

Heavy Metal Meets Byzantium! Contact between Scandinavia and Byzantium in the Albums »The Varangian Way« (2007) and »Stand Up and Fight« (2011) by the Finnish Band Turisas

»Diversity is what unites us!«

Turisas: »The March of the Varangian Guard«

Byzantium as a research subject fills entire libraries, but has not had as much impact on popular culture as, for example, the Classical world or the Vikings. Particularly in music, there is hardly any echo of this empire, which existed for more than a thousand years as the continuation of the Roman Empire, thus being the longest existing medieval empire (4th-15th centuries).

The Finnish Heavy Metal band Turisas has focused on the subject of Byzantium and its relations with Scandinavia. They have not only devoted a song to Byzantium but created two concept albums on the migration of the »Eastern Vikings«, the Varangians, to Constantinople (today Istanbul) and their experiences with the Byzantine Empire¹: »The Varangian Way«² (2007, fig. 1-2), and »Stand Up and Fight«³ (2011, fig. 3).

The first album describes the journey of a group of Scandinavians along the »Way of the Varangians to the Greeks«, as it was called in a 12th-century chronicle⁴, to Constantinople via Holmgard (Novgorod), the waterways and the feared Dnieper Rapids (see cover art on the album's back, fig. 2). The first album ends with the magnificent epic hymn on the capital of the Byzantine Empire, the »Miklagard Overture« (*Miklagarðr*/Miklagard being the Scandinavian name for Constantinople).

The following Turisas album from 2011, »Stand Up and Fight«, takes up the story line and starts with the energetic and dynamic song »The March of the Varangian Guard«. The story continues with songs describing Constantinople, including, for example, a race in the hippodrome (circus), continues with »The Great Escape« and ends with the song »The Bosphorus Freezes Over«.



Fig. 1 Cover of the album »The Varangian Way« by Turisas (2007). – © Century Media Records, with kind permission).

The cover art of the album »Stand Up and Fight« (fig. 3) is, to my knowledge, the only example of a Heavy Metal album depicting what is probably the most famous and largest Byzantine church: the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, built under Emperor Justinian I. (527-565) in only six years (532-537). Also unusual is the fact that the song about a race in the Hippodrome (Circus) of Constantinople bears a title in

1 This essay would not have been possible with the great support of the band Turisas and their lead singer and songwriter Mathias Nygård in particular, who also gave valuable insight into the meanings and intentions behind the songs. I would also like to thank Century Media Records and Reservoir Media to grant permission to use song lyrics and cover artworks for this essay. Furthermore, I would like to thank my dear colleagues Prof. Dr Günter Prinzing, Department of Byzantine Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany; JunProf. Dr Roland Scheel, Department of Scandinavian Studies, Göttingen University, Ger-

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2 Turisas, The Varangian Way 2007, Century Media Records: 77580-2.

3 Turisas, Stand Up and Fight 2011, Century Media Records: 9979822.

4 Nestor Chronicle, s. below, p. 396. 399.



Fig. 2 Back cover of the album »The Varangian Way« by Turisas (2007). – (© Century Media Records, with kind permission).



Fig. 3 Cover of the album »Stand up and Fight« by Turisas (2011). – (© Century Media Records, with kind permission).

Greek: »Βένετοι – Πράσινοι« (»Blues« and »Greens«), referring to the colours of the racing teams.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the lyrics and the story told by Turisas from the viewpoint of Byzantine studies using historical, epigraphical, pictorial and archaeological sources to shed light on how Byzantium and its contact with Scandinavia is represented in this genre of popular culture.

Heavy Metal as a Research Subject

Heavy Metal music developed in the early 1970s with the bands Black Sabbath and Judas Priest⁵, but »the globalization of heavy metal has only recently been viewed as a culturally significant phenomenon«⁶. This is surprising, since Heavy Metal has commercially been very successful. For example, the

1980 AC/DC album »Back in Black« is one of the best-selling albums of all times with an estimated 50 million albums sold⁷.

Heavy Metal has become an academic research topic in its own right, and it is almost impossible to gain an overview over the vast literature referring to this music genre and its many subgenres⁸. Heavy metal research is not a separate discipline, but requires *per se* interdisciplinarity, presenting particular challenges⁹. Musicological issues are in the focus¹⁰ especially, but Heavy Metal music has also been studied in many other disciplines from anthropology to theology¹¹. Deena Weinstein's books »Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology« (1991) deserves special mention as a very early recognition of Heavy Metal Studies as a cultural phenomenon¹². The wide range of topics include, for example, national expressions of Metal and issues of cultural/ethnic identities¹³, demographics, gender, identity and the mental state of the fans¹⁴, economy

5 The actual »beginning« of Heavy Metal is disputed; s. Brown/Spracklen/Keith-Hahn/Scott, Introduction 3. – Popoff, Who Invented Heavy Metal? – An overview over the development of the genre: Elflein, Schwermetallanalysen 43-45. – S. also the chapter »Metallurgies: Genre, History, and the Construction of Heavy Metal« in Walsler, Running with the Devil 1-26.
6 Brown et al., Introduction 3.
7 According to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_best-selling_albums (23.7.2017), the album ranges second after Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, 1982, Epic: QE 38112 (and over 400 more editions).
8 See for an overview Heesch/Höpflinger, Methoden der Heavy Metal-Forschung 9-10. – For a collection of research publications s. the self-published collection of bibliographical entries by Yfantis, Metal Goes Science.
9 Heesch/Höpflinger, Methoden der Heavy Metal-Forschung 14, with a discussion of disciplines and methods.
10 See especially Elflein, Schwermetallanalysen.
11 Such as social and cultural history, sociology, social anthropology, ethnology, religious studies, political sciences, media studies, gender studies, literary sciences, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, medieval studies and theology. – S. several essay collections with approaches from different disciplines: Brown et al., Global Metal Music. – Heesch/Höpflinger, Methoden der Heavy Metal-Forschung. – Nohr/Schwaab, Metal Matters. – S. also the conference pro-

