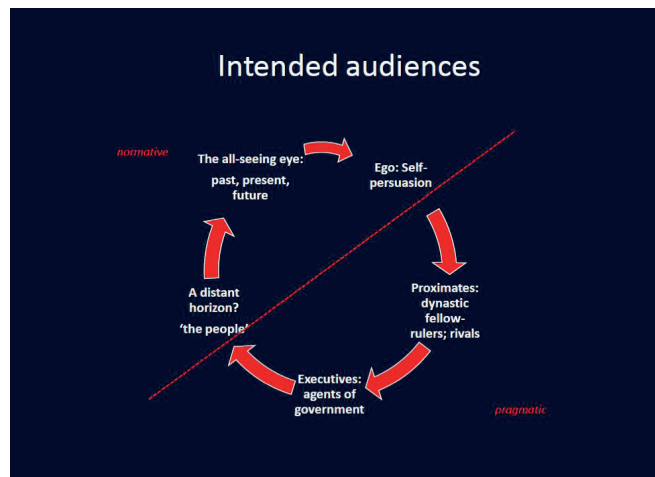
There is a certain resonance in actions undertaken by new rulers to confirm their position.⁵² Accession rites, proclamations, the granting of amnesties, donatives for key groups at the centre, visits to ancestral tombs and religious shrines, redefining the connection with intermediary elites and major urban centres (either at court or by moving to these centres) could be found across the globe. In many regions new princes would feel the need to show their prowess by engaging a major campaign – but there are important regional differences here: Chinese literati advisors would argue strongly against such >adventures<.⁵³ Everywhere the need to conclude marital alliances or in any case to rapidly produce an heir would be essential, confirming the continuation of the line. In addition to these acts, a variety of artefacts would broadcast the fame of the prince: buildings, stelae, inscriptions, coins; dynastic genealogies and *res gestae*, stories about prophecies and omens.

A listing of such acts and artefacts can continue *ad libitum*. Who were the intended audiences of this ongoing representation of royalty? This question could be answered using an image common in studies of the royal court: concentric circles. The ruler himself stands at the heart, his social proximates – close-by and more distant – form a first inner ring, followed by agents of government and intermediary elites. In the penultimate ring, the rather amorphous category of >the people< can be positioned. The people appear to be almost synonymous with the normative underpinning of the whole framework: the mandate of heaven. Finally, the all-seeing eye of heaven, ancestors, and successors, would have appeared to many rulers with great force – as an inner eye scrutinising their behaviour. Did they do justice to the people?

51 These points are discussed at some length in Duindam, *Dynasties*, chapters 3 and 4.

52 See the classic study by Hocart, *Kingship*, and this detailed typology of coronations.

53 Ebrey, Remonstrating against Royal Extravagance; Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*.



The same sequence is depicted above in a slightly different way. A prince can grab power by force, compel the recognition and respect of proximates and agents of government with a mixture of force and rewards, but at some point he will need to face the normative expectations of rulership, tied closely to just government and the well-being of the people. We have seen that even powerful and violent founders such as Zhu Yuanzhang were deeply concerned about the mandate of heaven. Self-scrutiny may have come late for many of these men of action, but it was very much part of their worldview and could be expected to have an impact. They used violence and actively ›fabricated‹ their rulership, but in the end they needed to convince themselves of their legitimacy.

Montesquieu connected fear to despotism, honour to monarchy, and virtue to the republic. Honour, in Montesquieu's reading, was close to honours in plural, to the distribution of graces and privileges among a mixed group of beneficiaries; the *corps intermédiaires*. Much to Montesquieu's regret, he could no longer trace real virtue in the republics of his own age. Apparently politics could no longer be built only on the foundation of the virtuous normative compliance of their elites. Rereading these categories with a modern post-Weberian view of power and legitimacy, it seems obvious that all categories were necessarily present in all types of states: coercion or enforced compliance; interests or pragmatic compliance; and ideals or normative compliance. Surely all three were essential for dynastic legitimacy, in varying proportions and always depending on the constellation of personalities, political contingency, and traditions.

III. Conclusion

Families have been building blocks of societies throughout history.⁵⁴ Kinship, inheritance, and succession are relevant for all layers of these societies. Dynasty is the family writ large, yet when do we label a family as a dynasty? Only if the family holds sovereign power for several generations, lives in a palace, employs numerous domestics and state servants? The modern definition of dynasty, formed in a phase of European history where pedigree became more rather than less important, where heredity and primogeniture became the norm, and where a limited number of royal houses were associated with the states they had been ruling for some time, is surely too restrictive. It underlines one aspect of dynasty: the gradual *concentration* of power.

54 See the influential volume edited by Sabeau *et al.*, *Kinship in Europe*.

The first part of this paper shows the variety of kinship and succession arrangements across the globe. It highlights the *diffusion* of power where paramount rule circulated among a wider pool of candidates that can still be seen as a dynasty – or as a conglomerate of competing dynasties. It examines the various connections created through marital alliances and harems, pointing to the relevance of male as well as female lines. The prevalence of king-makers in many capacities – from formal electors to inner court agents and guards – shows that dynastic power could be a collective venture. Yet even rulers styled as omnipotent and autocratic were surrounded by a mixed group of stakeholders. These pillars of dynastic power were willing to perform their obeisance but keen to defend their position and often able to manipulate their princes.⁵⁵ All larger premodern polities relied on the active participation of *corps intermédiaires*. They can be pictured as a pyramid of families, or households, related hierarchically through ties of fidelity, service, and reward. The static and normative differentiation between monarchy and aristocracy is not very helpful here; neither does it assist intercultural comparison. Aristotle's ›rule of the powerful‹, pointing to a limited number of competing families, was relevant for many monarchies as well as for aristocracies or oligarchies.⁵⁶

Dynasty, in this sense, was broader than its classical definition allows. Yet it was always part of a larger story in which the family occupied a more modest place. No dynasty ever was a straightforward demographic fact: dynasties maintained continuity through impromptu measures and safeguarded legitimacy by stressing permanence and tradition. The second part of this paper stresses that pedigree and lineage usually were a minor component only of the ideals and practices of rulership. In many traditions there was a clear expectation of frequent dynastic change, as an inevitable and desirable reinvigoration of more lasting political and cultural models. While usurpers were at pains to establish the correct antecedents for their family, dynasties never prided themselves only on their longevity in supreme office. They were accepted as legitimate on the basis of a far more diverse portfolio of conventions and traditions. Ultimately, the key criterion of legitimate power was the well-being of the people. This standard undoubtedly was rarely achieved in practice, but as a normative horizon it was present for rulers as well as subjects. Princes may have been ruthless conquerors, virtuoso manipulators, and keen propagandists, yet in the end they could not escape the all-seeing eye.

Dynasty was ubiquitous in history and is well-suited for global comparison. It needs to be taken seriously as a category for research, but surely not only according to its own fictitious standards. This comparison does not stop before the contemporary age: dynasty is still markedly present in politics as well as in business.⁵⁷ Finally, studying the variable but remarkably consistent patterns around dynastic rulers in the premodern age may tell us something about power and representation in our own age.

55 The limited agency of rulers and the permanent intervention of others at court is one of the themes of Duindam, *Dynasties*.

56 This conclusion fits observations in Drews *et al.*, *Monarchische Herrschaftsformen der Vormoderne*, e.g. 173.

57 Examples of modern-day dynasties (apart from European constitutional monarchies or dynastic polities in the Arabic world and in South-East Asia): Montefiore, *Stalin*; Baker, *Family of Secrets*; Martin, *Under the Loving Care*; examples from the business world can be found in Pina-Cabral and Pedrosa de Lima, *Elites*; see also the thirteen business dynasties in Landes, *Dynasties*.

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Nations, Tribes, Peoples, and States¹

Susan Reynolds*

In recent years, there has been considerable debate on whether the term ›nation‹ can be applied to kingdoms or states of the Latin West. Nationalist movements are indeed a modern phenomenon, and medieval kingdoms and polities differed from modern states in many organisational and administrative respects. But, as argued here, the medieval kingdoms were independent states and shared key features of what are now called nation-states, creating allegiances notionally defined by custom, law, and descent. Thus, this contribution addresses the words and concepts that framed these allegiances, and their changes over time.

Keywords: nations; states; tribes; political organisation; medieval Europe.

Nations: I start with the word. Its everyday use varies: it is often applied to what I would rather call ›states‹. What are called international relations are relations between states. The United Nations is an association of states, that is, areas under independent governments, but the newly independent states of North America had appropriated the title of ›United States‹ long before the UN started, so the UN could not use it. English, unlike German, has another confusion as we call the process of *Verstaatlichen* ›nationalization‹. The everyday use of words and their meanings cannot be controlled. If we want to discuss nations and their history, we need to start by thinking what each of us means by words in our own languages and whether we understand each other's meanings, especially if we want to make comparisons between different periods of history, different languages and countries (another word used in various quite different senses), and even maybe different disciplines. I cannot say what is the right use of the word and nor can anyone. I can only say what I mean by it.

So, by *nation* I mean a section of human society, generally one which is, or once was, a unit of government which those within it, or some of them, believe is a natural community that, if it is not an independent state, they think ought to be an independent state. The belief in a natural community is often based on ideas or myths of their common biological descent and of a shared history and culture, including common customs and (where it fits) language. Some, however, may think that their nation is a voluntary community which has made or is making its own culture despite the different origins of its members.

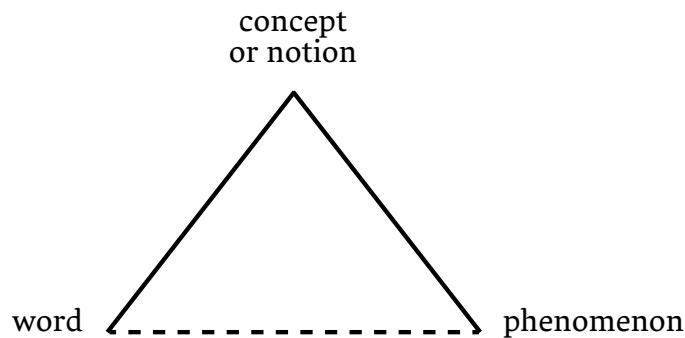
I use *state* for an organization of human society within a more or less fixed area in which the ruler or governing body more or less successfully controls the legitimate use of physical force, especially against persons. This is adapted from Max Weber by inserting ›more or less‹ because no state is totally successful in controlling its borders or the people inside it, and changing ›monopoly‹ to ›control‹ because some states allow individuals to use force on others in ways and circumstances that are considered legitimate in that state.² A state makes its own rules and enforces them.

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1 This paper was first presented at the conference ›Identity, Ethnicity and Nationhood before Modernity: Old Debates and New Perspectives‹ at Oxford in April 2015, and has since been edited for publication in this journal.

2 Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 122-125.

It may help to start our attempt at analysis and mutual comprehension if we distinguish the *word* which any of us uses in our own language from the *notion* or *concept* that one has in one's mind when one uses it, which may well be different from what one's hearer or reader understands by it; and both from the *phenomenon* either word or concept represents: that is, some actual collective group, past or present, which can better be distinguished from others, irrespective of both word or notion, by describing its characteristics and powers. About forty years ago, when I was struggling with the problem of words, I found the following diagram by Ogden and Richards extremely helpful:³



Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand has considered it in connection with associations in medieval German towns.⁴

It is sometimes said that the use of the *word* state for an independent unit of government is modern, but that does not mean that there could not have been any phenomena that fitted my adaptation of Max Weber's definition before whatever date at which one considers ›modern‹ times to have started. Past governments were different from modern governments, and they were thought about differently, but modern states in any case differ in their government and in the ways people think about them. And the same goes for variations in the word, concept, and phenomenon of the nation – or the tribe.

States are real phenomena – objective facts: we live in them and under their governments, and can be punished according to their laws, irrespective of the word used to denote them or whether anyone has a clear concept of the state. Nations are harder to see as objective facts, since some which are called nations are not even subordinate units of government while people in them may disagree about what nation they belong to: some Bretons think their nation is Brittany, not France; the UK is often called a nation-state and some of its inhabitants think it forms a single nation, but others think it contains three or four distinct nations. Some nations are also states, but some are not. I nevertheless hope that we may agree that a vital characteristic of what is called a nation now is that its members, or some of them, *think* that it has the right to be a state – that is, an independent unit of government: hence the movements and

3 Ogden and Richards, *Meaning of Meaning*, 13-15; further discussions in e.g. Lyons, *Semantics*, 95-119, 175; Tallis, *Not Saussure*, 114-116.

4 Schmidt-Wiegand, *Die Bezeichnungen Zunft und Gilde*, 31-52; Schmidt-Wiegand, *Historische Onomasiologie und Mittelalterforschung*, 49-78; Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*, 12-14, and more fully in Reynolds, *Use of Feudalism*.

wars to achieve that status. Nations are, in Benedict Anderson's words, ›imagined communities‹.⁵ That does not mean that they are or were unimportant or unreal. Belief and imagination can create feelings of community, so as to promote cohesion and unforced obedience, which all states need from at least some of their inhabitants. State and nation may coincide, but they are different.

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So much for our (or rather my) words, concepts, and phenomena. When we come to look at those of the past, we all have different amounts of knowledge about different periods and societies. I try to do the history of western Europe in the Middle Ages, but that covers a thousand years, and my knowledge of it is patchy both in chronology and geography. But one thing I am sure about: that medieval people did not always use words consistently or uniformly any more than modern people do: it is even more unrealistic to start from ›definitions‹ of important words in the Middle Ages. I have also taken a few rash looks at other continents and periods, but most of what I shall say about any bit of history could be corrected by some others. Still, I shall try to set out arguments that I think may be helpful if only in provoking corrections that will advance my knowledge and maybe the knowledge of others, and generally make us all think. I start with some very elementary social anthropology.

Human beings are, by and large, social beings, but their large brains and their use of language make them variable and awkward in their sociability. Even in very small societies of hunter-gatherers (*Jäger und Sammler*), individuals may develop separate and possibly conflicting desires and interests. They therefore need to practice some sort of politics, in the sense of organizing their collective life and developing rules and customs about it.⁶ Then, in the slightly richer and larger pastoral societies that sometimes develop, men with larger flocks, families and servants or slaves may join with other flock-rulers to develop customs and rules by which they together control and, if necessary, coerce all their families and followers.

Although such small groups have often exercised coercive force according to their norms and customs, most historians do not think of them either as states or as nations, perhaps due to the fact that they look too small and, above all, too ›primitive‹. The words tribe, *tribus*, *Stamm* etc. seem to have first been applied to what were seen as ›primitive‹ and ›pre-state‹ units of government in the eighteenth century. I avoid them, not only because their use in ordinary conversation is even more variable than that of state or nation, but because the anthropologists who study the phenomena argue among themselves about it.⁷ Maybe we could simply see these small, ›primitive‹ groups as one kind of ›people‹, following the Oxford Dictionary's definition of one sense of ›people‹ as ›The body of men, women, and children comprising a particular nation, ethnic group, etc.‹, with particular emphasis on that ›etc.‹ We could then try to focus less on the word and more on the evidence of the distinguishing characteristics of the phenomena we are talking about.⁸

These small societies are sometimes said to be egalitarian. They certainly have lower hierarchies than do larger, richer, and more complex societies, but the equality is often only between senior men who are the heads of relatively large and prosperous households, exclud-

5 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Friend, *Stateless Nations*, 2-6.

6 Clastres, *Society Against the State*; Lapierre, *Vivre sans état*; Woodburn, *Egalitarian Societies*, 431-451; Barnard, *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa*.

7 Reynolds, *Vocabularies for Comparative and Interdisciplinary History*.

8 *Oxford English Dictionary*: people II. 6; On medieval ›peoples‹: Davies, *The Peoples of Britain and Ireland*: I-IV.

ing not only women and servants or slaves, but also maybe the adult sons of the dominant men.⁹ Although most, if not all, of those who belong in this sort of society probably assume the right and duty of such men to coerce the rest when it is thought just, they do not have the resources to coerce everyone all the time. All governments rely on more or less voluntary submission of most of their subjects to most of the rules most of the time. If a society does not have guns and sophisticated means of communication it relies on it even more. Voluntary submission seems often to have been achieved by fostering solidarity and social cohesion. Historians, especially modern historians, sometimes assume that solidarity and unity go along with modern ideas of equality; but solidarity may in some ways be easier to achieve if it goes along with acceptance of inequality and hierarchy.

Solidarity and cohesion are also fostered by ideas of kinship. Some people in any kind of small community I am talking about would have genuinely close biological connections with each other or form them through marriage. Without permanent and official records it is easy to assume more distant links of kinship so as to absorb new groups or individuals. The units, whether you call them social or political, of such societies apparently seem natural, given communities both to their members and neighbours.¹⁰ Even if they look too small to be called nations, the belief or assumption that they are natural communities is very like the perception of nations. Since humans do not seem to be born with a belief in equality, and the inequalities in these small and poor societies form hierarchies which fit the communities, the hierarchy probably seems natural too. It gives women and even servants or slaves a natural and necessary place in what can seem a natural community to them too.

The bonds that such small societies assume often combine belief in their common kinship with ideas of their common customs, laws, and language. In other words people in them think of themselves as united by both biology and culture. Maybe they are, in a society small and isolated enough to correspond roughly to a breeding population, but the link between physical heredity and features like language that are acquired after birth has often continued to be assumed, even in large and complex societies. This was, and is, a fallacy, since cultural and biological characteristics are transmitted quite differently, but it was difficult to see that before the work of Gregor Mendel was rediscovered in 1900 and the study of genetics began. I cannot go into this here, and maybe need not, since I luckily left the word ›race‹ out of my title. But I might just point out that the past use of that word for a family, a nation, or almost any group or ›people‹ – even ›the human race‹ – illustrates the way that biological descent and culture were (and sometimes still are) assumed to go together. The word race therefore seems to me best avoided, though its replacement by ›ethnicity‹ (along with ›ethnic‹, ›ethnogenesis‹, and all the other ethne words) often seems to reflect the same conflation of biology and culture. Apart from words, moreover, the same conflation still survives in many of the myths treasured in ›national‹ histories. Not always: some scholars, like Walter Pohl, now make it quite clear that the conflation that they find in their sources was of ideas in the heads of the peoples they study, not in their own. But the distinction is not always made clearly, if at all.