ceedings ed. by Karjalainen/Kärki, Modern Heavy Metal (interdisciplinary conference held in Helsinki 2015). – S. also Stoop/Bartosch, Musikalische Artikulationen. – Weinstein, Heavy Metal. – Kahn-Harris, Extreme Metal. – Bartosch, Heavy Metal Studies. – Walsler, Running with the Devil. – Scott/Heesch: Gender and Sexuality. – Nohr/Schwaab, Medienwissenschaften. – Sharman/Dingle, Metal Music and Anger Processing. – Shafron/Karno, Heavy Metal Music. – Dobschenzki, German »Mittelalter Metal«. – Berndt, Metal und Christentum (PhD thesis in theology).
12 Weinstein, Heavy Metal. S. also Weinstein's 2007 article Weinstein, Reflections on Metal Studies.
13 E.g.: Bayer, Heavy Metal Music in Britain. – Von Helden, Norwegian Metal Music. – Karjalainen/Sipilä, Finnish Heavy Metal. – Hecker, Turkish Metal. – Weston, Basque Metal.
14 See, e.g., part III in Brown et al., Global Metal Music: »Metal Demographics and Identity« with contributions by J.-P. Ury-Petesch, C. Guibert / G. Guibert, A. R. Brass. – Scott/Heesch, Gender and Sexuality. – S. also the proceedings of a conference held in Helsinki in 2015: Karjalainen/Kärki, Modern Heavy Metal: Session 1 »Heavy Metal Fans and Community«. – Howe/Friedman, Groupies. – Howe/Aberson, Life Experiences. – Smialek, Reception Study. – Swami/Malpass et al., Metalheads.

and commerce of Heavy Metal¹⁵, the community's »dress code«¹⁶, or the symbolism of jewellery worn by musicians and fans alike (Thor's Hammers, pentagrams, skulls, etc.)¹⁷. Heavy metal is also becoming interesting for unexpected disciplines such as biology: empirical observations have shown that great white sharks become calmer when listening to AC/DC; they become »more investigative, more inquisitive and a lot less aggressive«¹⁸. Studies have also dealt with the effect of the music on humans: comparable to sharks, research in human neuroscience and psychology has shown no proof for an increased aggressiveness in listeners of Heavy Metal, but rather the opposite¹⁹.

Cover art²⁰ and graphic design have been discussed²¹; studies have investigated the darkness in Heavy Metal cover albums with the help of the art historian Erwin Panofsky's picture analysis methods²², or the effect of cover artwork on the music industry²³. The lyrics have been researched, for example, within the disciplines of English literature, linguistics, Scandinavian studies, sociology and theology, and also in medieval studies²⁴. Examples are a study on keywords used in Heavy Metal music²⁵, an essay collection on lyrics and intertextuality²⁶ and a study on »Metal and Christianity«²⁷.

According to Weinstein, the lyrics generally fall into two (not undisputed²⁸) subject groups: first, the »Dionysian theme«, referring to the Greek god of wine and wine-making, of ritual madness, fertility, theatre and religious ecstasy (Roman Bacchus), hence »sex, drugs and rock and roll«, or just enjoying life and partying; second, the »chaotic theme«, referring to dark subjects, such as hell, injustice, mayhem, carnage and death²⁹.

However, this does not take into account the songs and bands with a generally positive world view, »Happy Metal« so to speak, such as Helloween's »Future World«³⁰. More important, a whole group of songs is excluded that leaves the sphere of expressions of personal feelings, worldviews, reli-

gious attitudes or life-and-death-themes: the large group of lyrics dealing with historical subjects, either fictional or more or less historically reliable. Well-known examples are Judas Priest's concept album on Nostradamus³¹ and Iron Maiden's songs on Vikings (»Invaders«³²), the Albigensian Crusade (»Montségur«³³), World War I (»Paschendale«³⁴) etc., and, last but not least, the Turisas albums discussed here. Other songs and albums draw on world literature, such as Iron Maiden's »The Rime of the Ancient Mariner«³⁵, based on the 1798 ballad by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), or »Brave New World«³⁶, based on the 1932 novel by Aldous Huxley (1894-1963).

Heavy Metal and the Middle Ages have also been studied, for example, the reception of the pre-modern period in Heavy Metal³⁷. Jennifer Dobschenski in her paper on German »Mittelalter Metal« (2015) tackled crucial questions, such as what idea the performers have of the Middle Ages and why the Middle Ages are so appealing to the musicians³⁸.

The ways of dealing with history and particular events in song lyrics can range from a free adaptation (e.g., to evoke a glorious national past or an image of masculinity) to an in-depth analysis with historical accuracy. Viking topics are especially popular, not only in Heavy Metal lyrics, but also in research. For example, Simon Trafford and Aleks Pluskowski focused on »Vikings in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal« and its genesis in a paper³⁹, whilst Imke von Helden studied the links of Viking Metal to Old Norse literature⁴⁰ and has furthermore devoted a monograph to Norwegian Metal and questions of cultural identity⁴¹. Turisas's »The Varangian Way« has also received academic attention in Nordic Viking and Medieval Studies⁴², focusing rather on the narrative than on historical issues⁴³, and also in Byzantine Studies⁴⁴, suggesting a name for a new sub-subgenre »Varangian Metal«⁴⁵.

15 See, e.g., part IV in Brown et al., *Global Metal Music: »Metal Markets and Commerce«* with contributions by Karjalainen/Sipilä and Barratt, *Metal Jewellery*. – Karjalainen/Kärki, *Modern Heavy Metal: Session 13 »Heavy Metal Business and Industries«* with contributions by L. Niebling, E. Sipilä, L. Laaksonen, F. Hutabarat / I. R. A. Kusumah.
16 E.g. Höpflinger, *Kleidung im Heavy Metal*. – Berg/Gulden et al., *The Metal T-Shirt*.
17 Barratt, *Metal Jewellery*.
18 K. Ma, *Heavy Metal Under the Sea: Sharks Act Calmer When Listening to AC/DC*. In: *Time*, 6 June 2011 <http://newsfeed.time.com/2011/06/06/heavy-metal-under-the-sea-sharks-act-calmer-when-listening-to-acdc/> (23.7.2017).
19 See e.g. Sharman/Dingle, *Metal Music and Anger Processing* (with more literature). – Shafron/Karno, *Heavy Metal Music*.
20 For a collection of »Hard Rock Cover Art of the Vinyl Age« s. Popoff, *Fade to Black*.
21 Poynor, *Graphic Metallica*.
22 Gulden/Sjøvoll/Berg/Hjort af Ornäs, *Darkness in Album Covers*.
23 Cook, *Music Industry*.
24 See below.
25 Taina, *Keywords in Heavy Metal Lyrics*.
26 Bartosch, *Heavy Metal Studies*.
27 Berndt, *Metal und Christentum*.
28 See e.g. Hindrichs, *Body's Count* 119, n. 3, who suggested that the opponent of Dionysos in Heavy Metal should rather be Ares: »[...] Ares, the God of war in Greek mythology and the paradigmatic model for every metal hero.«
29 Weinstein, *The Music and its Culture* 35.
30 Helloween, *Keeper of the Seven Keys Part I*, 1987, Noise International: N0061.

31 Judas Priest, *Nostradamus*, 2008, 2 CDs, Sony BMG Music Entertainment: 88697315572.
32 Iron Maiden, *The Number of the Beast*, 1982, EMI: EMC 3400, OC 062-07 608.
33 Iron Maiden, *Dance of Death*, 2003, EMI: 592 3401, 07243-592340-1-4.
34 Iron Maiden, *Dance of Death*, 2003, EMI: 592 3401, 07243-592340-1-4.
35 Iron Maiden, *Powerslave*, 1984, EMI: 064-24 0200-1.
36 Iron Maiden, *Brave New World*, 2000, EMI: 7243 5 26605 1 3.
37 Hassemer, *Metal-Alter*.
38 Dobschenski, *German »Mittelalter Metal«* 114. The author comes to the conclusion that the preferred subjects in this subgenre (using four case studies) are medieval minstrels, magic and religion, death and violence, for which often original medieval songbooks are used, however, mingling historicity and fantasy (Dobschenski, *German »Mittelalter Metal«* 113. 120).
39 Trafford/Pluskowski, *Vikings in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal*. – Trafford, *Birth of Viking Metal*. – S. also the MA thesis by Walsh, *A Great Heathen Fist* (published online).
40 Von Helden, *Viking Metal and its Links to Old Norse Mythology*.
41 Von Helden, *Norwegian Metal Music*.
42 Walsh, *A Great Heathen Fist* (MA thesis in Nordic Viking and Medieval Culture). – Walsh, *Breathing History* (short talk, drawing from the results of her MA thesis, no critical apparatus).
43 The historical side is rather neglected, e.g., sources or secondary literature is almost never provided.
44 Leskinen/Wilskman, *Varangian Metal*.
45 Leskinen/Wilskman, *Varangian Metal*. – Both studies stress the historical accuracy of Turisas' lyrics (not the costumes), but do not go into much historical detail, miss out on many aspects and fall short of a critical apparatus.



Fig. 4 Valhalla: a Valkyrie with a drinking horn at the gates of Valhalla, welcoming a Viking who has fallen in battle and is carried by the eight-legged horse of Odin, Sleipnir. Stone relief, 8th century, Stockholm, Historiska Museet. – (Photo A. Bosselmann-Ruickbie).

Turisas: The Musical Style and the Topic of the Lyrics

The band was founded in 1997 in Finland by Mathias Nygård and Jussi Wickström⁴⁶ who named it after a Finnish war god⁴⁷. Their debut album »Battle Metal«⁴⁸, released in 2004, also gave the self-chosen name for the band's style⁴⁹. This was a new definition of what is an unusual mixture of musical styles, such as Pagan/Folk Metal, Viking Metal, Epic Metal, Symphonic Power Metal and also taking up a comparatively new genre, Pirate Metal, in the song »Hunting Pirates« (album »Stand Up and Fight«), mingled with folkloristic elements (e. g., the song »In the Court of Jarisleif«, album »The Varangian Way«)⁵⁰.

Since the development of Heavy Metal Music in the 1970s, nomenclatures of the music have developed far beyond a comparatively simple discrimination between »Rock« and »Heavy Metal«⁵¹. There is now an almost confusing diversity of subgenres within Heavy Metal »that even diehard metalheads sometimes have trouble telling apart«⁵²: Speed Metal,

Black Metal, Thrash Metal, Death Metal, Prog(ressive) Metal, Classic Metal, True Metal or »Mittelalter Metal« (»Middle Ages Metal«)⁵³. The style of Turisas is unique, especially with regard to the choice of musical instruments, such as electric violin and accordion.

With regard to the topics, Viking Scandinavia, with its history, heroes, legends and mythology, has in general attracted much attention in popular culture and especially film and music, from the famous 1958 film »The Vikings« (starring Kirk Douglas, Robert Wagner and Janet Leigh) to the successful Chanel One series »The Vikings«, based around the semi-legendary Scandinavian King Ragnar Lothbrok⁵⁴. The Vikings are also a popular subject in Heavy Metal music, such as Iron Maiden's »Invaders« on their famous 1982 album »The Number of the Beast«⁵⁵. Particularly, the Viking warriors' »heaven« Valhalla (fig. 4), has featured in many songs, such as Manowar's »Gates of Valhalla« (1983)⁵⁶, Blind Guardian's »Valhalla« (1989)⁵⁷, Týr's »Valhalla« (2006)⁵⁸ and Judas Priest's »Halls of Valhalla« (2014)⁵⁹, just to name a few.

46 Band members: Mathias Nygård (vocals), Jussi Wickström (guitar), Olli Vänskä (violin), Robert Engstrand (keyboards), Jaakko Jakku (drums), Jesper Anastasiadis (bass), s. www.turisas.com/site/band/ (27.7.2017).

47 Called Turisas in Crawford's translation of the Finnish national epic Kalevala by E. Lönnrot (Kalevala [Lönnrot/Crawford], Rune II and XLII), and Turisas in 16th-century Finnish bishop, theologian and Lutheran reformer Mikael Agricola's (1510-1555) list of Finnish gods (s. Virtanen/Dubois, Finnish Folklore 18).

48 Turisas, Battle Metal, 2004, Century Media Records: 77439-2.

49 www.turisas.com/site/band/ (27.7.2017).

50 As to Turisas' own classification s. the band's website, www.turisas.com/site/band/ (27.7.2017): »Often labelled as simply a folk metalband, the band defies easy genre definitions. Incorporating elements of symphonic power metal along with elements from prog, punk, death metal and even stadium rock, Turisas has truly carved a sound of their own. With no comparison, Turisas is as unique sounding battle metal as it gets.« – S. also the relevant chapter in Leskinen/Wilskman, Varangian Metal 8-9.