In small and poor societies social solidarity, voluntary submission, and even harmony may be fairly adequately achieved with the help of ideas of common descent, customs, law, and history, but that becomes harder as societies become richer, larger, and more complex. Agriculture, to start with, brings more wealth and therefore more inequality and more need

9 But for women in early Icelandic society: Miller, ›*Why is Your Axe so Bloody?*‹, 90-94.

10 For an illustration of the speed with which histories to suit present solidarities can be invented and believed even in the record-keeping twentieth century: Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat*.

for decisions to be enforced according to the society's laws. Whose is any bit of land and who decides whose it is? And what about the rights, obligations, and control of those who work the land? As wealth increases, so then does trade, which involves more mixing of populations, more regulation and more government. Changes in technology, whether in agriculture, industry, transport and communications, or arms and warfare, all tend to make ideas of a common descent, kinship, and history more and more implausible. But they seem to survive wonderfully, becoming more elaborate and recorded, if in more subtle and refined forms, for instance in ideas of national character, in many national histories as they are taught and written today.

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For those who believe, as I do, that there were nations in medieval Europe – that is, political units that people *thought* of very much as they now think of nations – the collapse of the western part of the Roman Empire may be seen as the time of ›ethnogenesis‹ – the origin of the nations of modern Europe. This is Walter Pohl's field, not mine, and he has written cogently about the whole process and especially about the difficulty of distinguishing between ethnicity and sense of solidarity on the one hand and power politics on the other in the creation of new kingdoms.¹¹ Presumptuous as it may be even to say that I reckon that he is absolutely right, I would just like to add that the problem is not merely about which came first or was more important but about how to distinguish them: the formation of a sense of shared ethnicity is in itself political. It implies a solidarity that probably involves organization and management of collective affairs.¹²

What slightly concerns me about ideas of early medieval ethnogenesis is any suggestion that it was permanent or unique. The humans of Europe – and of other parts of Eurasia? – have been so good at forming, reshaping, and replacing any kind of what I shall call polities (that is, political units) that ethnogenesis has happened quite often. Some of the kingdoms or lesser lordships that appeared between the fifth and eighth centuries CE did not survive or survived only as subordinate layers of government. Although historians suffer a constant temptation to read their own solidarities into those of the past, especially when writing their own ›national‹ histories, the most nation-like polities of the past were not necessarily those that foreshadow our own, even if a modern state is called by the same name as a past kingdom or other polity.

All through the Middle Ages kingdoms were the archetype of independent polity and were thought to belong to their peoples as much or more as to their kings. In the eleventh century King Conrad II of Germany (soon to be emperor) was said to have reminded the people of Pavia that kingdoms survived their kings, just as ships remained when their captains died.¹³ In 1320 a letter probably written by a servant of the king of Scots, but with approval of the leading nobles of Scotland, stated that they were all descendants of Scythians who had come through the Pillars of Hercules to settle in poor little remote Scotland and would go on fighting for their independence against England even if their king gave up.¹⁴ Scotland held out

11 Pohl, Introduction – Strategies of Identification, 44-45; Wickham, Conclusions, 551-555; Gat, *Nations*, 3, 18-22.

12 Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, and Smith, *Nationalism*, 12-15, 116-120, however, thinks ethnicity came first.

13 Wipo, *Opera*, ed. H. Bresslau, 29-30.

14 Duncan, *Nation of Scots*.

against England better than Wales, not only because of their different geography and population, but because it was a kingdom. Even Edward I of England admitted that, though he referred to it on occasion as merely a land.

As methods of government developed during the Middle Ages, rulers worked through collective and consultative processes that moulded ethnic solidarities, both at regnal (that is, kingdom) level and at the level of provinces, lordships, counties, and even towns. As the kings of the Franks extended their territories, myths of the common origin of all Franks were extended to embrace everyone within the kingdom that came to be called France. Consultative government and collective solidarity did not imply anything like democracy or even demand for it: most complaints and rebellions by people at the bottom were for justice within the existing hierarchy, and, particularly in towns, for more consultation. Later in the Middle Ages consultation became more systematic, sometimes with elected representatives, but elections were, I think, still designed to represent whole groups or communities rather than numerical majorities of individuals. Stories developed in some European kingdoms of separate origins of nobles and peasants,¹⁵ but they do not seem to have replaced or even seriously eroded the idea of kingdoms or other units of government as natural political communities composed, not of equals, but of people of different status, all fitting into a natural hierarchy.

City-states, and even towns with only limited rights of self-government, show attributes of this kind of nationhood, with their own myths of common origin. That the common descent of a town's population could be taken for granted, however improbable constant immigration made it, is shown by an explanation of conflicts in Florence: at least one chronicler thought that they happened because Florentines were divided between descendants of noble Romans and rough Fiesolans.¹⁶ But despite the independence and fame of a few great cities, kingdoms were the archetypes of nations and kings were the archetypes of rulers. Emperors, incidentally, were always kings too.¹⁷

Leaving aside city-states if you think them too small to count as nations, medieval ideas about kingdoms suggest to me that the idea of a kingdom was very like the modern idea of a nation. If, as I argue, nations exist primarily, if not only, as ideas, then it seems reasonable to call at least some medieval kingdoms nations. England and France are sometimes referred to as the ›first national monarchies‹, while Len Scales has argued cogently for the sense of community in late medieval Germany, despite its political divisions.¹⁸ If any of them is seen as essentially a new development that may be because they seem to fit into the traditional teleology of their respective textbook histories – though England, of course, is actually not a state. Other medieval polities, like Saxony, or Florence, or even Bernicia, may have been just as vividly perceived at one time or another as natural, given political communities. Teleology does not help us to understand past societies, especially if they left few records.

Although I consider that medieval kingdoms, inside and outside Europe, along with some lordships and city-states, should qualify as nations, I do not argue that there was as yet anything that I would want to call nationalism. The ›ism‹ seems to me to imply a movement to achieve independence for what their leaders claim to be natural, given communities. What I think I find in the bits of the Middle Ages that I know anything about, was less

15 Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 59-104.

16 Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, 213.

17 Goetz, *Politisches Denken der Karolingerzeit*, 110-189.

18 Scales, *Shaping of German Identity*; cf. Hirschi, *Origins of Nationalism*, 12, *et passim*.

a movement to achieve independence than an assumption that existing kingdoms were in fact already natural, given communities – in effect what are now called nation-states. Some rebels wanted to replace their kings (and did so), and a few rebellious nobles maybe wanted to make their lordships into independent kingdoms, especially if some memory of past independence survived. On the whole, however, I reckon that existing units of government in Europe – and Asia? – were taken as natural, given communities, though with the usual arguments about borders that are bound to arise when people try to draw hard lines through territories within which people live and communicate together.

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I agree therefore that nationalism as a positive movement seems to date from the eighteenth century, as most historians of nationalism have maintained. Where I differ from them is that I cannot agree that earlier ethnic groups or what Eric Hobsbawm called ›proto-national communities‹, had, as he put it, ›no *necessary* relation with the unit of territorial political organisation which is a crucial criterion of what we understand as a ›nation‹ today.‹¹⁹ My argument on the contrary is that before the rise of nationalism there was, if anything, a closer connection between the political entity and the sense of community than there has been since. Ethnic communities had been shaped by polities under hierarchical, more or less collectivist, governments. Those polities were therefore, I suggest, more like ›nation-states‹ than are many modern states, since a modern nationalist's nation may merely *want* to be an independent political unit. I entirely accept the modernists' insistence on a connection between the modern idea of a nation and ideas of equality and popular government, even though actually not all so-called nation-states are democracies and few enjoy equality beyond the ballot box. But modern ideas of equality come from what seems to me a quite separate tradition of thought that developed only from the seventeenth century. It derived societies, law, and property from a ›social contract‹ made between separate and equal individuals who would otherwise be in a ›state of nature‹ without government.²⁰

This new idea did not kill the old idea of natural, given political communities, even though it came to demand that the structure of government inside them should be changed. Hugo Grotius, who produced what seems to me the best, as well as the first, full account of the state of nature and the social contract, nevertheless still cherished the myth of the free commonwealth of the ancient Batavians who were the ancestors of the free people of Holland. Incidentally, reading his Latin account alongside an English translation made about forty years later, made me even more aware of the problem of connecting words to the ideas behind them.²¹ As for the way that the new and old ideas came to be combined in the eighteenth century, I shall cite three examples that I have used before: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson, and Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès.²²

Rousseau's ideas about the state of nature and the social contract, however idiosyncratic, clearly derive from the new paradigm. His ideas about nations equally clearly do not. He thought that peoples or nations had originated as communities of custom and way of life –

19 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 47, also 4, 18, 63; cf. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 55; Smith, *Nationalism*, 80-97.

20 The rest of this paragraph is based on Reynolds, *Our Forefathers?*, 17-36; Reynolds, *Idea of the Nation*, 54-66; Reynolds, *Before Eminent Domain*, 132-138, with references in each.

21 Grotius, *Liber de antiquitate reipublicae Batavicae*; and Grotius, *A Treatise of the Antiquity of the Commonwealth*, trans. Woods.

22 Reynolds, *Before Eminent Domain*, 135-137.

what might now be called ethnic communities. Although they were now under governments that he thought illegitimate, they had long been political units that, though not always independent, had been regarded as natural and given.

Jefferson started the Declaration of Independence with two paragraphs setting out first the old idea and then the new. His first paragraph refers to peoples endowed by the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God with a political right to separate and independent government, even though the particular ›people‹ he was concerned with had hitherto been inter-connected by ›political bands‹ with another. What belonged unambiguously to the new paradigm and needed formal statement in the next paragraph, even though he claimed that it was self-evidently true, was the idea of the equality and rights that all men had had before the institution of government.

Lastly, in what has been called the most celebrated pamphlet of the French Revolution, Sieyès' *Qu'est-ce que le tiers état* suggests a more elaborate and perhaps more conscious combination of new and old. It declared that the nation was prior to everything, but was formed by individuals joining together so as to have a common or national will, and so could form a government. The nation on which he focused without hesitation was geographically coextensive with the eighteenth-century kingdom of France, though he counted only the Third Estate as its citizens. He thus reshaped the political structure of the nation, but the nation was still France, and could draw on many of its old solidarities, loyalties, and myths.

For all three of them, nations had always existed as political communities, however governed, but they *should* be governed by their ›people‹.

New ideas about nations also differed from the old because of a new emphasis on language. This is owed much to Germans, particularly Herder, who was no democrat but expressed clearly the belief that Germans, who spoke German and had once had the greatest kingdom of Europe, the inheritor of the Roman Empire, were a true people despite their current division between many states. Then, as ideas of democracy caught on, the need to educate voters and integrate minorities and immigrants made a common language ever more important. But ideas of nations still involved biological descent. Despite the invitation written on the Statue of Liberty to the huddled masses of the poor, and the undoubted character of the USA as a nation of immigrants, some Americans have always paid much attention to their various supposed ancestries – their Roots.

Much history is used, even by serious historians, to trace the way their national past led to the present. Myths are powerful and survive. In England, the eight hundredth anniversary of Magna Carta in 2015 evoked what seem to me wholly fictitious stories of the special and exemplary character of English liberty. We all need to compare our bits of history with other periods, other areas, and other disciplines in order to make sense of our own. If anyone shows that I have got things wrong, knowledge – at least my knowledge – will be advanced. We need to look hard at words like nation and state and kingdom and country and what we understand by them, so as to begin to distinguish what people in the past meant by whatever words they used, how they organized their societies and governments, how they regarded them, and why they obeyed or did not obey their rulers. Which brings me back to one particular message I would like to leave with my readers: the difference between words, concepts, and phenomena and between our words and concepts and those of the particular bits of the past we are studying. Is the history of nationhood about changes in words, or changes in notions in the minds of those who used them, or in phenomena – that is, the actual society and government of whatever area that they were writing about? Which of the three changed at any point, and does that mean that the others changed too?

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Lieux Saints Partagés: An Analytical Review

Glenn Bowman*

Over the past decade a series of workshops, conferences and publications have examined, from various perspectives, the practices of inter-communal interactions around what are generally termed ›shared‹ holy places.¹ Many of these have focussed on regions which had previously been under imperial rule, and one active field of study has investigated shrine sharing in the Mediterranean Basin, particularly in its southern and eastern parts. The present contribution takes a recent exhibition as a starting point to discuss, from an anthropological perspective, how intercommunal interaction could unfold in the Ottoman Empire, and how the decline of imperial rule and post-imperial developments led to its eventual erosion.

Keywords: shared sacred places; religious identity politics; Ottoman Empire; Judaism; Christianity; Islam.

Between 29 April and 31 August this year, the *Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM)* mounted a substantial exhibition highlighting these practices of inter-communality around sacred sites with a specific focus on those linked to the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The exhibition, entitled *Lieux saints partagés*, covered a full floor of MuCEM's spectacular new extension and directed visitors through four thematic areas (reflected in the four main sections of the catalogue): ›*Dans les pas des prophètes*‹ (focussing on sites dedicated to Old Testament figures and shared by Christians, Muslims and Jews); ›*Marie la Chrétienne, Marie la Musulmane*‹ (presenting Marian sites of mixed Muslim-Christian devotion); ›*À la rencontre des saints*‹ (exploring ambiguous saints – *La Ghriba*, George and the Seven Sleepers – and the locales of their reverencing); and ›*Témoins et passeurs*‹ (displaying religious officiants and acolytes promoting shrine sharing).

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1 Contemporary interest in the topic of shrine sharing seems to have been consolidated by the debate kicked off by Hayden, *Antagonistic Tolerance*; and the responses to it published in *Current Anthropology*. Subsequent academic gatherings around the theme include the March 2006 *Les Lieux partagés du religieux et les pèlerinage interconfessionnels en Méditerranée: Approches anthropologiques* (Université Paris Ouest – Nanterre), Columbia University's February 2008 ›Sharing Sacred Space: Religion and Conflict Resolution‹, Boğazici and Columbia's ›Choreography of Sacred Spaces‹ (Istanbul, May 2010), PRIO's ›Shared Spaces and their Dissolution‹ (Nicosia, October 2011), the Pontifical University St. Thomas Aquinas's ›Interdisciplinary Conference on Sharing Sacred Space: Legal, Theological, and Sociological Perspectives‹ (Rome, December 2011), Friedrich-Alexander-Universität's ›Geteiltes Gedenken. Parallelnutzungen von Sakralorten in interreligiösen und -konfessionellen Kontexten‹ (Erlangen-Nürnberg, February 2013) and, most recently, ›Lieux saints partagés: Colloque International. Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée‹ (Marseille, June 2015). Significant collections, often emerging from these gatherings, include Albera and Couroucli, *Religions traversées*; Albera and Couroucli, *Religiones entrecruzadas*; Albera and Couroucli, *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*; Albera and Couroucli, *Luoghi sacri comuni ai monoteismi*; Barkan and Barkey, *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites*; Bowman, ›In Dubious Battle on the Plains of Heav'n‹; Bryant, *Shared Spaces and Their Dissolution*; Cormack, *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*; as well as the catalogue of the exhibition discussed here (Albera et al., *Lieux saints partagés*).

The term *passeurs* in the fourth section should be translated not as ›smugglers‹ but as ›ferryman‹, and it is this function which makes sharing possible. In the literality of the exhibition the *passeurs* are those who facilitate the commingling of distinct communities of worshippers around shared sites: peripatetic Sufi saints such as Djalâl ad-Dîn Rûmî and wandering religious savants such as Louis Massignon and Paolo dall'Oglio feature along with the cohabitation they promoted and supported. While these border-bridgers are the corporeal agents who facilitate the sharing of religious sites and practices, in analytical terms it is the plurivalence of the sacred objects – be these places, images, or practices – that function as *passeurs*, making possible the events and locales which bring denominationally distinct visitors together. They do this not by signifying the same to different communities but by manifesting meanings connecting with communities' particular practices and beliefs *in the same places* and sometimes *at the same times* as they embody variant meanings for present members of other communities. As the exhibition makes clear, encounters can happen through the mediation of figures or stories common, but variously told, to two or more traditions (as, for instance, with Old Testament stories of Abraham and Isaac, Moses, Rachel and others who figure in the religious traditions of Jews, Christians and Muslims) but can also occur when the figures themselves are ambiguously defined (such as *La Ghriba* – ›the stranger‹ – a woman of unknown confessional provenance whose tomb in a synagogue on the Tunisian island of Djerba is worshiped by Jews and Muslims) and thus able to address quite distinct bodies of addressees. In all these instances of so-called sharing what is shared is not the meaning of the figure, event or place but these entities as signs signifying meanings particular to the communities which feel themselves hailed² by them. Different communities, and certainly different groups within particular communities, can read the same sign differently with or without being aware of the potential for incommensurability.

Overlooking the multivalence integral to *sacra* at moments of seeming sharing can lead to the simplistic idea that shrine sharing is a manifestation of religious syncretism through which the engaging communities *become the same* in the act of communion.³ As the exhibition, and the scholarship around shrine sharing, make clear, this is far from the case. While different communities may cohabit times and spaces, thus giving the impression of commingling, interaction is in many cases, when not overtly antagonistic, minimal. I'm reminded in the latter case of Edgar Allen Poe's unsettling description of an uncanny stream of something like water found flowing in the negative utopia which provides the setting of the final pages of his *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838):

›the whole mass of liquid was made up of a number of distinct veins, each of a distinct hue; ... these veins did not commingle; and... their cohesion was perfect in regard to their own particles among themselves, and imperfect in regard to neighboring veins. Upon passing the blade of a knife athwart the veins, the water closed over it immediately, as with us, and also, in withdrawing it, all traces of the passage of the knife were instantly obliterated. If, however, the blade was passed down accurately between the two veins, a perfect separation was effected, which the power of cohesion did not immediately rectify.⁴«

2 Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*.

3 This is the assumption underlying Victor Turner's conception of *communitas* in ritual and pilgrimage practice (Turner, *Communitas*, and Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*). It was ethnographically criticised by Michael Sallnow (Sallnow, *Communitas Reconsidered*; Sallnow, *Pilgrims of the Andes*) in the context of pilgrimage, and genealogically dissected by Robin Horton even before *communitas* entered into popular currency (Horton, *Ritual Man in Africa*; see also Stewart and Shaw, *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*).