51 Elflein, Schwermetallanalysen 45-46, discusses the three basic stylistic categories introduced by Weinstein, Heavy Metal 6-8: Lite Metal, Classic Metal

and Speed/Thrash Metal. He agrees to the general categories, but notes that between Weinstein's book (1991) and his own publication (2010) these styles have developed, and also that a term such as »lite metal« does not find acceptance in the fans' communities (Elflein, Schwermetallanalysen 46). He decides for the following nomenclature: Hard Rock (instead of Lite Metal), Classic Metal (instead of Heavy Metal) and Extreme Metal (instead of Speed/Thrash; s. for Extreme Metal: Kahn-Harris, Extreme Metal).

52 Poynor, Graphic Metallica.

53 Compare the list in Elflein, Schwermetallanalysen 45. – S. also Dobschenzki, German »Mittelalter Metal«.

54 For a discussion of the series' historical accuracy s. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikings_\(TV_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikings_(TV_series)) (27.7.2017).

55 Iron Maiden, The Number of the Beast, 1982, EMI: EMC 3400, OC 062-07 608.

56 Manowar, Into Glory Ride, 1983, Megaforce Records: MRI-169-666.

57 Blind Guardian, Follow the Blind, 1989, No Remorse Records: NRR 1006.

58 Týr, Ragnarok, 2006, Napalm Records: NPR 199, NPR 199 CD.

59 Judas Priest, Redeemer of Souls, 2014, Sony Music: 88843072432.

The term »Viking Metal« has been coined for this sub-genre of Metal music⁶⁰ that combines dark, often epic hymns with northern folk elements, and particularly using popular themes of the Viking world in their lyrics, such as Viking mythology and battles⁶¹. Popular bands are, for example, Bathory (considered the »founding band« of this style⁶²), Ensiferum and Týr. However, to place Turisas exclusively in this corner would be partly correct, but would not do their music justice as a whole.

Besides Turisas, only a few bands have included Byzantium into their portfolio of topics. The German Metal band Rebellion, for example, released an album trilogy named »The History of the Vikings« (2005-2009)⁶³ and also dealt with the Varangians and Byzantium: their second album is titled »Miklagard« (Constantinople). Another example is the Swedish melodic Death Metal band Amon Amarth with their song »Varyags of Miklaard« (»Varangians of Constantinople«) on their album »Twilight of the Thunder God« (released in 2008)⁶⁴.

Setting the Stage: History, Sources and State of Research on the Vikings, Varangians, Byzantium, and the »Varangian Question«

The Vikings and their history, archaeology and mythology have been researched for a long time and are testified by many sources. The term »Viking« does not describe an ethnic group but a »profession«, which is something like going on a raid. The etymology has been discussed extensively⁶⁵, but even in the Middle Ages, there was no consensus on what a Viking, »synonymous with a raiding or trading Northman«⁶⁶, actually was. Trade, for example with furs⁶⁷, wax and honey, in exchange, e. g., for oil, wine, silk and glass⁶⁸, was an important part of their lives, but raiding and trading activities are often difficult to differentiate⁶⁹. The Viking world was very large (fig. 5), stretching from Iceland (and even America) in the West and Persia in the East to North Africa in the South⁷⁰, and as far as the Persian Gulf⁷¹. A Viking whetstone found in 1940 on Gotland mentions what were probably the most faraway places known to the person who carved four

words on this stone: Greece (Byzantium), Jerusalem, Iceland and Serkland.

Since the 1960s, the image of the pillaging, plundering and raping Viking warrior has shifted, and other occupations such as trading, farming and craftsmanship have come into the focus of researchers⁷², especially of the Vikings in the West and Europe rather than on the »Eastern Vikings«, the Varangians⁷³ (see map in fig. 6) who are discussed in this paper. Runic inscriptions and skaldic verses offer many examples of people who went on an *austfrfar*, a journey east⁷⁴, to what is Russia today, and further to Byzantium and its capital Constantinople along the waterways, known from written sources as the »Way of the Varangians to the Greeks«⁷⁵.

Many sources testify to the important part Varangians have played in the forming of the first large empire on East Slavic territory, the Kievan Rus', the name of which led to the name »Russia« (Ruthenica in Western sources from the 11th century)⁷⁶. In the 18th century, an academic dispute between »Normanists« and »Anti-Normanists« had started, known as the »Varangian question«, concerning the part that the Scandinavians played in forming of Slavic Rus' Empire⁷⁷, and how this, for example, affected patriotic Russian academia⁷⁸. Although many questions are still open, it is clear that the elites were often Scandinavians, but they were apparently not in the majority amongst the Slavic inhabitants. Their traces are often obscured because it was a hallmark of Scandinavians »abroad« to adopt local languages and traditions quickly and integrate to a degree that makes definitions of ethnic identity not only difficult, but obsolete⁷⁹.

Written sources in Greek, Latin and Scandinavian languages (e. g., Old Norse) are an important basis for the study of the Varangians or the Scandinavians in the East. It is problematic that the mostly orally transmitted Scandinavian history has begun to be compiled in writing only from the late 12th century, making evaluations of earlier periods difficult. This is a time when the actual heyday of the traders and soldiers of fortune who sought »fame and gold« in the Southeast had mostly passed and legends had started to be formed around them. Earlier Byzantine and Latin sources can fill this gap, but each author was biased in his own way, so that the sources have to undergo a comparative analysis: »When Byzantine

60 A list of Viking Metal bands: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Viking_metal_bands (27.7.2017).

61 On Viking Metal in general s. Trafford/Pluskowski, Vikings in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal. – Von Helden, Viking Metal and its Links to Old Norse Mythology 2-3. – Kärki, Forging Metal 132.

62 Kärki, Forging Metal 132. – Trafford, Birth of Viking Metal.

63 Rebellion, History of the Vikings vol. 1: Sagas of Iceland, 2005, Massacre Records: MAS CD0478, vol. 2: Miklagard, 2007, Massacre Records: MAS CL0522; vol. 3: Arise: From Ginnungagap to Ragnarök, 2009, IronD: IROND CD 09-1629.

64 Amon Amarth, Twilight Of The Thunder God, 2008, Metal Blade Records: 3984-14693-2.

65 For an overview on etymology and use of the Old Norse *vikingr* (masculine) for a person and *viking* (feminine) for an activity s. Brink, Who were the Vikings?. – Jesch, Ships and Men 44-56. – S. also Jesch, Ships and Men 57-68, for Viking activities »Death and War«, »Battles and Raids«, »Trade«, »Pilgrimage«.

66 Brink, Who Were the Vikings? 5.

67 Martin, Fur Trade.

68 Rapp, Cosmopolis 159.

69 See Jesch, Ships and Men 64 with references. For evidence on trade in the Viking Period in runic inscriptions and skaldic verse s. Jesch, Ships and Men 63-66.