4 Poe, *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, 151.

I recently quoted this in my analysis of inter-communal interaction in Jerusalem's *Anastasis* or Holy Sepulchre during the Holy Fire ceremony⁵ and suggested that Poe's fictional depiction, not unlike Robert Curzon's literal description of the deadly fervour of the Holy Fire ceremony of 1834,⁶ counterposes the Turners' *communitas* – a »relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities«⁷ – with evidence of the potential of a more alienated and violent rending of sharing holy space by the eruption of identity politics.⁸

Nonetheless there is substantial evidence in this exhibition as well as in the ethnographic literature⁹ of not only past and contemporary coexistence around mutually revered sites but as well as of amicable collaboration between nominally distinct sectarian groups. It is the range of potential responses to the mixing of populations around holy sites that forces us to question what are the forces operating to found, maintain or fracture that communality, and this question brings us back to the theme of this volume – Empires: Elements of Cohesion and Signs of Decay.

Shrine sharing in an age of empire

The majority of sites examined by the *Lieux Saints Partagés* exhibition were, while that empire existed, located within the bounds of the Ottoman Empire. It is also true that the majority of sites presented have in recent years seen sharing diminished, placed under threat or extinguished. To take just a couple of examples of sites engaged by the exhibition and catalogue, Rachel's Tomb near Bethlehem has become a fortified Jewish settlement¹⁰ while the synagogue of *La Ghriba* in Tunisia was bombed by *al-Qaeda* in April 2002 and has since been transformed into a militarily protected enclave ›sold‹ by the Tunisians to an international, largely Jewish, clientele as an icon of putative ›multiculturalism‹.¹¹ Throughout the Middle East shared shrines have been the targets of aggressive state reshapings and attacks by sectarian activists who find inter-communalism apostatic. The literal *passeurs* discussed in section four of the catalogue have suffered commensurately: the *Bektashi* sufi order, noted for its bridging of Muslim-Christian practices and beliefs, has seen its important *Baba Arabati Tekke* in Tetova, Macedonia aggressively and progressively usurped by Salafists since August 2002¹² while the aforementioned Paolo dall'Oglio, who'd rebuilt and promoted the shared *Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi* monastery in Syria, was kidnapped and killed by IS militants in August 2013. What these attacks and developments share in common is their motivation by identity politics shaped by the desire to exclude or exterminate difference.

5 Bowman, »In Dubious Battle on the Plains of Heav'n«, 376.

6 Robert Curzon's 1850 *Visits to Monasteries in the Levant*, quoted in Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 188-191.

7 Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 250.

8 This potential for violence has been the focus of the work of Robert Hayden and his associates since the above cited article in *Current Anthropology* (see Hayden, *Religious Structures and Political Dominance in Belgrade*; Hayden and Naumović, *Imagined Communalities*; Hayden *et al.*, *Byzantine Mosque at Trilye*; Hayden and Walker, *Intersecting Religioscapes*; also Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*; Hassner, *Pessimist's Guide to Religious Coexistence*). Although I disagree theoretically and empirically with this perspective on the foundational and atemporal identity underlying inter-communal antagonism, I can only concur that in certain contexts and historical moments identity-based violence can be induced in sites previously characterised by seeming amity.

9 See for instance Assayag, *Confluence of Two Rivers*; Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred*, on India; on former Yugoslavia see Baskar, Komšilik; Henig, »Knocking on My Neighbour's Door«, and Bowman, *Orthodox-Muslim Interactions*, all offering counterexamples to Hayden's chosen locales of ›antagonistic tolerance‹.

10 See Bowman, *À l'ombre de Rachel*, and, in English, Bowman, *Sharing and Exclusion*.

11 Carpenter-Latiri, *Ghriba on the Island of Jerba*.

12 Schwartz, *Harabati Baba Tepe*. During a visit to the *tekke* in May 2006, I observed the expropriated »Kubeli Meydan«, the hall where *Bektashi* rituals had previously been performed, from which I was harassed by a Salafist militant (see also <https://www.flickr.com/photos/nygus/6144379427/>; retrieved on 28 October 2015).

The salient questions then are ›what in the context in the Ottoman Empire promoted and protected amicable inter-communal interactions, both in everyday life and in the domains of religious sites?‹ and ›what changed?‹. Karen Barkey, in her important *Empire of Difference: the Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, writes that ›toleration emerged ... in the first three centuries of Ottoman rule, both from the top down by the state and from the bottom up by communities where each shared an interest in the maintenance of inter-communal peace and order‹.¹³ Although the state was clearly an Islamic entity insistent on the superiority of Islam, it was also, as Barkey phrases it, ›an empire of difference‹¹⁴ in which the heterogeneity of its inhabitants, and the various contributions they could make to the furtherance of the empire, were recognised and fostered. Codes of conduct, grounded in religious differences, distinguished communities by legislating differential dress, residence and modes of transport and in so doing made clear positionings in a field of diverse social relations, simultaneously enforcing and protecting difference. Such clarification, combined with the *dhimmi*-system of intra-communal self-governance, vastly reduced the space for inter-communal conflict whilst ensuring that payment of taxes and adherence to the overarching Ottoman law were maintained. Difference was here subsumed within the unity of the state.

As Barkey,¹⁵ Masters,¹⁶ Doumanis,¹⁷ Makdisi¹⁸ and Greene¹⁹ have shown, definitional integration structured from the top down both gave rise to and supported local inter-communal interaction:

»Much of the relationship between communities occurred in the market, in the production and consumption transactions that members of the different communities engaged in daily. Jews, Christians and Muslims not only bought and sold from one another, but they also formed business associations, dissolved them, and committed fraud and crimes that required the arbitration of [their separate, autonomous but somehow interactive] courts....[T]he more they bought and sold property from each other, the more they intermixed in their urban living space.«²⁰

What Anna Bigelow, speaking of life in the Indian town of Malerkotla, refers to as ›practices of everyday pluralism‹²¹ characterise the melange of activities and interpretations generated by these ›mixed‹ areas, regardless of whether they were urban or rural.²² In these

13 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 114.

14 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*.

15 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*.

16 Masters, *Christians and Jews*.

17 Doumanis, *Before the Nation*.

18 Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*.

19 Greene, *Shared World*.

20 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 147-148.

21 Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred*, 217.

22 Masters argues that in the Ottoman cities religion was ›the primary basis of identity... [but that] this was less the case in the region's thousands of villages where more heterodox religious traditions prevailed and the casual intermingling of people of different faiths was common before the hardening of sectarian boundaries in the nineteenth century‹ (Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 39). I would note, further to my work in Macedonia as well as Palestine, that local coexistence of shrine visitors is not necessary for sharing reverences of holy places; what is required is the circulation of assumptions about the efficacy of visits to those places. Both Sveti Nikola in Makedonski Brod (Bowman, *Orthodox-Muslim Interactions*) and Mar Elyas between Bethlehem and Jerusalem (Bowman, *Nationalizing and Denationalizing the Sacred*) gathered Muslims and Christians from towns, villages and countryside around the site, and Sveti Nikola – located in a purely Christian town – was visited by Muslims from a substantial catchment area who knew through tradition and hearsay of the power of the site.

people engage in what Mauss calls »prestigious imitation«²³, emulating the actions of others that, through observation or the testimony of those others, they have reason to believe are efficacious. The multivalence, or »slippage«, of these actions which I have discussed above allows a form of mimicry which enables them, as well as the religious officiants of the holy places, to avoid violating their own confessional regimes.

To speak for a moment in the ethnographic present (which I think is justified by the existence, in parts of FYROM, of practices which appear analogous to those of the long past period of Ottoman hegemony over the region), I will describe a couple of recent events illustrating such »mimicry with a difference«. Each of these show the mix, in both beliefs and practices, as well as the means by which both visitors and officiants avoid violating their own religious precepts. The first is, I suspect, fairly common as I've watched analogous performances in West Bank Palestine.

In an Orthodox church in Kicevo two local priests testified to the fact – which I and my colleague subsequently observed – that local Muslims (Kicevo is half Orthodox and half Muslim) come to the church not only for holy water and to ask for blessings but also to request that the Christian ritual of baptism be carried out, for instance, when a Christian man has converted to marry a Muslim woman but nonetheless wants their child baptised or when the parents of a sickly Muslim child want the child baptised so as to augment its spiritual protections. In these cases the priest prays over Muslims before the iconostasis with a special prayer – that designated in the prayer books as being for the unbaptized – and instead of laying his cope over their heads raises it in front of them before sprinkling holy water over them; the Muslims in turn kneel before the priest, bowing their heads before him and his sacramental cope, but neither kissing his hands or the bible nor crossing themselves.

The second instance is perhaps more exceptional. Outside of Kicevo is the monastery of *Sveti Bogoroditsa Prechista* (the Holy Mother of God Most Innocent). In the course of examining the context of shared shrine practices, I and my Macedonian colleague interviewed the imam of the local Sunni mosque. He, trained in the renowned Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, responded to our queries about Muslims attending the *Sveti Bogoroditsa* monastery by asserting strongly that he had never gone there, and never would. He nonetheless went on to explain that he would advise congregationists to go to the monastery for help with particular problems because »the world of demons, like our world, is made up of Christians and Muslims. When someone is afflicted by a Muslim demon I can deal with the problem, but when someone is troubled by a Christian demon there is nothing I can do, so I send them to the church.«²⁴ The imam's sense of a parallel world of Muslim and Christian demons that demographically duplicates the sectarian heterogeneity of his own locale is manifested in his own (heterodox) advocacy of shared Muslim-Christian shrine practices. Similarly Muslims who go to churches for blessings manifest in their activities the circulation through their communities and networks of relations of stories of the efficacy of the shrines and rituals of sectarian others.²⁵

23 Mauss, *Body Techniques*, 101.

24 Interview in Kicevo, 30 April 2006.

25 It is far more unusual to find Christians going to Muslim holy places for blessings unless, as with the case of the Husamedin Pasha Mosque in Stip, Christians can convince themselves that the mosque is built over the site of an earlier Christian church. Insofar as Islam historically follows Christianity and, in Islamic thought, corrects and clarifies Christian interpretations of revelation, Muslims are able to attend Christian sites that, although manifesting an imperfectly understood divine revelation, are nonetheless informed by revelation. For Christians Islam is a heresy or deviancy, and attendance at a Muslim site is effectively blasphemous. As Hasluck points out »a mosque, unless it has been (or is thought to have been) a church, is rarely, if ever, taken over as a church by the Orthodox« (Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam I*, 104).

After empire: the twilight of sharing

The dissolution of that ›mixed‹ worldview in most contemporary sites is a consequence of the separation of populations, both demographically and ideologically, and this separation is effected both through local activity and activity ›from above‹. Barkey, following her earlier statement regarding tolerance in the first three centuries of Ottoman rule, indicates that

›important transformations of state-community boundaries and relations occurred in the eighteenth century...[when] it was clear that the empire was not sustainable and that all constituent parts were experiencing lowered ›expectations of many future interactions‹.«²⁶

These perceptions and transformations were to a large degree the eventual result of the corrosive effects of the Capitulations²⁷ which, following the French agreement with Suleiman the Magnificent of 1535, permitted the designation as *beraths*, or protégés, of eminent members of sectarian communities seen as affiliated with European nations. These persons, while formally remaining subject to the sultanate, enjoyed the same juridical and commercial rights as their foreign patrons which, in most cases, were in excess of those granted to Muslims and members of other communities. In time this ›extraterritorial‹ status was (at least nominally) extended to all members of the protected communities (most notably the Catholics for the French and the Jews for the British; the Russians, in their patronage of the Orthodox, were relative latecomers to the game) corroding the commercial, juridical and, to some extent, demographic connections between communities while strengthening, particularly in the public sphere, the sectarian identities of the groups affected (not only the berath but as well the Muslim majority which came to see their former neighbours as distinct and unjustly empowered competitors living in what increasingly came to seem ›enclaved‹ quarters).

Simultaneously foreign intervention not only in the affairs of these communities but as well as in the politics of the state in its relation with them pushed the communities increasingly to imagine themselves as potentially distinct from the empire and drove the Sultanate to increasingly see these sectarian groups as posing threats to the coherence and order of the state. From the mid-eighteenth century on, particularly in the border territories of the Balkans and the east, the state engaged in substantial exemplary violence (usually massacres) against Armenian and Greek Orthodox minorities seen as threatening the state's rule and coherence. In time this state action became increasingly sectarian in its assertion, and by the late nineteenth century Sultan Abdül-Hamid, ruling an empire threatened by uprisings in Bulgaria and invasion by Russia (allegedly to protect Orthodox Christians there), »employed the rallying cry of a politicised Islam to try to save his empire«.²⁸ His »playing of the Islamic card... could only be repellent to the empire's diverse Christian minorities«²⁹ and increased religious polarisation in Anatolia while, albeit temporarily, comforting Muslim elites in

26 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 114. This closing phrase is drawn from Fearon and Laitin, *Explaining Interethnic Cooperation*.

27 The Capitulations were bilateral commercial agreements between the Ottoman Sultanate (the ›Sublime Porte‹) and France allowing Europeans rights of residence and trade under the protection of France and extending to Europeans resident in the Empire (and to members of sectarian communities taken under France's protection) the protection of that state's extra-territorial jurisdiction (Groot, *Historical Development; Masters, Christians and Jews*). Further Capitulations were later negotiated with other European states and even companies. Masters points out that those ›taken under protection‹ by France, and later Britain and Russia, could in eighteenth century Greater Syria be numbered in the low hundreds but would, by the mid-nineteenth century, be counted in their thousands (Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 125).

28 Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 170.

29 Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 170.

the Arab provinces in its assurance that Christians would be dissuaded from continuing to attempt to usurp political and economic positions traditionally granted to Muslims.³⁰ In both regions the ›practices of everyday pluralism‹ were eroded while ›expectations of future interactions‹ were increasingly of antagonistic, rather than commensal, relations.

With the collapse of empire in the opening decades of the twentieth century the space of a discourse of inter-communal amity – a discourse already substantially eroded by the developments sketched out above – was effectively closed down by the loss of an overarching state and its replacement either by national sovereignties (in the Balkans) or by protectorates which continued to differentially treat religious communities. Woodrow Wilson's conception, influential in the Versailles negotiations, that small ethnic groups should have their own homelands (›each nation should have its own state‹) led to the construction of ethnic states – often based on religio-ethnic categories – throughout not only the Balkans but also territories previously under the Austro-Hungarian Empire.³¹ In the Southern Mediterranean and Middle East most ›liberated territories‹ were placed under protectorates which carried on the traditions of sectarian distinction and differential patronage. As Michelle Campos demonstrates, the place for an already etiolated public sphere of ›Ottoman brotherhood‹ was terminally eroded by the policies of the British Mandate that applied very different systems of education, political participation and economic resourcing to Jews, Christians, and Muslims.³² In Palestine the fact that the Mandate brought the territory under the sovereignty of a single European state meant that intra-communal distinctions between lay Christians became far less significant than they had been when different confessional groupings were patronised by different states. This was not the case in the remainder of ›Greater Syria‹ (Lebanon and Syria) where distinctions between communities and sub-communities were maintained in the distribution of power and influence. This laid the foundations in Israel/Palestine for the eventual emergence of a popular (but not ecclesiastical) Christian nationalism opposing both Jewish and Muslim nationalisms³³ while in Lebanon and Syria the continuance of fostered distinctions between Shi'a (including Alawites) and Sunni and Catholic (Maronite) and Orthodox made for far more complex, and fractious, identity politics in the practices of politics and of shrine sharing.

Conclusions: the future of sharing?

The identity politics that emerged in the latter years of the Ottoman Empire and were consolidated in the wake of that polity provides a partial answer to the question posed above of ›what changed?‹. As the spaces of mutually beneficial interaction were turned into domains for aggressive and sometimes threatening competition so did the borders between those territories become strengthened by a politics of ›us‹ and ›them‹. Sharing of public space became increasingly competitive and this, in the case of previously shared holy places, could in certain circumstances lead to the attempts by one of the sharers to assert exclusive ownership of the site.³⁴ Identity and property are mutually dependent terms.

30 Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 170-171.

31 Knock, *To End All Wars*.

32 Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*; see also Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire*.

33 In the case of Palestine, antipathy by Christian and Muslim Arabs to Jewish nationalism, a movement based on sectarian ethnicity, drew the communities together into an amity already sketched out by earlier movements of Arab nationalism against Ottoman hegemony. ›Palestinian Arab unity‹ is contextual and tenuous and has, from the Mandate Period on, been threatened by confessional (Christian and Muslim) identity politics (Bowman, *Constitutive Violence and the Nationalist Imaginary*

34 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam* I, and Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam* II.

Moreover, as sectarian, or ethnonational identity became increasingly significant, so too did the importance of propriety. The *passeurs* discussed in the opening paragraphs of this paper – those plurivalent *sacra* allowing a play of interpretation and able to ›haik‹ persons of different religious affiliations – need either to be fixed in their meaning or expelled. Fixing entails a double movement; on the one hand the sacred objects or performances must be ›properly‹ defined through association with the body of belief and ritual appropriate to the worshippers' confessional allegiance and on the other hand the subversive presence of others, or their traces, which open the *sacra* to alternative definitions must be expurgated. This is the function of religious functionaries who, particularly in urban regions, ›protect‹ religious sites from the threat, or temptation, of heterodoxy (the Macedonian priests and imam described above would be termed ›outlaws‹ by the guardians of orthodoxy).

As the exhibition, and my own fieldwork experience, show, there are still practices of shrine sharing taking place in the Mediterranean world, most often outside of urban areas but also in some cases in the urban periphery (such as that of the *Marariyeh* in Cairo). These are under threat, often from religious purists of any of the Abrahamic faiths and sometimes (as with the *Ibrahimi Mosque* [the Cave of the Prophets] in Hebron) by sectarian militants aligned with ethno-religious states. Certainly in the thirty years I have worked in Jerusalem and West Bank Palestine I have watched the seemingly inexorable reduction of shared shrines both through state machinations of demographics and through the turning of local people away from these shrines, either because of their condemnation by religious leaders or because of an increasing scepticism about ›archaic‹ superstition. The contexts which foster shrine sharing are, in other words, disappearing as a result both of local developments and activities from ›above‹.

Intriguingly, however, the same post-imperial mechanisms (particularly global internet connectivity and commercial integration) which militate against the common use of holy places through promoting trans-national conceptions of religious identity and ideologies of modernist secularity are also generating ›expectations of many future interactions‹ between wide and dispersed groups of persons and communities open to the possibilities and promises of engaging difference. What sort of ›sacred sites‹ these future sharers might produce is not a topic raised by the *Lieux Saints Partagés*-exhibition or its catalogue but, in a world seemingly on the cusp of transition from the age of the nation state into something more global, the question of what *passeurs* will build the bridges that allow us to cohabit amicably after the nation is one worth addressing.