70 See the Viking-centered map in Williams/Pentz/Wemhoff, Vikings 12-13.

71 Isitt, Vikings in the Persian Gulf.

72 For an overview s. Williams, Raiding and Warfare 193.

73 The academic literature on the Vikings fills miles of bookshelves, but a concise overview can be gained from Stefan Brinks 700 page-strong essay collection, »The Viking World« (2008/2012).

74 Jesch, Ships and Men 89-90.

75 See below, esp. p. 400-401.

76 See on the emergence of the Rus' Franklin/Shepard, Emergence of Rus. – For a brief overview s. Franklin, Rus' 1818-1820. – S. for their archaeological traces Androshchuk, Vikings in the East.

77 See on the history and discussion of this dispute Scholz, Warägerfrage.

78 See also Duczko, Viking Rus 4-5.

79 See, e. g., Renaud, The Duchy of Normandy 456.



Fig. 5 Mobility of Vikings and Varangians in the early Middle Ages. – (After Leisering, Historischer Weltatlas 37).

texts refer to Scandinavians and medieval texts from the north refer to Byzantium, they almost never talk about the same events⁸⁰.

Apart from literary evidence, such as the late 12th-century Nestor Chronicle (Primary Chronicle)⁸¹, there is a total of 29 rune stones that testify to 32 »Greek-farers« who had travelled to Byzantium (or the Orient in general) and died abroad⁸² – a rather small number in comparison to the estimated numbers of Scandinavians who travelled to Byzantium and other areas. Archaeological evidence from along the Russian rivers, such as the Dnieper, testifies to the presence of Scandinavians in these areas from the 8th century⁸³, and even as far a modern Katar on the Persian Gulf⁸⁴. Coins are

particularly revealing in this respect: the many finds of Byzantine coins and jewellery of the 10th and 11th centuries along the waterways to Byzantium agglomerate especially on the Eastern Baltic coast (modern-day Estonia), around Kiev and on the Western shores of the Black Sea⁸⁵ (see fig. 7).

Research on the Vikings was initially focused prevalingly on the relations to the West, but already in 1976 Hilda Ellis Davidson published a book titled »The Viking Road to Byzantium«⁸⁶, which formed an important step in research. Sigfus Blöndal's work »The Varangians of Byzantium« (1978) is in parts outdated, but still a reference work. In 1997, Michael Müller-Wille published the two-part conference proceedings devoted to Byzantium and the North, with a focus on the

80 Scheel, Concepts of Cultural Transfer 53 (mentioning two exceptions).

81 German translation: Müller, Nestorchronik.

82 Scheel, Jenseits der »Warärgarde«, 159 n. 46. – Källström, Runic Inscriptions.

83 See, e.g., Androschuk, Vikings in the East.

84 Isitt, Vikings in the Persian Gulf 389.

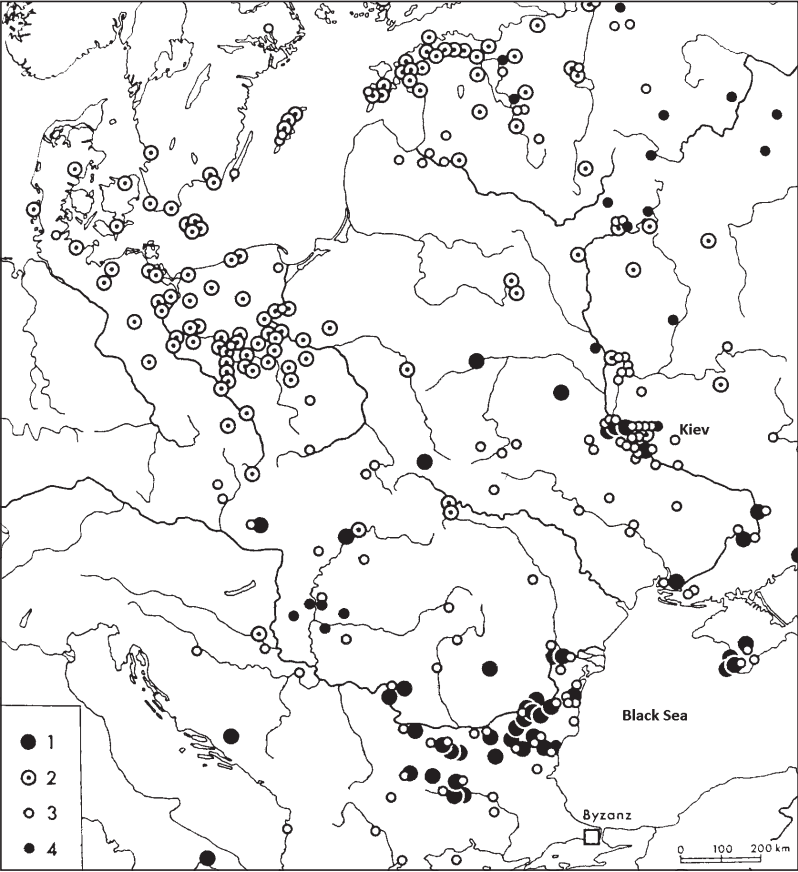
85 Müller-Wille, Relations between Byzantium and the North fig. 1. – S. also other maps showing the distributions of different object categories, such as Byzantine coins found in Sweden and Gotland (fig. 6). – S. also Eniosova, Viking Age Gold. – Eniosova/Puškina, Finds of Byzantine Origin.

86 Davidson, Viking Road.

Fig. 6 Trade route from Scandinavia to Byzantium/Constantinople; P = portage. – (After Davidson, Viking Road 48-49 map 2, changed by the author).



Fig. 7 Distribution of Byzantine coins of the 10th and 11th centuries, showing pure (1) and mixed hoards (2), single finds (3) and graves (4). – (After Müller-Wille, Relations between Byzantium and the North fig. 1, changed by the author).