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Calculating the Middle Ages? The Project »Complexities and Networks in the Medieval Mediterranean and the Near East« (COMMED)

Johannes Preiser-Kapeller*

The project »Complexities and networks in the Medieval Mediterranean and Near East« (*COMMED*) at the Division for Byzantine Research of the Institute for Medieval Research (*IMAFÖ*) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences focuses on the adaptation and development of concepts and tools of network theory and complexity sciences for the analysis of societies, polities and regions in the medieval world in a comparative perspective. Key elements of its methodological and technological toolkit are applied, for instance, in the new project »Mapping medieval conflicts: a digital approach towards political dynamics in the pre-modern period« (*MEDCON*), which analyses political networks and conflict among power elites across medieval Europe with five case studies from the 12th to 15th century. For one of these case studies on 14th century Byzantium, the explanatory value of this approach is presented in greater detail. The presented results are integrated in a wider comparison of five late medieval polities across Afro-Eurasia (Byzantium, China, England, Hungary and Mamluk Egypt) against the background of the »Late Medieval Crisis« and its political and environmental turmoil. Finally, further perspectives of *COMMED* are outlined.

Keywords: complexity theory; network analysis; quantitative methods; comparative history; global history; Byzantine history; Mediterranean studies; environmental studies; climate history; social theory.

Introduction

In the year 2012, »Complexities and networks in the Medieval Mediterranean and Near East« (*COMMED*) was established as a research project at the Division for Byzantine Research of the Institute for Medieval Research (*IMAFÖ*) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Its aim is the integration, adaptation and further development of concepts and tools of network theory and complexity sciences for the analysis of the Byzantine Empire and neighbouring polities and regions in the medieval Mediterranean and Near East. With the help of these instruments, social, economic, religious, political and intellectual entanglements between individuals, groups, communities, institutions, polities and localities as well as between societies and their environments and the dynamics of these phenomena in time and space are visualised and analysed in a qualitative and quantitative as well as comparative perspective. Thereby, the actual complexity

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of pre-modern societies and the relevance of such research for the analysis of comparable complex interconnections in the contemporary globalised world are rendered visible.

The explanatory value of these new methods has been demonstrated with case studies for the Late Byzantine ecclesiastical, political and intellectual elites,¹ processes of religious and ethnic transformations in the Late Medieval Eastern Mediterranean,² the diplomatic and political entanglements of the Near East between 300 and 1200 CE,³ ancient and medieval maritime traffic systems⁴ and the complex dynamics of the Late Medieval »World Crisis« in a global and comparative view (see also below).⁵ Recently, the *COMMED*-project with regard to its content and methodology was especially augmented by studies on climate and environmental history. *COMMED* focuses not on one single research topic, but provides a methodological and technological framework for various endeavours both within and beyond *IMAFÖ* (see below).

Complex systems, networks and mathematics in historical studies

»Systems«, »networks« and »complexity« are terms present in a significant number of current historical and archaeological studies, but in many cases, they are used in a »metaphorical« way or as novel conceptual framework for otherwise traditional narratives.⁶ Yet an application of the actual set of concepts and tools provided by the field of complexity, systems and network theory allows for a new understanding, visualisation and analysis of structures and dynamics of past phenomena.⁷

As W. Brian Arthur explains, »complexity is (...) a movement in the sciences that studies how the interacting elements in a system create overall patterns, and how these overall patterns in turn cause the interacting elements to change or adapt«. ⁸ A »system« consists of inter-related elements, whose interactions at the »micro-level« produce complex changing patterns of behaviour of the entire system on the »macro-level« (»emergence«). For social systems, these patterns stem from the actions and interactions of individuals, families, communities, etc., up to the globalized society of today.⁹ These systems show a non-linear behaviour, which means that they answer to certain stimuli (actions of individuals on different scales or external influences and events) or minimal differences in initial conditions not in a linear way (which would mean that the output is proportional to its input); due to the interactions between the parts of the system these stimuli can be reinforced (or weakened) through feedback mechanisms in an unexpected way (»non-linearity«, see also the popularised »butterfly effect«). Furthermore, complex systems are »path-dependent«; their trajectory does not only depend on current conditions, but also on its past dynamics and the structures, constraints and poten-

1 Preiser-Kapeller, »Our in the Holy Spirit beloved Brothers and Co-Priests«.

2 Preiser-Kapeller, *Liquid Frontiers*.

3 Preiser-Kapeller, *Großkönig, Kaiser und Kalif*.

4 Preiser-Kapeller and Daim, *Harbours and Maritime Networks*.

5 Preiser-Kapeller, *Networks of Border Zones*.

6 Cf. for instance Malkin, *Small Greek World*, and most contributions in: Malkin *et al.*, *Greek and Roman Networks*. A distinct approach of »system theory« was established by Niklas Luhmann and also applied in another study within the framework of *COMMED*: Preiser-Kapeller, *Luhmann in Byzantium*. For the integration of Luhmann's theories into historical research see also Becker and Reinhardt-Becker, *Systemtheorie*, and Becker, *Geschichte und Systemtheorie*.

7 For an overview cf. also Preiser-Kapeller and Daim, *Harbours and Maritime Networks*.

8 Arthur, *Complexity and the Economy*, 3; Cf. also Mainzer, *Thinking in Complexity*. For a good introduction for historians see Gaddis, *Landscape of History*.

9 On complexity and social theory cf. esp. Castellani and Hafferty, *Sociology and Complexity Science*.

tials emerging from them. Change within complex systems is described as transition between alternative (more or less) stable states or »attractors«. At the same time, complex systems are typically open systems, which are entangled with their environment (consisting of other complex systems both anthropogenic and natural) in equally complex interrelations. The transition from one state to another can emerge because of endogenous interactions (or reactions also to exogenous impacts) which sum up and reinforce (»positive feedback«) or dampen (»negative feedback«) each other until a certain »tipping point« or »bifurcation point« is reached, at which the transition to a new attractor takes place. Marten Scheffer also calls attention to the fact that »systems may gradually become increasingly fragile to the point that even a minor perturbation can trigger a drastic change toward another state«; this depends on »the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks.«, for which Scheffer (as others) uses the term »resilience«. ¹⁰ The concept of complex systems is thus deeply »historical« in two respects: it takes into account the system's »history« and at the same time assumes constant dynamic change leading to new system states. ¹¹

An increasing number of scholars actually refer also to this formal and also mathematical basis, especially in archaeology. Among these approaches, which also have been used within *COMMED*, we find:

Attempts to identify statistical »signatures of complexity« in quantitative data (e.g., distributions of settlements sizes within a region or of wealth among individuals in a larger group, respectively time series, especially of prices), such as unequal distribution patterns (power laws, logarithmic, etc.) or indicators for non-linear dynamics. ¹² Furthermore, systems of equations are proposed in order to capture essential factors for these dynamics on the basis of the correspondence between patterns emerging from these models and observed data (a top-down approach). ¹³

Experiments to capture the »bottom up«-dynamics of complex systems emerging from the interaction of single elements with the help of agent-based models, acting on the basis of a set of (often relatively simple) rules within a simulated (spatial) environment over several time steps. Again, emerging statistical properties of such models are compared with observed data in order to determine their explanatory value. ¹⁴

Efforts to survey, map and analyse the connections and interactions between various elements (individuals, groups, settlements, polities, but also objects or semantic entities) documented in historical or archaeological evidence with the help of network models in the form of graphs with »nodes« and »ties«, also in their spatial and temporal dynamics. Again, statistical »signatures of complexity« (e. g. patterns of distribution of the number of links among nodes) are identified and models for their emergence in growing or changing networks are proposed. ¹⁵

Many complex systems can be conceptualised as networks of interconnected and interacting elements, and network theory »for many scientists in the community (...) is synonym-

10 Scheffer, *Critical Transitions*, 6, 103.

11 Cf. also Gaddis, *Landscape of History*; Herbst, *Komplexität und Chaos*.

12 Cf. Brown, *Measuring Chaos*, 53-66; Kantz and Schreiber, *Nonlinear Time Series Analysis*; Thome, *Zeitreihenanalyse*; Sinha et al., *Econophysics*, 83-129 (on distribution patterns).

13 Cf. Weidlich, *Sociodynamics*.

14 Cf. for instance now Madella and Rondelli, *Simulating the Past*. For a more general overview cf. Sinha et al., *Econophysics*, 147-203 (with further literature).

15 Wasserman and Faust, *Social Network Analysis*; Scott and Carrington, *Sage Handbook of Social Network Analysis*; Newman, *Networks* (especially on the mathematical basis).

ous with the study of complexity«. ¹⁶ One central aim of network analysis is the identification of structures of relations which emerge from the sum of interactions and connections between individuals, groups or sites and at the same time influence the scope of actions of everyone entangled in such relations. For this purpose, data on the categories, intensity, frequency and dynamics of interactions and relations between entities of interest is systematically collected in a way which allows for further mathematical analysis. This information is organised in the form of matrices (with rows and columns) and graphs (with nodes [vertices] and edges [links]), which are not only instruments of data collection and visualisation, but also the basis of further mathematical operations (on the basis of matrix algebra and graph theory). ¹⁷

In general, network theory assumes »not only that ties matter, but that they are organized in a significant way, that this or that (node) has an interesting position in terms of its ties.« ¹⁸ Differences in the »centrality« of individual nodes can be determined due to the number of their connections or their favourable position between otherwise disconnected groups of nodes. Other methods allow the identification of clusters and cliques as groups of nodes that are more closely intertwined with each other than with the rest of the network, and can represent different factions, for instance. Finally, networks can be analysed in their entirety with regard to the density and »resilience« of the web of relations or the (un)equal distribution of central network positions among nodes. ¹⁹ Yet, even in the best cases with thousands of documents, we know for sure that our information is not complete. Written sources provide only a certain part of the spectrum of social relations for a limited group. As for any other historical study, the researcher must be sure that the data basis is sufficient »to demonstrate general structures and developments« ²⁰ – in the case of network analysis, that significant and characteristic patterns can be reconstructed, especially for those types of relationships (kinship, allegiance, economic interaction, etc.), which are essential for the problem at hand. Wolfgang Reinhard, the pioneer of the German historical network research was quite optimistic in this respect: »The selection (of relationship types) in the sources is based on certain rules, for which the values and norms of the historical society were of crucial importance from which the sources originate«. ²¹ In any case, the systematic collection and presentation of the relations recorded in a stock of sources allows us to discover the big gaps, but also areas of denser evidence, which offer themselves for further structural analysis. On this basis, the actual complexity of social formations of the past and their dynamics become accessible in a new way, as several studies have also demonstrated for the medieval period, especially since the 1990s. ²²

16 Johnson, *Simply Complexity*, 13.

17 Wasserman and Faust, *Social Network Analysis*, 92-166; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, 9-16.

18 Lemerrier, *Formale Methoden der Netzwerkanalyse*, 22. Cf. also Brughmans, *Thinking through Networks* 623-662, the contributions in Knappett, *Network-Analysis in Archaeology*, and Collar *et al.*, *The Connected Past*, 1-31, for an overview of concepts and tools as well as further bibliography.

19 For an overview of analytical tools see also Preiser-Kapeller, *Letters and Network Analysis*.

20 Burkhardt, *Hansischer Bergenhandel*. Cf. also Erickson, *Social Networks and History*; Jullien, *Netzwerkanalyse in der Mediävistik*.

21 Reinhard, *Freunde und Kreaturen*. For a more pessimistic position cf. Erickson, *Social Networks and History*, for a well-balanced middle-way see Burkhardt, *Hansischer Bergenhandel*.

22 See for instance: Burkhardt, *Hansischer Bergenhandel*; Gramsch, *Reich als Netzwerk der Fürsten*; Gruber, *Wer regiert hier wen?*; Habermann, *Verbündete Vasallen*; Mitsiou, *Networks of Nicaea*; Padgett and Ansell, *Robust Action*; Preiser-Kapeller, »Our in the Holy Spirit beloved Brothers and Co-Priests«; Sindbæk, *Small World of the Vikings*; Tackett, *Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*; Vonrufs, *Politische Führungsgruppe Zürichs*. For a critical approach towards these methods cf. Hitzbleck and Hübner, *Grenzen des Netzwerks*. For a review of similar studies in the field of ancient history cf. Nitschke and Rollinger, »Network Analysis is performed.«

The toolkit applied: mapping medieval conflicts

Yet, while the term »network« has been used abundantly in historical research in the last years, the actual number of studies taking into account the methodology of network analysis is still relatively limited. The reluctance of historians to adapt tools of network analysis can be also connected with the conceptual and terminological divide between humanities and formal sciences.²³ At the same time, the user-friendliness of software tools tempts others to use them as »black boxes« in order to produce a variety of figures without being aware of the underlying concepts. In order to address these challenges, the expertise in the field of historical network analysis developed within *COMMED* was used by a group of scholars at the *IMAFO* to develop a project which at the same time would provide a comparative approach to medieval history. »*Mapping medieval conflicts: a digital approach towards political dynamics in the pre-modern period*« (*MEDCON*) was selected for funding in September 2014 within the framework of the programme »go!digital« supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Science, Research and Economy and the Austrian Academy of Sciences (for the period October 2014 to May 2016).²⁴ In particular, the aims of *MEDCON* are:²⁵

The adaptation and combination of a set of software tools which facilitates the relational survey of medieval sources and the visualisation and quantitative analysis of social and spatial networks (using an open source database application named »OpenATLAS«, created by Stefan Eichert and developed further together with Katharina Winckler and Alexander Watzinger²⁶).

The development of case studies demonstrating a »best practice« of the application and evaluation of tools of network analysis for medieval history.

The creation of an online platform for the exploration of data, methods and results by the wider public.

A generalisable work flow from data input on the basis of medieval sources to the creation, visualisation and analysis of social and spatial network models and their web-based publication and presentation is currently established. In order to demonstrate the explanatory value of a network approach in detail, *MEDCON* focuses on the analysis of political networks and conflict among power elites across medieval Europe with five case studies:

Fluctuation between opposing parties in the struggle for the German throne 1198-1208 (Andrea Rzhacek, Renate Spreitzer)²⁷

Coalitions in the war of Emperor Sigismund against Duke Frederick IV of Tyrol (Günter Katzler)²⁸

Emperor Frederick III Friedrich III. and the League of the Mailberger coalition in 1451/52 (Kornelia Holzner-Tobisch)²⁹

Factions and alliances in the fight of Maximilian I for Burgundy (Sonja Dünnebeil)³⁰

Political factions in 14th-century Byzantium (Johannes Preiser-Kapeller).

23 Cf. also Hitzbleck and Hübner, *Grenzen des Netzwerks*.

24 <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/fellowship-funding/promotional-programmes/godigital/> (retrieved 12 September 2015).

25 See also the website of the project: <http://oeaw.academia.edu/MappingMedievalConflict> (retrieved 25 September 2015).

26 <http://www.openatlas.eu/> (retrieved 10 September 2015).

27 Cf. Rzhacek and Spreitzer, *Urkunden Philipps von Schwaben*.

28 For first results see the paper given at the International Medieval Congress 2015, University of Leeds, 6th to 9th July 2015: »Coalitions in the war of Emperor Sigismund against Duke Frederick IV of Tyrol«.

29 Herold and Holzner-Tobisch, *Regesten Kaiser Friedrichs III.*

30 Cf. Dünnebeil, *Orden vom Goldenen Vlies*.

The project is also conceptualised as digital extension of several internationally renowned long-term projects for text edition, diplomacy and prosopography at *IMAFO*.³¹

MEDCON uses the relational structuring provided by modern software not simply as instrument for the organisation of data, but as a heuristic tool for the reconstruction and analysis of the relational character of social phenomena of the past.³² Even if fragmentary tradition does not allow the use of quantitative methods or only to a limited extent, it is worthwhile to take systematically in the focus the social connections between individuals and groups as the context of their actions, especially when it comes to conflicts. Every single actor was embedded in an abundance of relationships which he or she had received by birth (e. g. kinship) or that he or she actively established and maintained (e. g. the membership in a fraternity). These links could be connected with different positions in more or less formalized and institutionalized systems of order (as the patron of followers or as a follower of a higher ranking patron, for instance) and could play an essential role for the identity and overall social position of an individual (e. g. the integration into networks of peers as confirmation of a noble status). In the case of conflict, such networks thus could serve as a resource (support from relatives, friends, allies, patrons), but also limit the room for manoeuvring, due to obligations as a follower of another patron, for instance.³³

Based on earlier work within the framework of *COMMED*, the additional explanatory value of the approach of *MEDCON* can be demonstrated for the case study on »Political factions in 14th century Byzantium«. As in many parts of Europe, Africa and Asia, also for the Byzantine Empire the »calamitous 14th century« was a time of crisis and conflict. External enemies, climate change associated with natural disasters, and (since the middle of the 14th century) the plague threatened the existence of the empire, while the imperial family and the elite weakened themselves in internal conflicts.³⁴ The first of these civil wars in the years 1321 to 1328 owed its outbreak to the alienation between the reigning emperor Andronikos II (r. 1282-1328) and his grandson (and formally co-emperor) Andronikos III Palaiologos, who was disinherited. But Andronikos III found his own retinue especially among the younger representatives of the Byzantine aristocracy, who were extremely dissatisfied with the regime of the elder Andronikos who had ruled for almost 40 years with rather limited success. In the spring of 1321, the younger Andronikos and his followers declared war on Andronikos II and demanded the reinstatement of the heir to the throne. The representatives of the elite had to take sides now, and the fracture lines were drawn between generations within individual families.³⁵

A telling example is the family of Theodoros Metochites³⁶, chief minister and a close confidant of the Andronikos II. While Theodoros remained loyal to Andronikos II in the civil

31 Diplomata-Abteilung der Monumenta Germaniae Historica: <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/imafo/die-abteilungen/editionsunternehmen-und-quellenforschung-mir/ag-diplomata-der-mgh/> (retrieved 14 September 2015); Wiener Arbeitsgruppe Regesta Imperii: <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/imafo/die-abteilungen/editionsunternehmen-und-quellenforschung-mir/ag-regesta-imperii/> (retrieved 15 September 2015); Die Protokollbücher des Ordens vom Goldenen Vlies: <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/imafo/die-abteilungen/editionsunternehmen-quellenforschung-mir/einzelprojekte/protokollbuecher-des-ordens-vom-goldenen-vlies/> (retrieved 15 September 2015); Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit (PLP): <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/byzanz/byzplp.htm> (retrieved 15 September 2015).

32 Cf. also Gould, *Uses of Network Tools*.

33 For this interpretative framework cf. Preiser-Kapeller, *Luhmann in Byzantium* (with further literature).

34 Cf. Tuchman, *Distant Mirror*. For Byzantium cf. Congourdeau, *Les Byzantins face aux catastrophes naturelles*; Laiou, *Byzantium and the Neighboring Powers*; Telelis, *Climatic Fluctuations*.

35 For the wider background cf. Preiser-Kapeller, *Complex Historical Dynamics of Crisis, 74-77* (with further literature).

36 Trapp, *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, no. 17982.

war, his sons Nikephoros, Demetrios and Michael³⁷ established ties with the camp of the younger Andronikos. Furthermore, they also negotiated with their brother-in-law Ioannes Palaiologos, another rebellious scion of the imperial house and husband of Theodoros Metochites' daughter Eirene.³⁸ Eirene's and Ioannes Palaiologos' daughter Maria had married the Serbian King Stefan Uroš III Decanski³⁹, who tried to benefit from the internal turmoils of his Byzantine neighbours by backing an attempt of Ioannes to establish himself as ruler of Thessalonike. Thus, the family was separated among three different factions in the years between 1321 and 1328 (see Fig. 1).

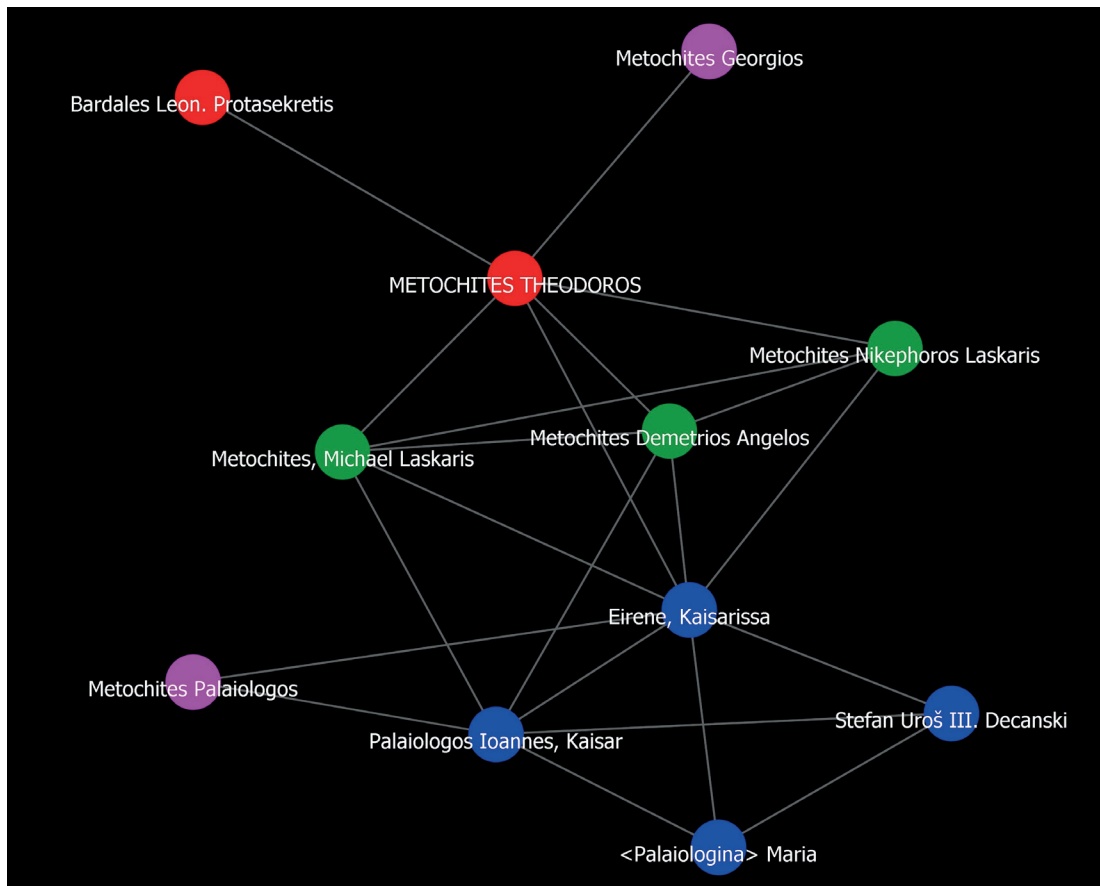


Fig. 1: The kinship ego-network of Theodoros Metochites in the years 1315-1328 CE; nodes are coloured according to their loyalty in the civil war of the years 1321 to 1328 CE (red: faction of Andronikos II Palaiologos; green: faction of Andronikos III Palaiologos; blue: support of the kaisar Ioannes Palaiologos resp. the Serbian King Stefan Uroš III Decanski; image: Johannes Preiser-Kappeller, 2015, created with the software tool ORA*)

Ties of kinship per se thus did not guarantee the cohesion among core groups of the Byzantine elite in that period; still, they provided the most important social bond among the noble clans.⁴⁰ As a structural-quantitative analysis of network models for the entire web of

37 Trapp, *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, nos. 17980, 17985, 17986.

38 Trapp, *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, nos. 5972, 21479.

39 Trapp, *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, nos. 21391, 21181.

40 Cf. Stathakopoulos, *Dialectics of Expansion and Retraction* (with further literature).

kinship among the Byzantine nobility (centred onto the emperor) for several time periods (1282-1292, 1293-1302, 1303-1312, 1313-1321, 1322-1328) during the reign of Andronikos II indicates⁴¹, we can observe underlying general trends towards polarisation in this group even before the outbreak of the civil war in 1321. Our model is not a genealogical one, were every possible kinship tie, which can be reconstructed from the sources, is registered. Beyond the immediate family, where the relevance of kinship is evident (parents and children, siblings, etc.), we only included kinship ties explicitly mentioned as socially relevant and salient in the sources («my imperial cousin», «my noble aunt»), thus ties that actually mattered as framework of interactions (see Fig. 2).⁴²

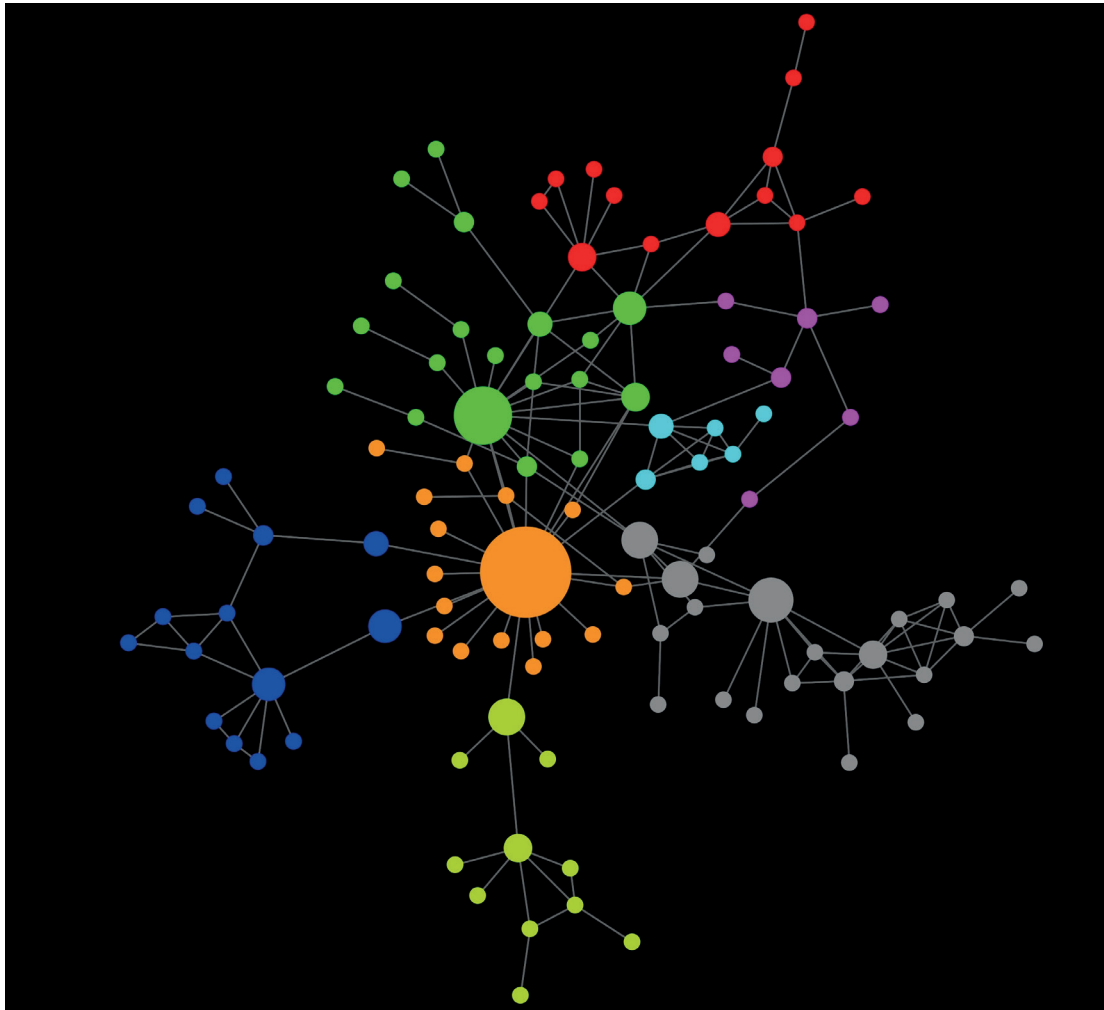


Fig. 2: Network model of kinship ties between core members of the Byzantine elite (number of nodes = 107) centred on Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos in the years 1321 to 1328 CE; nodes are coloured according to the cluster identified with the help of the Newman-algorithm (image: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool ORA*)

41 The network model is based on the data in the »The Vienna Network Model of the Byzantine Elite, 1282-1402«: http://www.academia.edu/8247283/A_new_view_on_a_century_of_Byzantine_history_The_Vienna_Network_Model_of_the_Byzantine_Elite_1282-1402 (retrieved 20 September 2015).

42 Cf. also Vonrufs, *Politische Führungsgruppe Zürichs*.

Across all time periods we observe that the network models of (salient) kinship ties are relatively densely woven; on average, everyone is related to everyone else via »four degrees of separation« (measured in the »average path length«) (*see Fig. 3a and 3b*). This »macro« network property intensifies on the »micro« level, as is visible in the increasing values for »transitivity«, which indicates the percentage of pairs of links (A to B; B to C) where, when node A is linked to node B, and node B is linked to node C, node C is also linked to node A (»kin of my kin is also my kin«); this process (also called »triadic closure«) increased the »local« cohesion among actors (*see Fig. 3c*).⁴³ Equally, we observe a continuous decrease of the values for »degree centralisation« and »betweenness centralisation«, which signal the extent to which ties (»degree«) or the potential for intermediation (»betweenness«) are focused on some especially central actors (such as the emperor); lower centralisation values equal a higher potential for the emergence of other focal points of influence within the network (*see Fig. 3d and 3e*).⁴⁴ (Dis)-assortativity, finally, constitutes a measure to quantify the general amount of structural polarisation, meaning the tendency of nodes to cluster around central actors with a small number of direct connections between these (potentially) »big players«. ⁴⁵ This measure decreased in the models for the first period of Andronikos' II reign, but increases towards the earlier level until before the outbreak of the civil war (*see Fig. 3f*). The diremption between the younger and the older Andronikos thus catalysed an already growing trend towards the formation of potentially competing factions within the elite.

Dis-assortativity further increases during the period of civil war 1321-1328 before abating towards the pre-war level during the reign of Andronikos III (r. 1328-1341), who finally was victorious and dethroned his grandfather (*see Fig. 3f*). Yet, as the values for transitivity and centralisation signal, the underlying dynamics of elite-polarisation did not change during Andronikos' III rule (*see Fig. 3c, 3d and 3e*); on the contrary, the tendency towards cluster-formation significantly increases during these years (*see Fig. 3g*).⁴⁶ This increasingly delicate balance collapsed when Andronikos III unexpectedly died in June 1341. We »simulated« this event by eliminating the »imperial« node from the network model; the result is a significant increase in the dis-assortativity level and a dramatic decrease of centralisation values (*see Fig. 3f, 3d and 3e*).

43 Nooy *et al.*, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, 341-343.

44 Nooy *et al.*, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, 143-145, 150-151.

45 Newman, Assortative Mixing. Actually, (degree-based) dis-assortativity is normally measured in negative numbers as counterpart of »assortativity«; here, for the sake of simplification, we measure dis-assortativity in positive numbers.

46 Nooy *et al.*, *Exploratory Social Network Analysis*, 341-343, on the »clustering coefficient«.

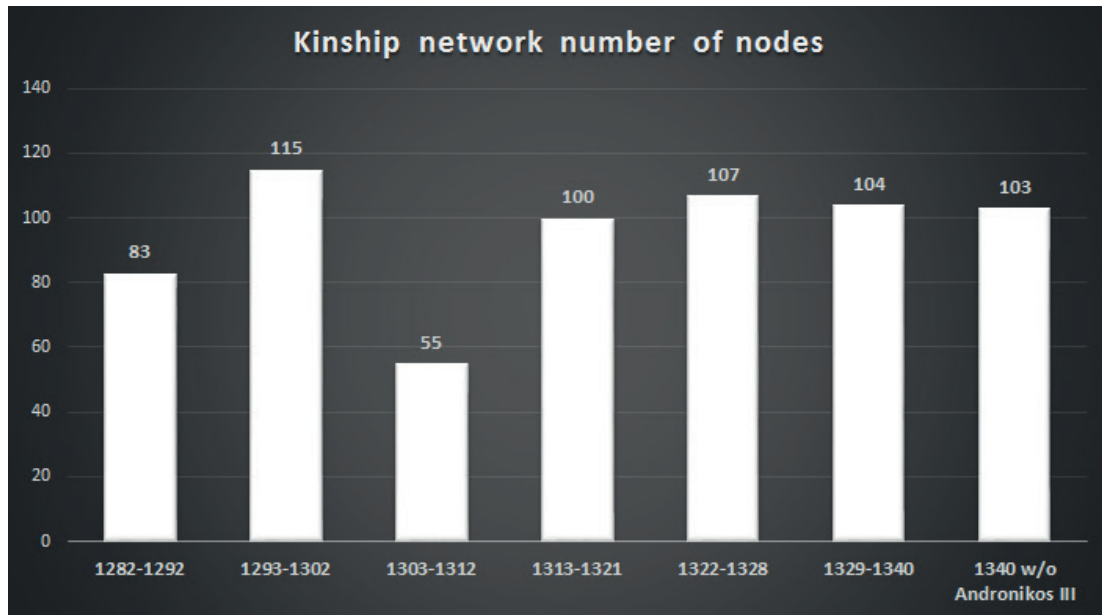


Fig. 3a: Number of nodes in the network models of kinship ties between core members of the Byzantine elite for various time slices between 1282 and 1340 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

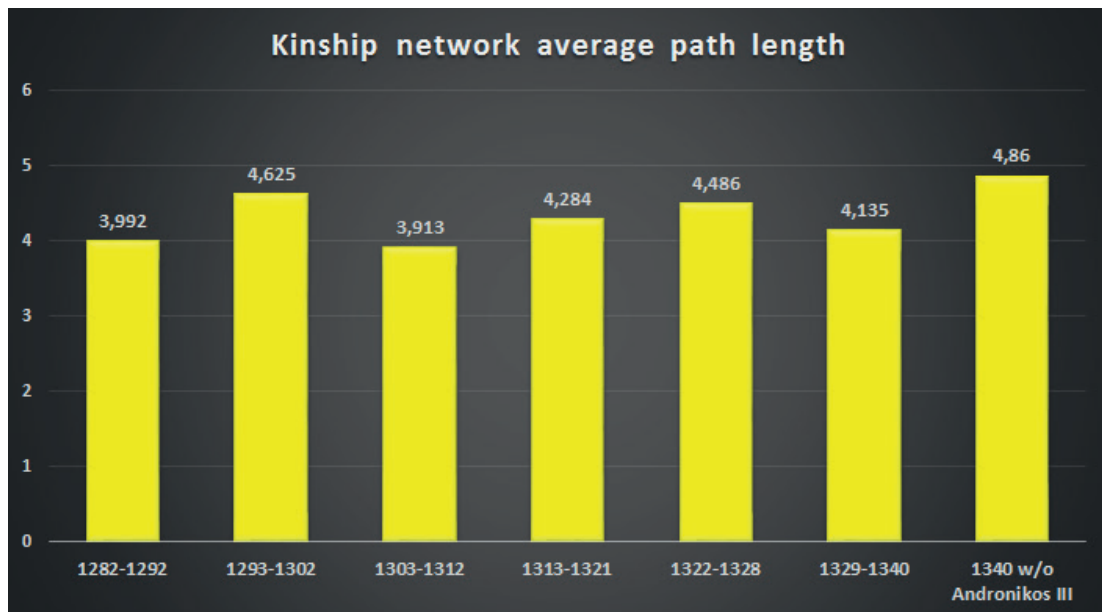


Fig. 3b: Average path lengths between nodes in the network models of kinship ties between core members of the Byzantine elite for various time slices between 1282 and 1340 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