Christianisation of the Baltics in the light of archaeological and historical records. The Scandinavian exchange with the Islamic and the Byzantine world was in the focus of a symposium in Uppsala, published in 1998 by Elisabeth Piltz⁸⁷. Piltz' own contribution »Varangian Companies for Long Distance Trade« is an overview of the archaeological, literary and epigraphical sources⁸⁸. Interactions between Scandinavians and the Rus' were discussed in Wladyslaw Duczko's book »Viking Rus: Studies on the Presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe« (2004)⁸⁹. Franklin's and Shepard's book on the »Emergence of Rus 750-1200« (1996) is a reference work on the forming of the Rus' realm⁹⁰. In 2013, Fedir Androshchuk edited a collection of his essays titled »Vikings in the East« focusing on the »Contacts along the Road to Byzantium (800-1100)«. In 2016, Fedir Androshchuk, Monica White and Jonathan Shepard edited a collection of essays under the heading »Byzantium and the Viking World«. This subject has also been treated by a single author in 2015, resulting in a massive reference work of over 1300 pages: Roland Scheel's »Skandinavien und Byzanz: Bedingungen und Konsequenzen mittelalterlicher Kulturbeziehungen« (»Scandinavia and Byzantium: Prerequisites and Consequences of Medieval Cultural Relations«)⁹¹. Results of his research can be found in Scheel's contribution to the subject in this volume⁹².

The state of research at the time of the composition of the album »The Varangian Way«, published in 2007, and even after the album »Stand Up and Fight« (2011), has advanced, and much was published after this date. In general, research on the Vikings has progressed immensely in the last decades, not only through new archaeological finds, but opening the iron curtain and thus encouraging international research⁹³. Some views on Vikings and Varangians have to be re-considered: for example, Roland Scheel's re-assessment of the sources has deconstructed much of the legend of what is known as the »Varangian Guard«⁹⁴ that features in the two albums considered here.

Holmgard and Beyond: »The Varangian Way«

Turisas' album »The Varangian Way« describes the story of a group of Varangians under their leader Ingvar, which is based on historical facts. »The Way of the Varangians to the

Greeks' and its historical geography is known through literary and archaeological evidence, and there was indeed a Viking expedition under a leader called Ingvar in the 11th century. The story of Ingvar is connected with the story of another famous Varangian who is mentioned in the song »Five Hundred and One« and also existed: »Nordbrikt« was the name of King Haraldr harðráði (Harald Sigurdsson, »the Hard«, later King of Norway, 1046-1066), under which he had joined the Varangian Guard in Constantinople from 1034 to 1042. Jarisleif, mentioned in the song »In the Court of Jarisleif«, is the Nordic name for the 11th-century Grand Prince Yaroslav »the Wise« of Novgorod and Kiev. Together with the date given in the song »The March of the Varangian Guard« (album »Stand Up and Fight«), we gain a precise year: 6542, second indiction (a late Roman and Byzantine tax period⁹⁵), which according to modern chronology equals 1033/34⁹⁶. The last song on »Stand Up and Fight«, »The Bosphorus Freezes Over«, contains a fictional poem by Hakon Halfdansson, the first-person narrator, dated to »appr. 1043«, marking the end of the period described in the two albums.

There are additional references to the writings of the 10th-century Arabic scholar al-Mas'udi on the »Meadows of Gold« (or the »Fields of Gold«)⁹⁷, probably as a metaphor for the Varangians' goals, as well as parts of the Finnish National Epic, the Kalevala (»Cursed be Iron«) that plays an important role in northern Heavy Metal⁹⁸.

The Album Title »The Varangian Way«, Varangians and Rus', and the Chronology of the Story

The »Varangians« can be traced in the areas of the rivers Dnieper, Dvina, Volga and Don and to the Caspian and Black Sea to Byzantium through archaeological and written evidence (Byzantine, Arabic⁹⁹, Old Russian). The first contact of Scandinavians with Byzantium occurred in the time around 800, and in the early 9th century, the Black Sea coast and the Propontis were plundered. The word »Varangian« was in Old Norse Væringjar, in Greek Βάρανγοι (Várangoi), and referred to people bound by an oath in a sort of commercial or military undertaking¹⁰⁰. Byzantium was a popular (but not the only) destination of the many Scandinavians who travelled abroad: the inscriptions on rune stones, forming the most important

87 Piltz, Byzantium and Islam.

88 Piltz, Varangian Companies.

89 Duczko, Viking Rus.

90 Franklin/Shepard, Emergence of Rus.

91 Scheel, Byzanz und Skandinavien. – S. also other publications by Scheel: Byzanz und Nordeuropa; Concepts of Cultural Transfer.

92 Scheel, Jenseits der »Warärgergarde«.

93 Trafford, Review of British Museum exhibition »Vikings«: »the overwhelming majority of the objects shown were not known at the time of the last great Vikings exhibition in 1980, either because they had not yet been unearthed or because they were sequestered from Western scholarship in forbidding Soviet-era eastern bloc museums«.

94 See below.

95 Oikonomides, Indiction.

96 The Byzantines counted the years from the date of the creation of the world, which supposedly happened 5508 years before the incarnation, so this number has to be subtracted from a given date. Since the Byzantine year began on 1 September, the Byzantine and modern calendar overlap. See Kazhdan, Chronology.

97 The Baghdad historian al-Mas'udi (c. 895-957) wrote »The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems« 943 but kept working on it afterwards. It is an historical account but also deals with zoology, astronomy, medicine, philosophy etc. S. Montgomery, Arabic Sources 555-557. – Montgomery, Vikings and Rus.

98 See, e.g., Kallioniemi/Kärki, Kalevala, esp. 67-70. – Kärki, Forging Metal. The lyrics for »Cursed be Iron« were taken from the 1888 English translation of the Kalevala by J. M. Crawford as is indicated in the CD booklet (Kalevala 97-98). – S. also Walsh, A Great Heathen Fist 35.

99 See Montgomery, Arabic Sources. – Montgomery, Vikings and Rus.

100 Lind, Role of the Varangians 409.

source material on these »Greek-farers«, usually use the word *GrikkiaR*, the ethnic designation (plural) translating to »Greeks«, and the inscriptions *Grikkfari* (contracted from the longer *Grikklandsfari*) means »Greece-travellers«¹⁰¹.