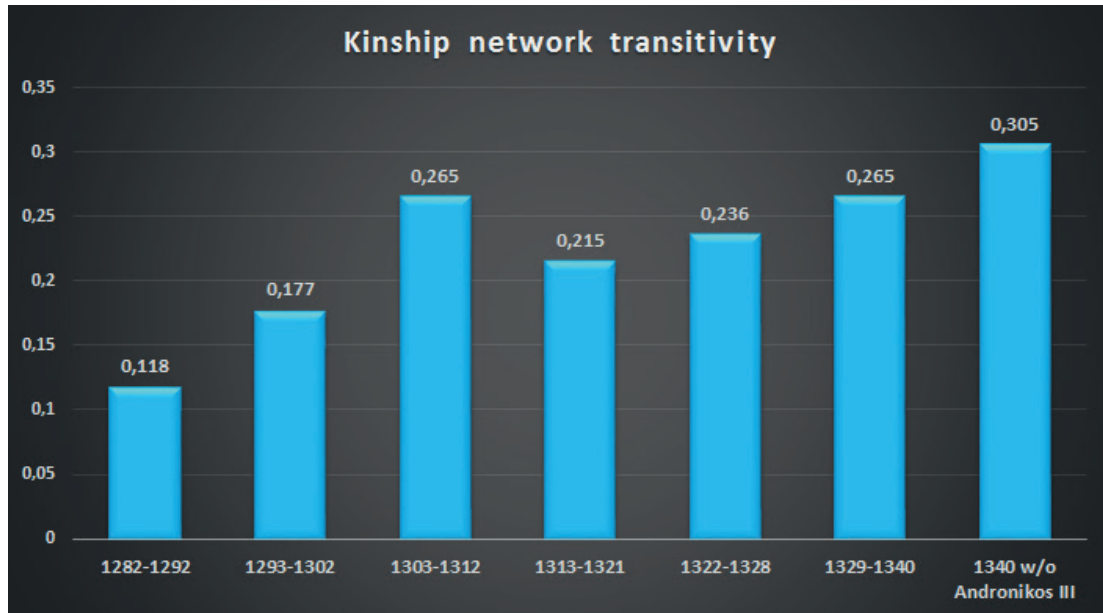


Fig. 3c: Values of transitivity in the network models of kinship ties between core members of the Byzantine elite for various time slices between 1282 and 1340 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

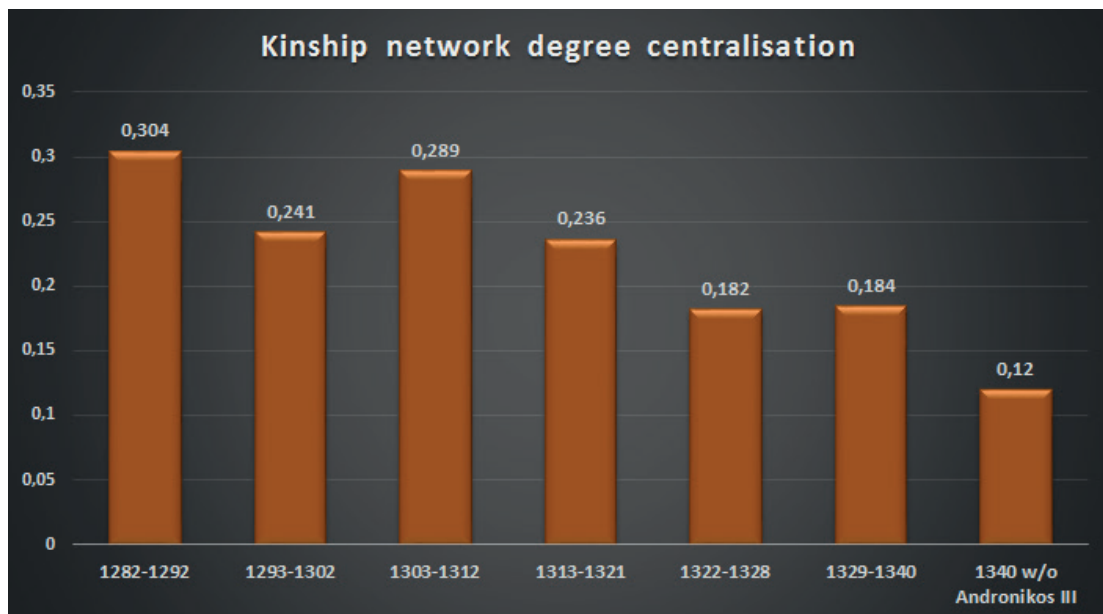


Fig. 3d: Values of degree centralisation in the network models of kinship ties between core members of the Byzantine elite for various time slices between 1282 and 1340 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

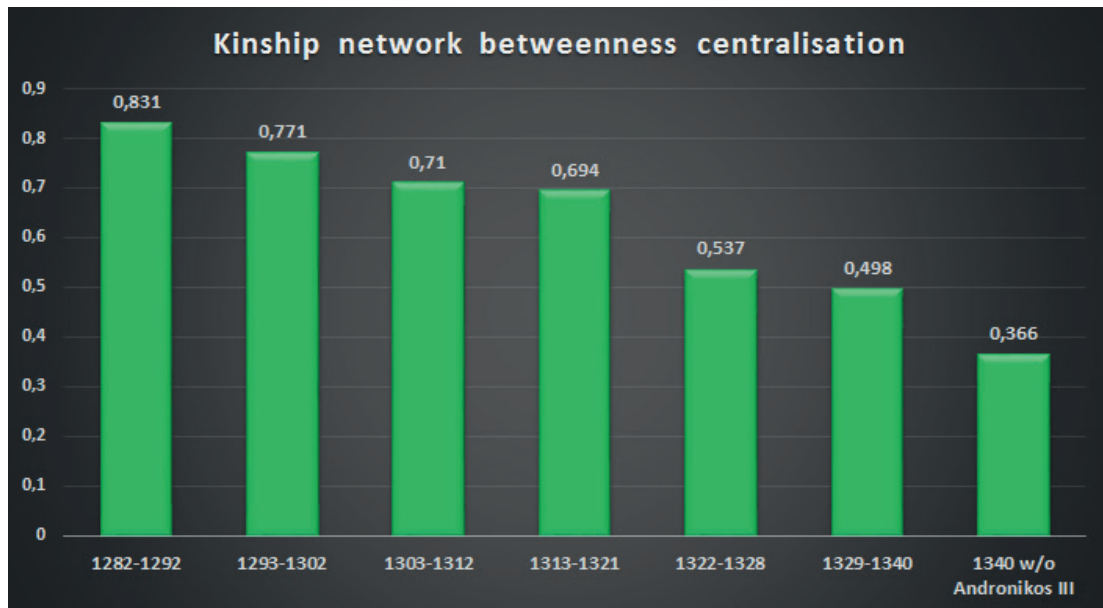


Fig. 3e: Values of betweenness centralisation in the network models of kinship ties between core members of the Byzantine elite for various time slices between 1282 and 1340 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

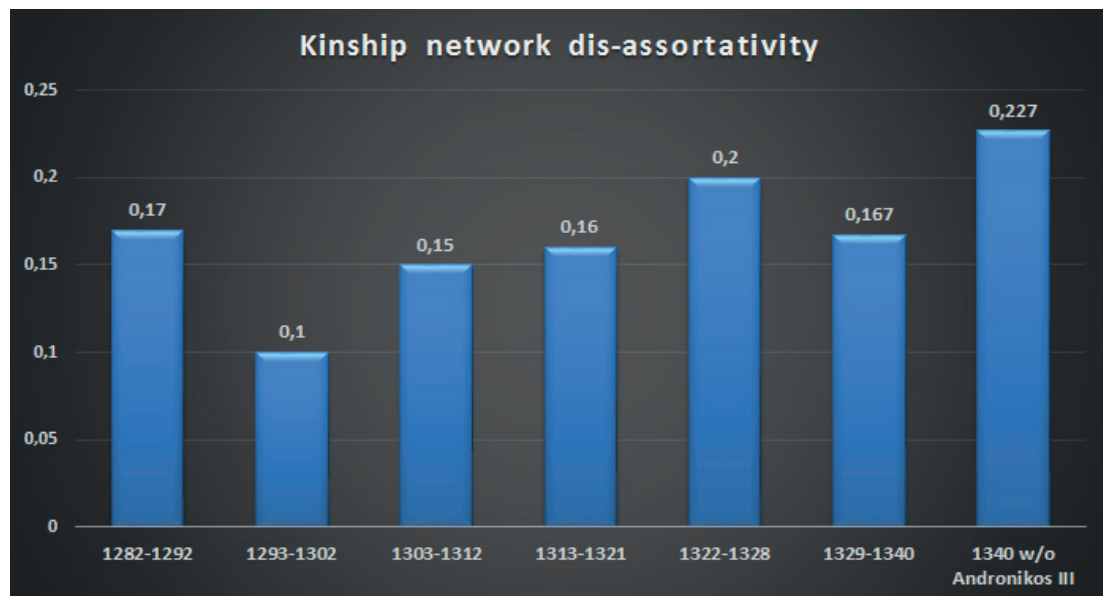


Fig. 3f: Values of (degree-based) dis-assortativity in the network models of kinship ties between core members of the Byzantine elite for various time slices between 1282 and 1340 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

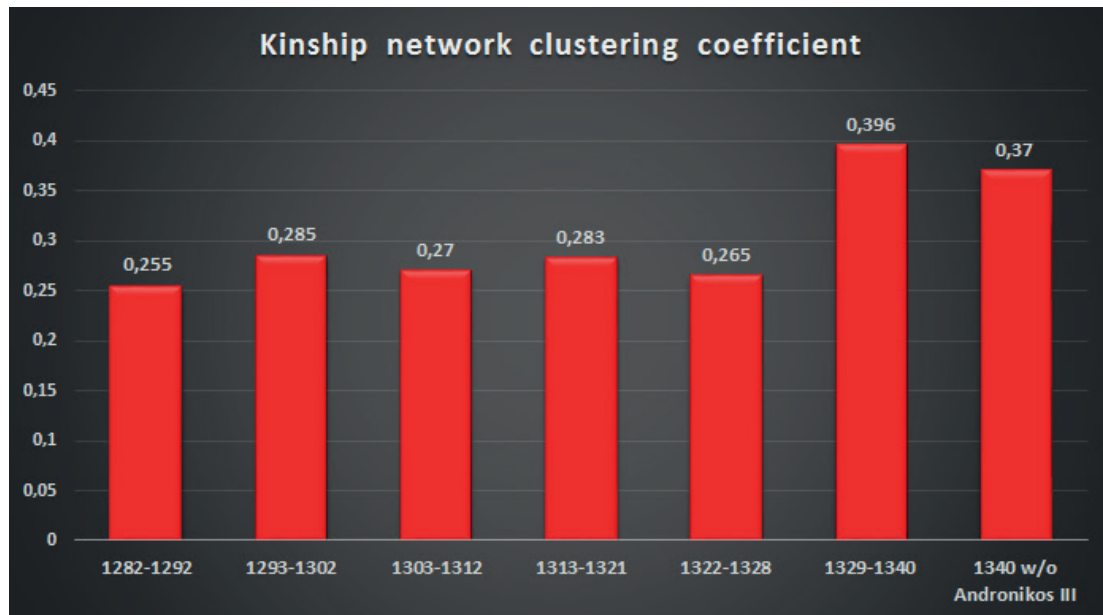


Fig. 3g: Values of clustering coefficient in the network models of kinship ties between core members of the Byzantine elite for various time slices between 1282 and 1340 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

This now salient fragmentation of the elite network formed the structural background for a next round of civil wars in the years of 1341 to 1354, which led to a permanent weakening of the Byzantine Empire.⁴⁷ This outburst of intra-elite violence was the most significant one during the 14th century, as a time series of the annually newly added »ties of conflict« between actors in the entire network model for the Byzantine nobility for the time 1282 to 1402 demonstrates (see Fig. 4). In addition, the distribution of frequencies of the number of conflict ties activated in a year tends to follow a power law (characterised by a big number of small-scaled events and a small number of big-scaled events), which is commonly interpreted as a statistical »signature of complexity« and has been observed for other frequency distribution of magnitudes of conflict events (see Fig. 5).⁴⁸ Further analysis indicates persistence effects, meaning that the magnitude (in terms of conflict ties) of outbursts of conflict can be correlated with the size of earlier events due to feedback dynamics of polarisation, conflict and (thereby increased or dampened) polarisation within the elite network. The social system of the Late Byzantine elite had a »memory« with regard to conflicts, which influenced the severity of further conflicts.⁴⁹

47 Cf. also Preiser-Kapeller, *Complex Historical Dynamics of Crisis*, 89.

48 Newman, *Power Laws*; Clauset *et al.*, *Power-Law Distributions*. A power law follows the equation $p(k) = k^{-\alpha}$; the scaling factor α for the distribution of the number of conflict ties in our model = 1.469.

49 The so-called Hurst-exponent (the inverse of α , = 0.68). For these phenomena and statistical properties especially for time series of conflict events cf. now Trinn, *Konflikt und Komplexität*, 29-52.

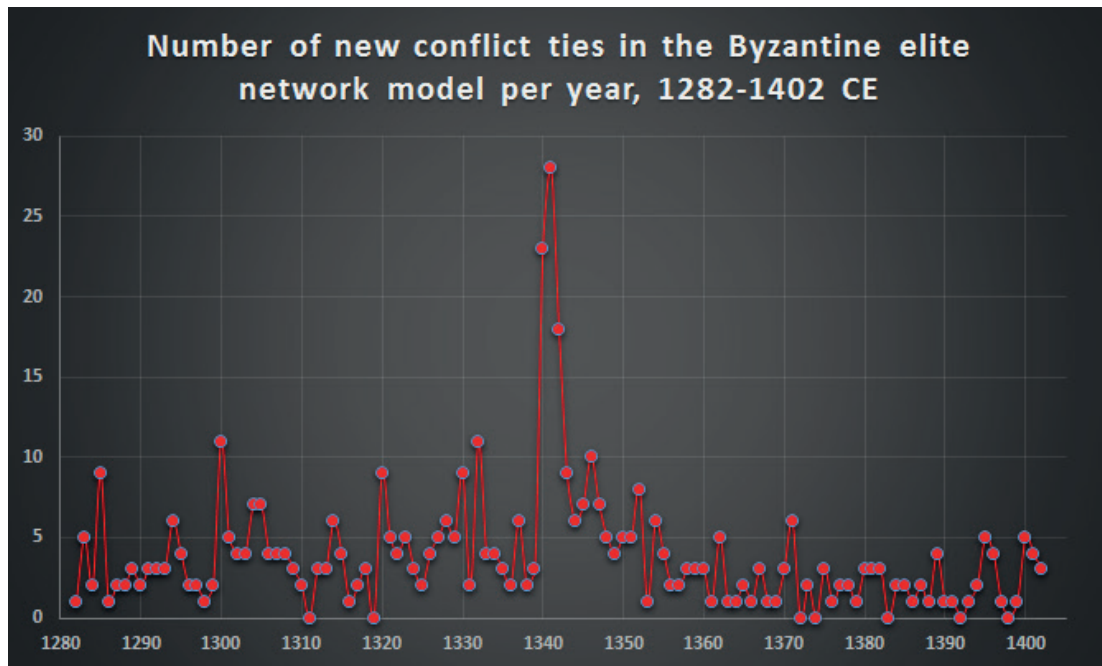


Fig. 4: Time series of the annually added »ties of conflict« between actors in the entire network model for the Byzantine nobility for the years 1282 to 1402 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

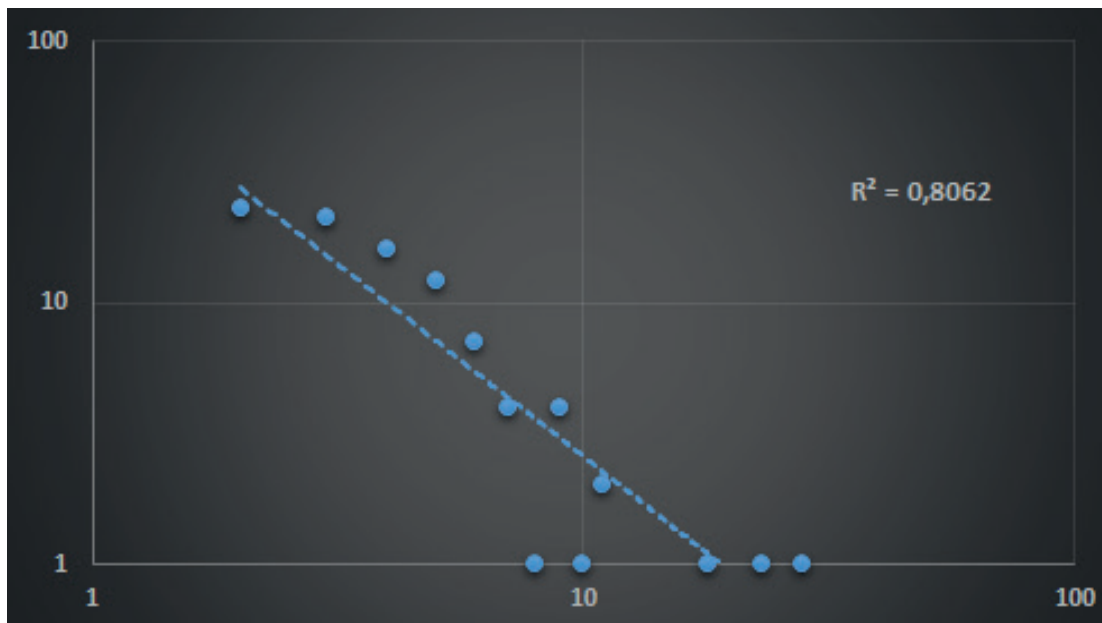


Fig. 5: Frequency distribution of the number of annually newly added »ties of conflict« between actors in the entire network model for the Byzantine nobility for the years 1282 to 1402 CE (on a double-logarithmic scale; graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

As *MEDCON* follows a comparative approach, we also ask if the complex dynamics and vulnerability of elite formations were unique to Byzantium. While we are currently creating comparative dynamic network models for the above-mentioned case studies, we inspected the dynamics of internal instability for a sample of five polities from England via Hungary, Byzantium and Egypt to China across Afro-Eurasia. We systematically registered social disturbances such as rebellions, unrest and civil wars and visualised them for the period 1200-1500 CE in the form of »instability indices« (inspired by the studies of Peter Turchin) (see Fig. 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d and 6e).⁵⁰ While periods of crises in these five cases very much differ in their chronological distribution and duration, further statistical analysis indicates a general interplay between occurrences of internal instability and of changes of ruler: domestic turmoil not only endangered a ruler's position, a transition on the throne as such in turn increased the probability for further political changes and the outbreak of periods of unrest. This hints at an underlying vulnerability of elite arrangements which became especially salient in cases of »genealogical accidents« such as the premature death of Andronikos III, but contributed to an inherent risk of all cases of regime change (see Fig. 7).⁵¹ On average across all five polities, a change of ruler in one year increased the probability for another change in the following year threefold (an outlier is Mamluk Egypt, where this probability increased only 1.5 times – but here the general risk to encounter a ruler change at any time was exceptionally high with 14 %⁵²) (see Fig. 8a and 8b). Furthermore, once a period of instability began, it had the tendency to last; again on average, the probability to encounter a year of unrest after a preceding year of unrest increases six-fold when compared with the transition period from a stable to an unstable year (again, with Egypt as an outlier with a generally higher probability to encounter a year of unrest) (see Fig. 9a and 9b).⁵³ These statistical properties signal self-energising, complex dynamics (»positive feedbacks«) of political instability in our sample of late medieval polities similar to the case of Byzantium.⁵⁴

50 Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*; Turchin and Nefedov, *Secular Cycles*. For the data basis to this analysis and further literature cf. Preiser-Kapeller, (*Not so*) *Distant Mirrors*, as well as Preiser-Kapeller, *Byzantium's Connected Empire*.

51 Cf. also North *et al.*, *Violence and Social Orders*; Watts, *Making of Polities*; Blaydes and Chaney, *Feudal Revolution and Europe's Rise*. The absence of the systemic stress of ruler change very much contributed to a relative florescence of Hungarian power in the 14th century in contrast to the turbulent decades before and afterwards, for instance.

52 On the peculiar political framework of Mamluk Egypt and function of military rebellions cf. Clifford, *State Formation*.

53 For the statistical methods used for this analysis cf. Preiser-Kapeller, *Games of Thrones*.

54 Cf. now Trinn, *Konflikt und Komplexität*.

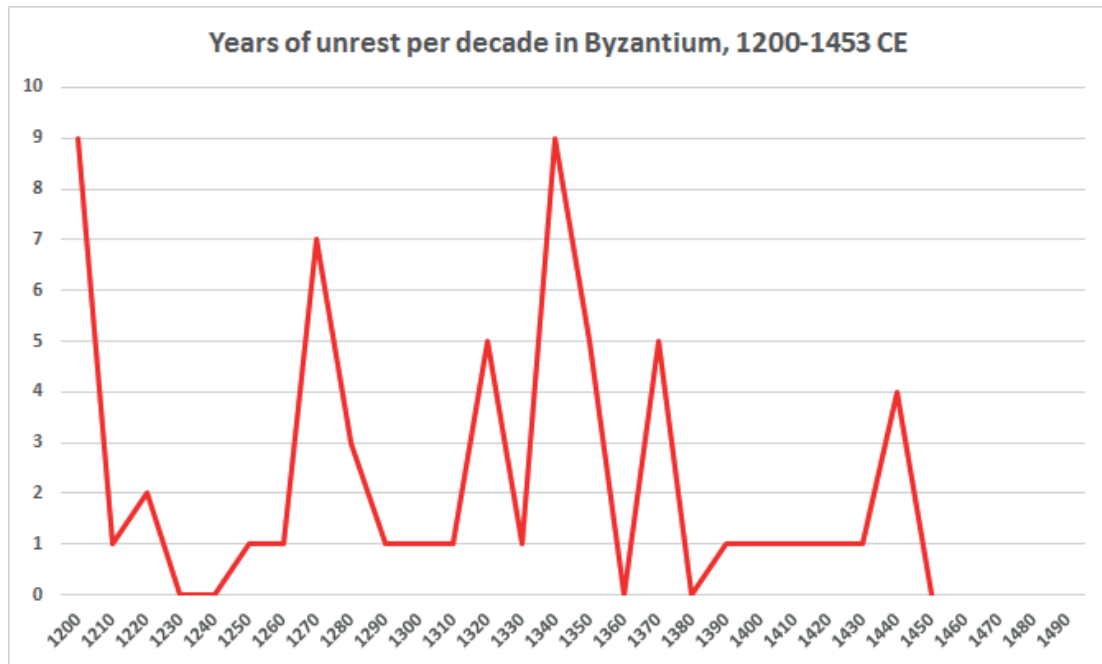


Fig. 6a: Years of unrest per decade in the Byzantine Empire, 1200-1453 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

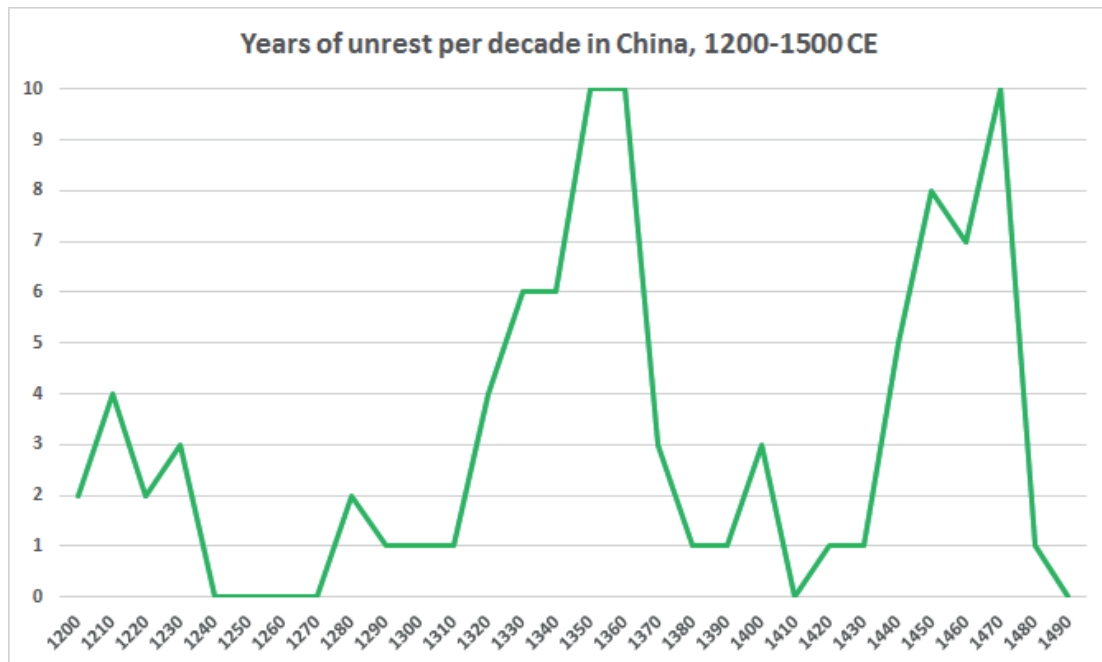


Fig. 6b: Years of unrest per decade in China, 1200-1500 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

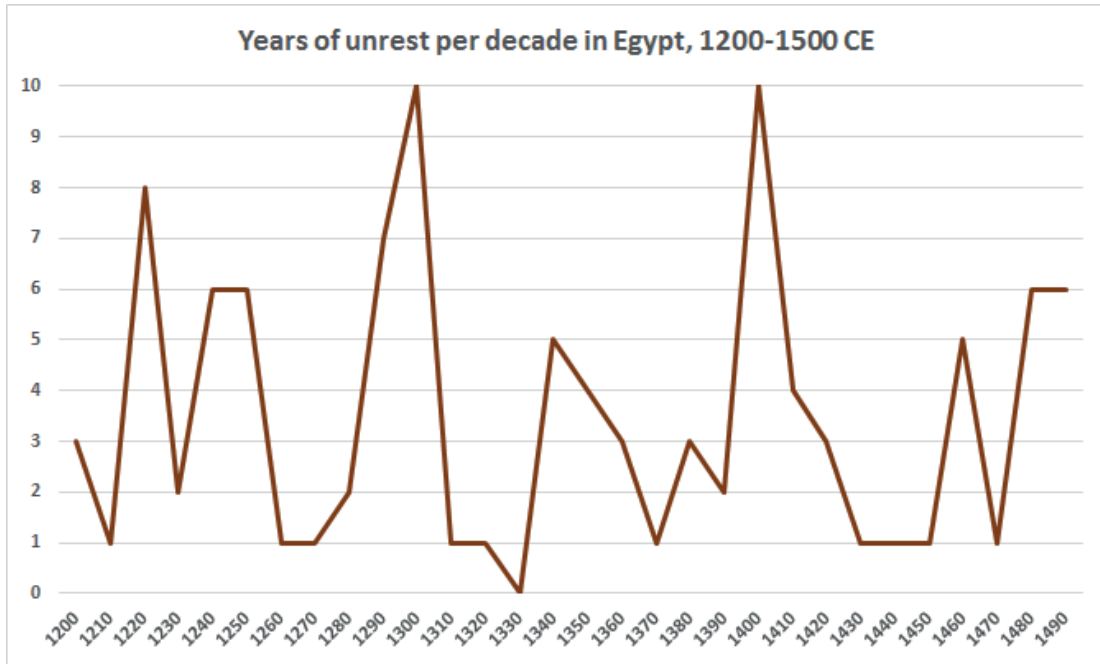


Fig. 6c: Years of unrest per decade in Egypt, 1200-1500 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

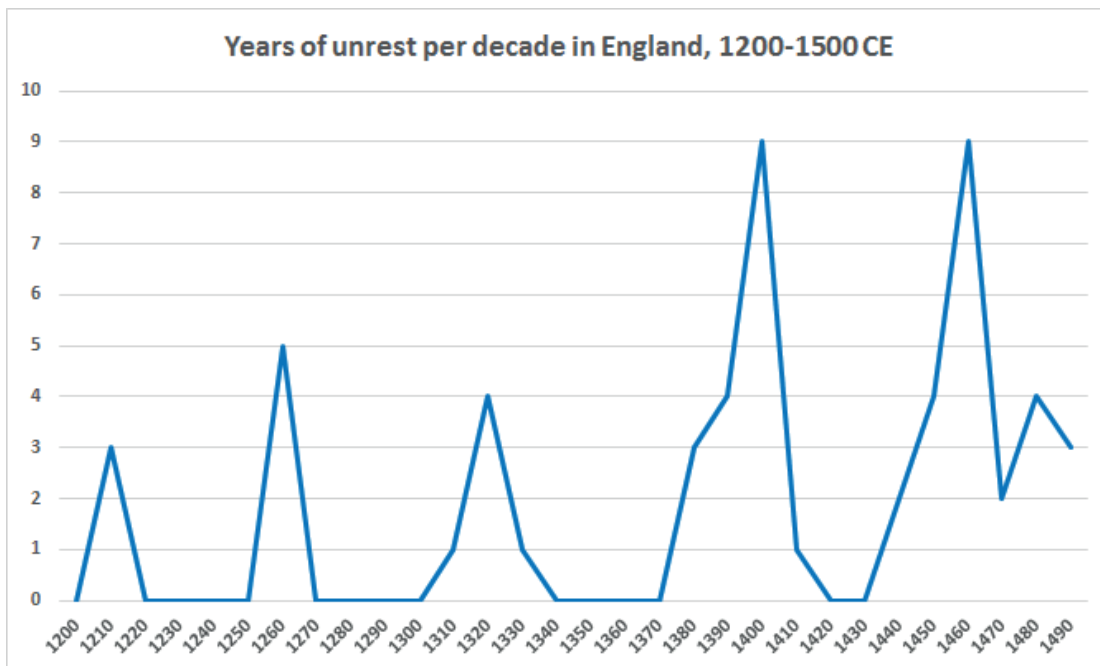


Fig. 6d: Years of unrest per decade in England, 1200-1500 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

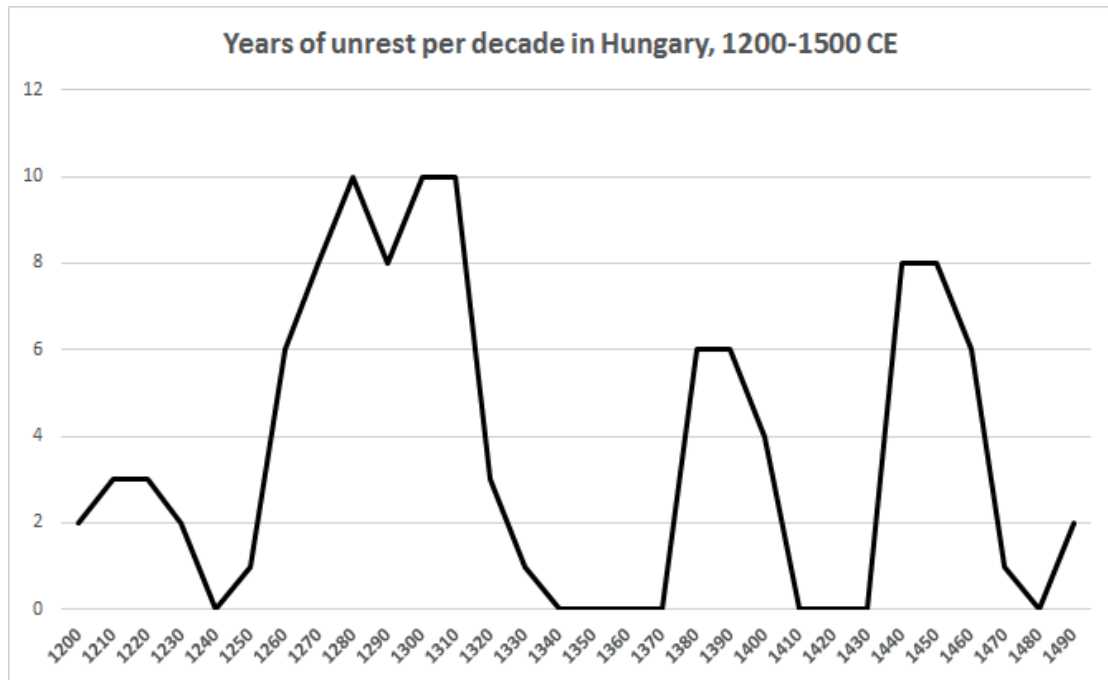


Fig. 6e: Years of unrest per decade in Hungary, 1200-1500 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

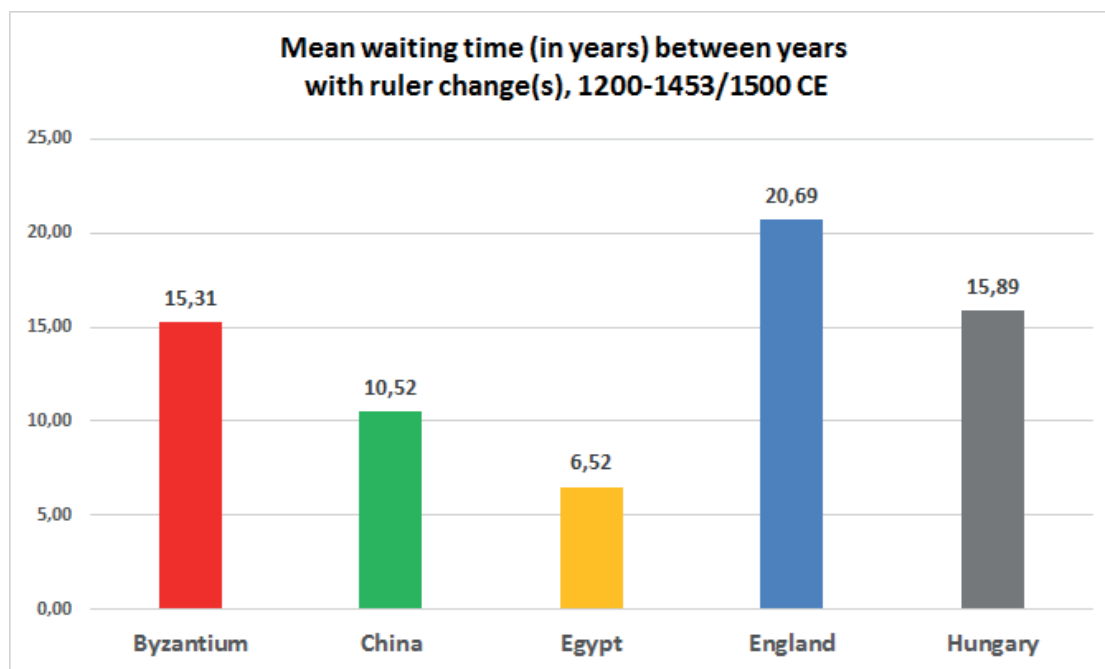


Fig. 7: Mean waiting time between years with ruler change(s) in Byzantium, China, Egypt, England and Hungary, 1200-1453/1500 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)]

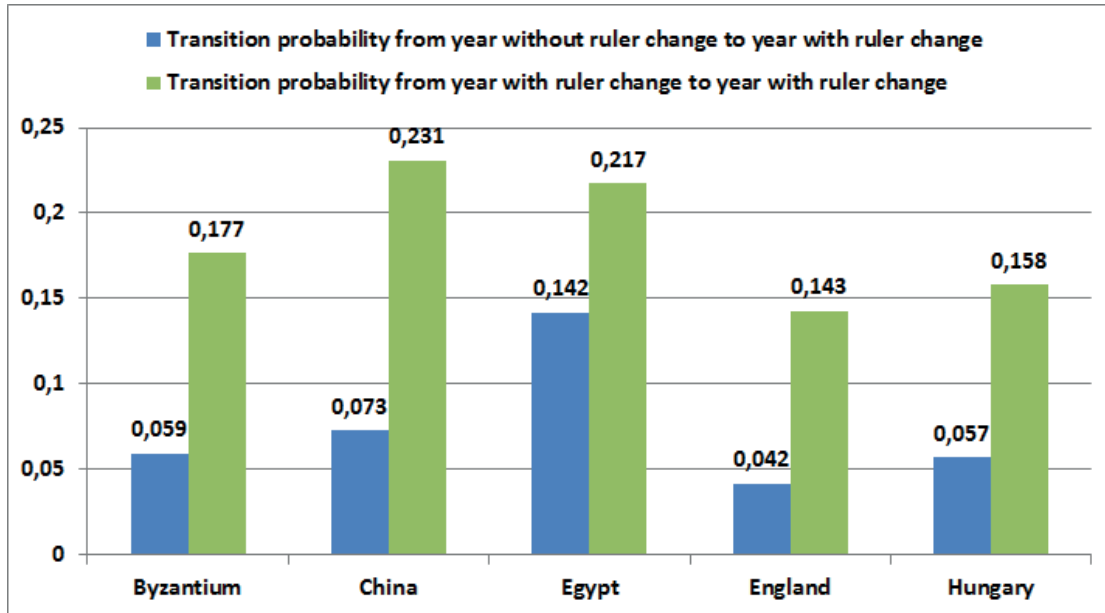


Fig. 8a: Transition probabilities from a year without ruler change to a year with ruler change respectively from a year with ruler change to another year with ruler change in Byzantium, China, Egypt, England and Hungary, 1200-1453/1500 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