The Varangians in the East were initially known as Rus', at least until the mid-10th century. The term Rus'¹⁰² has been thought to derive from an Old Norse term for rowing men (rods-), which would fit the fact that the Vikings used boats on the eastern rivers, but the provenance of this ethnonym remains ultimately unclear. The Byzantines adopted the term Ῥῶς (Rhōs), which had been given to the people north of the Pontus by Baltic Finns and east Slavs¹⁰³. By the mid-10th-century, the term »Rus'« began to take on a wider meaning, encompassing the East Slavonic majority-population in and around Kiev. Originally both »Rus'« and »Varangians« were functional rather than ethnic terms¹⁰⁴. The Eastern Slavs, Varangians or Ῥῶς were mentioned in many Byzantine sources, for example, the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (913-959) in his treatise *De administrando imperio*, written for his son, Romanos II, on how to rule an empire: he described the Rhos, their trade activities on the rivers in the east and how dangerous this was, that they were different from the Slavs, and their relation to the belligerent Pechenegs¹⁰⁵. Patriarch Photios in the 9th century depicted them as exotic and belligerent¹⁰⁶ – characteristics that are similar to a modern view of the Vikings.

The *Annales Bertiniani* mention the Varangian Rus' for the first time in the year 839¹⁰⁷. They accompanied an official delegation from the Byzantine Emperor Theophilos (829-842) to the court of Emperor Louis the Pious (813-840, son of Charlemagne) at Ingelheim on the Rhine (near Mainz, Germany). These people were sent on by Theophilos to return home a different way, because the way via the Russian rivers was deemed too dangerous. They called themselves »Rhos« and explained to Louis – obviously unacquainted with these people – that they were from Sweden. This is the first historical appearance of the Varangians. The relations between Varangians and Byzantines in the 9th century are corroborated by archaeological finds: for example a small gold clasp with a Greek inscription found with the 9th-century Hoen Hoard from Norway¹⁰⁸ and six coins of the Byzantine Emperor Theophilos, four of them from the trading centre Birka. However, it remains unclear whether they were related to the Ingelheim visit¹⁰⁹.

Scandinavians appeared more and more in the written sources after the Ingelheim event, and especially after they attacked Constantinople for the first time with a fleet in 860, like »a thunderbolt from heaven« according to Patriarch Photios¹¹⁰. This seems to have been quite a successful mission from a Rus' point of view, as much in acquiring riches as frightening the inhabitants of the suburbs¹¹¹ – the city itself was supposedly saved through divine help¹¹². From this point onwards, Byzantium was the goal for not only mercantile activities but also repeated raids¹¹³.

Vladimir I »the Great«, prince of Novgorod, grand prince of Kiev, and ruler of Kievan Rus' 980-1015, converted to Christianity in 988. After that, the journey to Byzantium was made much safer and more convenient through the building of harbours and supplying of escorts for the more dangerous parts of the route¹¹⁴. The route was at its height in the first half of the 11th century, the period in which the albums are set and the time of Yaroslav »the Wise« (Nordic: Jarisleif), an important figure and »patron of the Varangians among the Rus'¹¹⁵.

The Varangians who travelled east either came as traders-men or mercenaries, often with the aim to join the Varangian Guard in Constantinople. Their presence is testified by many archaeological finds in Russia, on the way to Byzantium¹¹⁶ and in Byzantium itself. The Russian Primary Chronicle, also known as the Nestor Chronicle, mentions treaties between Kiev and Byzantium in the years 907, 911 and 944, which also describes in detail how the merchants from Russia had to behave in Constantinople, how they had to be accompanied by a Byzantine guide, and that they had to be unarmed¹¹⁷.

»Holmgard and Beyond«: The Way of the Varangians to Constantinople

In the first song¹¹⁸ »Holmgard and Beyond«, the first-person narrator is introduced, Hakon the Bastard, »out to find my name«, and some of his companions, as well as their leader Ingvar.

The journey leads them to Holmgard and beyond to Constantinople, »far from the sea and distant lands«, »for fame and for gold«, despite the fear of becoming a »slave to the Saracens«, which is a lesser fear to being »chained to your bed, chained by your life«.

101 Jesch, *Ships and Men* 99-102. – Källström, *Runic Inscriptions* 169. 171. – For a map showing the distribution of the rune stones s. *ibid.* 170, map 7, 1.
 102 Franklin, *Rus' 1818-1820*.
 103 Scheel, *Skandinavien und Byzanz* 77-79 with an indepth discussion.
 104 Lind, *Role of the Varangians* 409.
 105 Constantine Prophyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, chap. 2. 4. 9 (Moravcsik/Jenkins 49-51. 51-53. 57-63).
 106 See Franklin, *Rus' 1818-1819*.
 107 For this event s. Duczko, *Viking Rus* 10-59 (»The Case of Rhos in Ingelheim A.D. 839«). – Also Prinzing, *Begegnungen* 101-103. – Montgomery, *Vikings and Rus* 162-163, with a discussion of the title of the Norsemen's leader.
 108 Buckton, *Byzantine Disc.* – Androschuk, *Material Evidence* 95 and 94 fig. 4, 1.

109 Androschuk, *Material Evidence* 95.
 110 Photius, *Homilies* 96 (Mango).
 111 Shepard, *Viking Rus and Byzantium* 497. – S. on this event also Duczko, *Viking Rus* 83-86 (chapter »The Attack on Constantinople in 860«).
 112 Duczko, *Viking Rus* 83.
 113 Duczko, *Viking Rus* 86.
 114 Shepard, *Yngvarr's Expedition* 223-224.
 115 Franklin/Shepard, *Emergence of Rus* 201.
 116 Shepard, *Yngvarr's Expedition* 226-227.
 117 Rapp, *Cosmopolis* 159-160.
 118 Song lyrics of song analysed here in more detail are found at the end in the appendix.

The reasons for the large »Viking diaspora« and their wide and dangerous travels in the medieval world have been intensively discussed; these include technical, environmental, demographic, economic, political and ideological explanatory factors¹¹⁹. J. Barrett concluded that the primary reason would have been the social structure of medieval Scandinavian society. Evidence has been discussed concerning a possible but difficult-to-prove tendency for female infanticide amongst Vikings¹²⁰ with the intention of preferably raising boys in an age when young fighters were needed for internal struggles for leadership. This would have led to a surplus of young males, who in the absence of sufficient status roles sought treasure and bride-wealth outside Scandinavia¹²¹. This, plus religious pre-determination – the belief that the time of death was already foretold at the time of birth – made the Vikings a testosterone-steered, devil-may-care (or Odin-may-care) bunch of beserking soldiers of fortune, pillaging and plundering the medieval world. Be this as it may, it definitely agrees with the notoriety of the Vikings, already in the Middle Ages. Several rune stone inscriptions testify to the large profit that could be gained through a voyage to Grikkland¹²², as do Byzantine finds in Scandinavia¹²³. Indeed, there was an increased influx in the 9th and 10th centuries of Byzantine gold coins from the time of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (913-959), especially from 945, to Constantine IX (1042-1055)¹²⁴, but also Arabic Dirhams as well as silver and gold objects in Scandinavia¹²⁵. So, »for fame and for gold«, as mentioned in the song »Holmgard and Beyond«, seems to sum it up nicely.