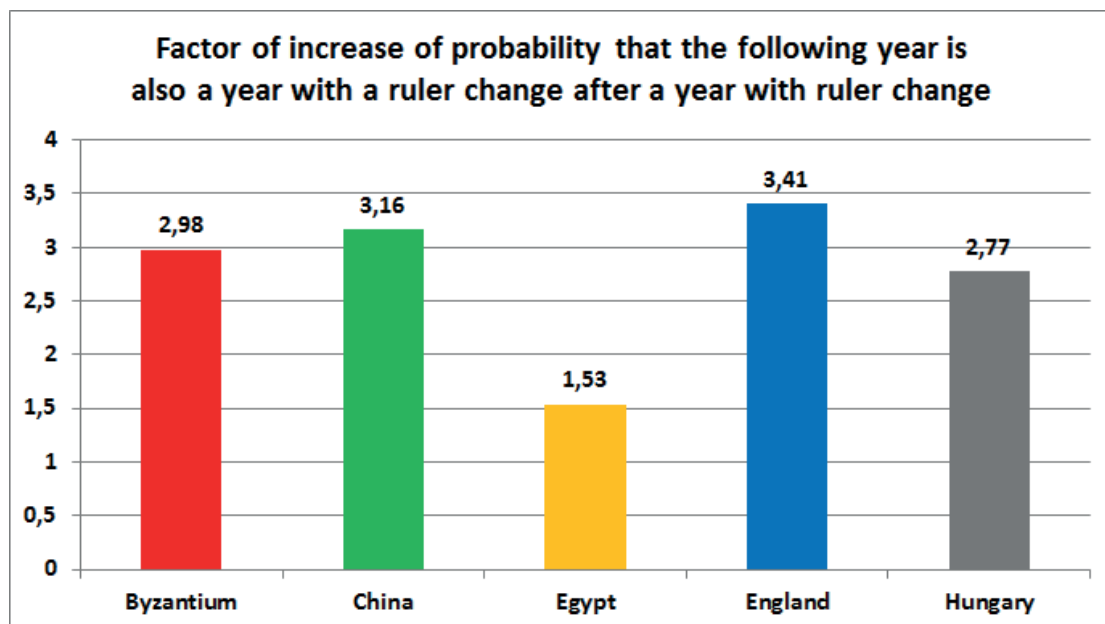


Fig. 8b: Factors of increase of the probability that the following year is also a year with a ruler change after a year with ruler change in Byzantium, China, Egypt, England and Hungary, 1200-1453/1500 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

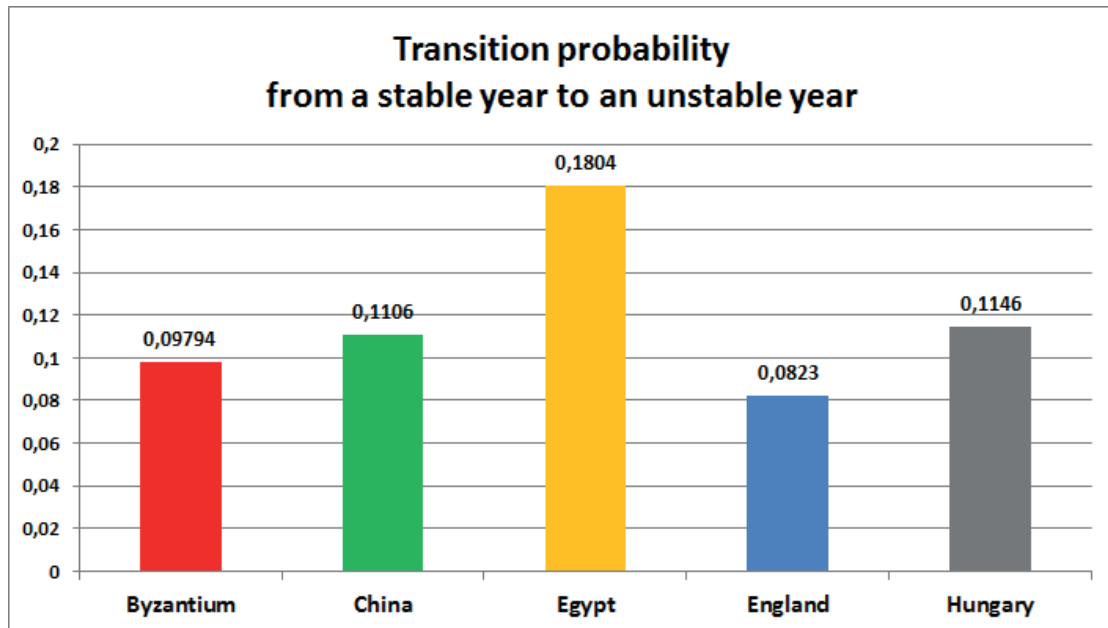


Fig. 9a: Transition probabilities from a stable year to a year of internal instability in Byzantium, China, Egypt, England and Hungary, 1200-1453/1500 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

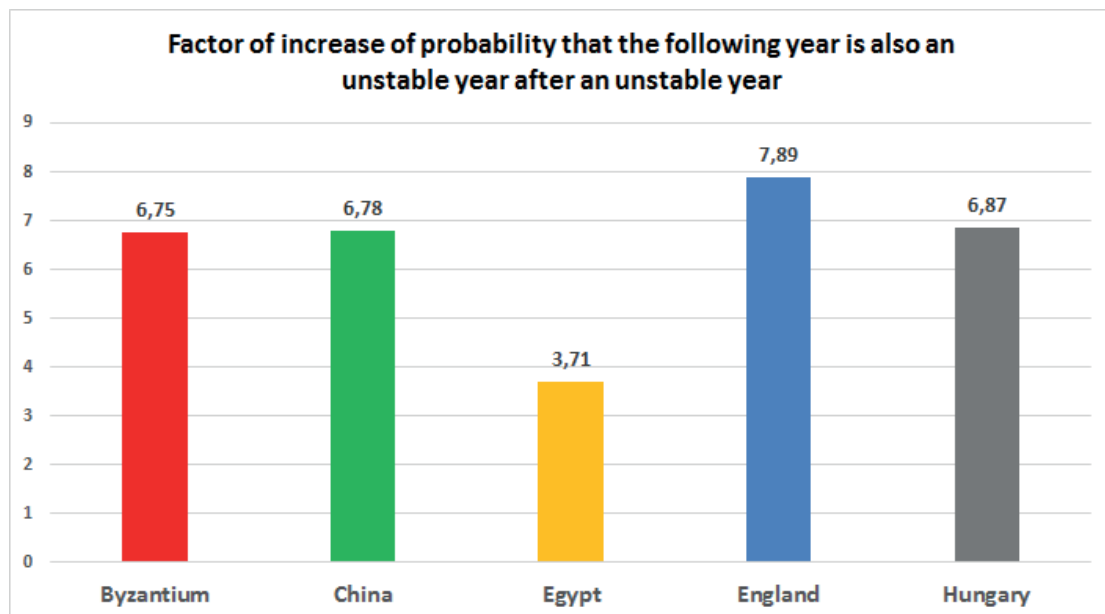


Fig. 9b: Factors of increase of the probability that the following year is also a year of instability after a year of instability in Byzantium, China, Egypt, England and Hungary, 1200-1453/1500 CE (graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

Endogenous dynamics in our analysis dwarf the direct (linear) impact of exogenous factors, especially extreme environmental events (droughts, floods, cold snaps) and outbreaks of epidemics, which we registered in a similar way to the instability events (*see Fig. 10a and 10b*).⁵⁵ As indicated above, the late 13th and the 14th century marked the transition from the so-called »Medieval Climate Optimum« (which had positive climatic effects especially on Western Europe, but less so in many other parts of the globe⁵⁶) towards the »Little Ice Age«, accompanied by an increase of the number of extreme events even before the arrival of the »Black Death« and following plague waves from 1345 onwards. This crisis has been identified as a »Schumpeterian wave of destruction« of medieval social arrangements and as a decisive factor for the »transition to modernity«, mostly with regard to Western Europe, whose »rise to global dominance« has been connected to these developments.⁵⁷ Therefore, a comparative approach especially beyond Western Europe, integrating polities which »did not make it« to »modernity« (Byzantium, Mamluk Egypt and Hungary, conquered by the Ottomans in 1453, 1517 and 1526 respectively) may allow us to capture the »diversité véritable« without losing track of essential commonalities (the »strange parallels«, as Victor Lieberman has called them in his remarkable study on Southeast Asia in Global Context) of this »world crisis«. ⁵⁸ Furthermore, a complexity approach provides a more balanced analysis of the interplay between endogenous

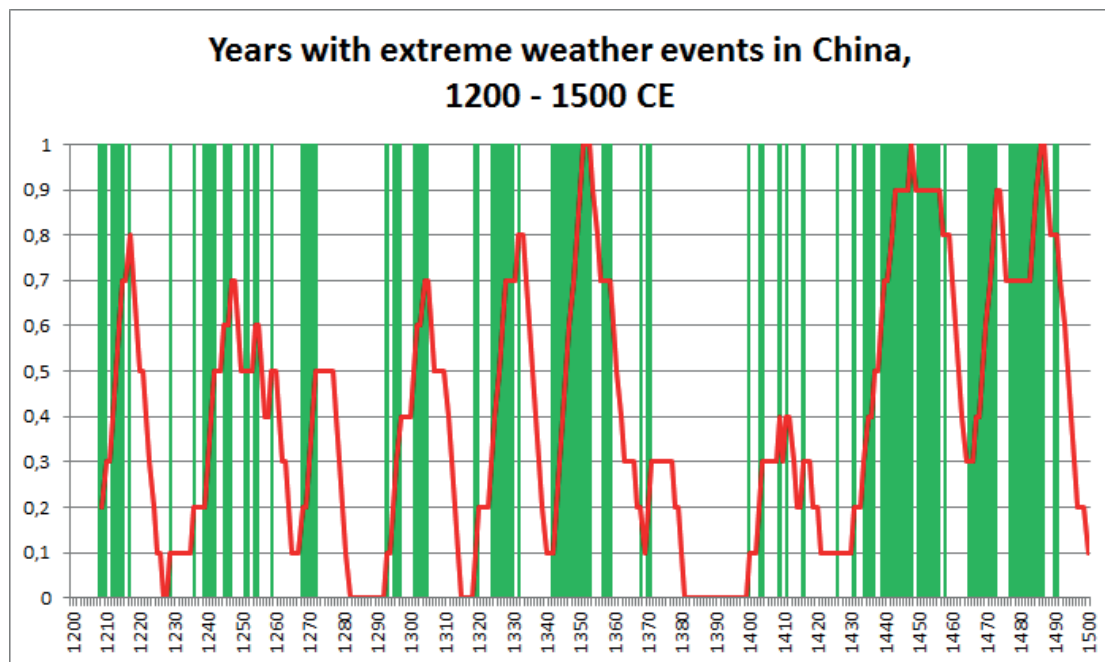


Fig. 10a: Years with extreme weather events in China, 1200-1500 CE (red: 10 years moving average; graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

55 Cf. also Albeverio *et al.*, *Extreme Events*; Rohr, *Extreme Naturereignisse*.

56 Cf. Preiser-Kapeller, *Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean?*

57 Epstein, *Freedom and Growth*; Brooke, *Climate Change*, 380-422; Benedictow, *Black Death*; Blaydes and Chaney, *Feudal Revolution and Europe's Rise*. Cf. also Hatcher and Bailey, *Modeling the Middle Ages*, for a review on the debate on the late medieval crisis and its socio-economic impacts for the English case.

58 Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*. Cf. also Borsch, *Black Death in Egypt and England*; Pamuk, *Black Death*; Brook, *Troubled Empire*.

social dynamics and exogenous impacts beyond (also recently presented) simplifying scenarios of a linear, maybe even exclusive causation of crises or collapse by forces of climate or epidemiology.⁵

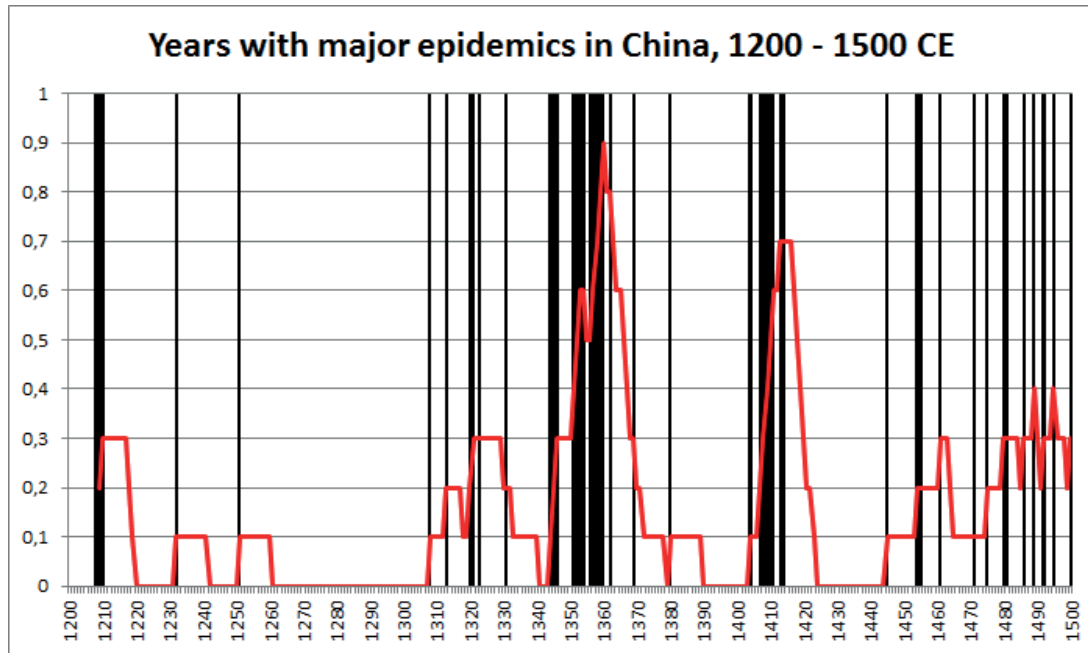


Fig. 10b: Years with major epidemics in China, 1200-1500 CE (red: 10 years moving average; graph: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 2015, created with the software tool MS-Excel 2013)

Prospects

After years of methodological development and experiments, the toolkit of COMMED »in action« will be presented in several upcoming publications. Network analysis and complexity theory were combined with climate and environmental history for a book project on the »long 14th century« of the Byzantine Empire (1282-1402) in global perspective, which was accepted by Palgrave Macmillan Publishers under the title »Byzantium's Connected Empire, 1282-1402. A Global History« and shall be published in 2016/2017. This book will be a first monographic synthesis of central methodological and analytical results. In cooperation with Mihailo Popović (OEAW) and Adam Izdebski (University of Cracow) a concept for a first »Companion to the Environmental History of Byzantium« was created, which will be published with Brill in the new series »Companions to the Byzantine World« as a composite work of more than 20 scholars from more than 10 countries.⁶⁰ A further book project under the working title »Peaches to Samarkand. Long distance-connectivity, small worlds and socio-cultural dynamics across Afro-Eurasia, 300-800 CE« is in preparation and will focus on the global entanglements between empires and world regions in the transformation period

59 Cf. Vries, *Measuring the Impact*; Winiwarter and Knoll, *Umweltgeschichte*; Brooke, *Climate Change*, 391-392, for a recent discussion (with further literature); White, *Climate of Rebellion*. For a detailed analysis of an earlier period of Byzantine history (11th-13th cent.) along these lines cf. Preiser-Kapeller, *Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean?*

60 See the outline of the volume: http://www.academia.edu/4098590/A_Companion_to_the_Environmental_History_of_Byzantium_together_with_Adam_Izdebski_and_Mihailo_Popovi%C4%87_ed._ (retrieved 10 September 2015).

between Antiquity and the Middle Ages, again integrating complexity and network theory with political, socio-economic and environmental history and archaeological evidence.⁶¹

As outlined above, on the methodological basis of *COMMED* the project »Mapping medieval conflicts: a digital approach towards political dynamics in the pre-modern period (*MEDCON*)« was awarded funding. Results and further perspectives of network analysis and complexity theory in historical and archaeological research will be discussed at an international conference »Entangled Worlds« in April 2016.⁶² Similarly, selected tools are integrated into a case study on historical Southern Armenia (Vaspurakan) for the new project »Digitising Patterns of Power. Peripheral Mountains in the Medieval World« funded within the programme »Digital Humanities: Langzeitprojekte zum kulturellen Erbe 2014« by the Austrian Academy (PI: Mihailo Popović, *IMAFO*).⁶³

Within the Division of Byzantine Research, the project is closely connected to the Edition of the Register of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (PRK)⁶⁴, the Prosopography of the Palaeologian Period (PLP) and the DFG-funded project »Ports and Landing Places at the Balkan Coasts of the Byzantine Empire (4th-12th Century): Monuments and Technology, Economy and Communication« (together with the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz and the Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies of the University of Vienna).⁶⁵ Beyond the Austrian Academy, the project is cooperating with leading institutions for complexity research in Austria and abroad, such as the »Section for Science of Complex Systems« at the Medical University Vienna (Stefan Thurner), the Department of History, University of Sheffield (Julia Hillner), the Historisches Institut, University of Jena (Robert Gramsch) and the international Evolution Institute with its »Seshat: Global History Databank«, which aims at a macro-comparison of human societies across chronological, spatial and methodological borders.⁶⁶ Thereby an exchange of methodological approaches as well as the linking of an increasing amount of data on the political, socio-economic, cultural and environmental dynamics of polities is secured.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Science, Research and Economy and the Austrian Academy of Sciences under the Grant scheme »go!digital« (project: »Mapping medieval conflicts: a digital approach towards political dynamics in the pre-modern period«).

61 Cf. the working paper Preiser-Kapeller, *Peaches to Samarkand*, with some core arguments and evidence of this project.

62 See: http://www.academia.edu/15158937/Conference_Entangled_Worlds._Network_analysis_and_complexity_theory_in_historical_and_archaeological_research (retrieved 25 September 2015).

63 <http://dpp.oeaw.ac.at/> (retrieved 25 September 2015).

64 <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/byzanz/prk.htm> (retrieved 25 September 2015).

65 <http://www.spp-haefen.de/en/projects/byzantine-harbours-on-the-balkan-coasts/> (retrieved 25 September 2015).

66 <http://www.complex-systems.meduniwien.ac.at/about/>; <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/history/index>; <http://www.histinst.uni-jena.de/Historisches+Institut.html>; <https://evolution-institute.org/project/seshat/> (all retrieved 25 September 2015).

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