The Route

The album title »The Varangian Way« refers to the trade route from the East Baltic to Byzantium (fig. 2. 6). The term »The Way of the Varangians« is known from the so-called Nestor Chronicle, compiled in the early 12th century, the oldest East Slavic Chronicle preserved¹²⁶. From the Baltic Sea the Varangian Way went via the Gulf of Finland, past what was later called Saint Petersburg, via the Neva River into Lake Ladoga. From there the way led south along the Volkhov River, passed Staraja Ladoga, then further along the river to

Novgorod (Holmgard). South of Holmgard was Lake Ilmen, then the River Lovat. The next important waterway was the Western Dvina River and then the Dnieper, past the notorious Dnieper Rapids and from its mouth via the Black Sea and through the Bosphorus to Constantinople.

The story told in the album begins in Holmgard (*Holmgardr*, literally »island-enclosure«), later Novgorod¹²⁷, a name also known from rune stones¹²⁸. Novgorod was a commercial hub and »oligarchic republic of a kind otherwise unknown in this part of Europe«¹²⁹, thriving in the first part of the 11th century, when the story is set.

The group of Varangians came »with thirty ships«, »set sails for those lands unknown« (song »Holmgard and Beyond«), »the bow turned towards Gardar« (*Garðar*). Gardar was the name for Kiev on the middle Dnieper¹³⁰, the Slav metropolis of the Rus' between the mid-10th and mid-12th centuries, »rich and powerful«¹³¹. Kiev was mentioned by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos in *De administrando imperio*¹³² as the main base of the Rus' for travel to Constantinople. Finds of coins, glass and amphorae for wine and oil testify to this trade (fig. 7). The destination of Gardar appears as a goal of Greekfarers in eight or nine runic inscriptions, which commemorate men having died out there. Some refer to men who have come back, such as Porsteinn who used money he made in Russia to buy a farm home in Uppland¹³³. However, Gardar does not necessarily refer to the city of Kiev alone, but also to the larger area, also known as Gardariki¹³⁴. Through the songs, we are also introduced to some more geographical markers, which are also indicated on a map that is the basis for the cover art on the CD's back (fig. 2). Aldeigjuborg was the name for Staraja Ladoga, »the focal place of the early Rus«¹³⁵ since the mid-8th century¹³⁶. It was the oldest and largest Varangian settlement, testifying to craftsmen and also intensive trade, especially in furs¹³⁷, not only with Byzantium but also with the Arab World: the earliest of the thousands of Islamic silver coins, dirhams, in that area were found here (dating to 787)¹³⁸. The Ladoga area then became the centre of the Kaganate of Rus'¹³⁹. The area south of Lake Ilmen and the River Lovat are mentioned in »A Portage to the Unknown«.

119 See for an overview Barrett, What Caused the Viking Age?

120 Wicker, Female Infanticide.

121 Barrett, What Caused the Viking Age? – Barrett, Viking Age Diaspora.

122 Jesch, Ships and Men 99 and also 100.

123 Roslund, Byzantinische Funde. – Duczko, Byzantine Presence in Viking Age Sweden.

124 Hammarberg/Malmer/Zachrisson, Byzantine Coins found in Sweden 7. 9. 28-46. – Jankowiak, Byzantine Coins 117.

125 Mikkelsen, Islam and Scandinavia, esp. 47-48, who mentions an amount of c. 85,000 Arabic coins in Scandinavia, mostly Sweden. – Jankowiak, Byzantine Coins 117, speaks of 400,000 Islamic dirhams dating to the 9th-10th centuries in northern Europe. – S. also Duczko, Viking Age Scandinavia and Islam and Noonan, Dirhams.

126 Nestorchronik 7 (Müller). – S. generally Shepard, From the Bosphorus and also Shepard, Small Worlds.

127 Franklin/Shepard, Emergence of Rus 40. 130. – S. also on Holmgard Duczko, Viking Rus 99-105.

128 Jesch, Ships and Men 97.

129 Duczko, Viking Rus 60.

130 See on the mentioning of *Garðar* on rune stones and in skaldic verse Jesch, Ships and Men 98-99.

131 Duczko, Viking Rus 60.

132 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, chap. 9 (Moravcsik/Jenkins 57).

133 Jesch, Ships and Men 96.

134 Duczko, Viking Rus 60. – Jesch, Ships and Men 96.

135 On Staraja Ladoga s. Duczko, Viking Rus 64.

136 Duczko, Viking Rus 66.

137 Duczko, Viking Rus 61.

138 Noonan, Dirhams 3-4. – For other archaeological finds s. Duczko, Viking Rus 67-68.

139 Duczko, Viking Rus 61.

The »end of river Lovat« refers to a problem faced when travelling by boat between the Baltic and the Black Sea since the rivers do not fully connect, and the ships had to be partly dismantled and carried or drawn over land via a portage (indicated with a »P« on the map in **fig. 6**). These portages connected the most important rivers of Volga, Dvina, Dnieper and Don and others: »The waters change to sand, Lakes and rivers turned to Land [...] Foot by foot we edge, Once a ship, now a sledge.«

Ingvar and Nordbrikt – Nordic Sagas and Byzantine Sources

Through the names of Ingvar, mentioned in »Holmgard and Beyond« and »A Portage to the Unknown«, and »Nordbrikt«, appearing in »Five Hundred and One«, we can connect the story to historical events in the 11th century and legends, transmitted through various sagas¹⁴⁰.

Ingvar the Far-Travelled

Ingvar is named as the leader of the group of Varangians in the songs. A well-known Ingvar led an expedition to the East and »Serkland« that probably found its end in 1041¹⁴¹, and »whatever happened on this expedition, it seems to have been something of a disaster«¹⁴². He is known through rune stone inscriptions as Ingvar and the late 12th-century romantic and fictional Icelandic Saga *Yngvars saga víðförla*¹⁴³, perhaps attributable to Oddr Snorrason¹⁴⁴, as Yngvar. Historically, Ingvar cannot be connected with Byzantium¹⁴⁵, and in the album, some of Ingvar's men continue their travels with another famous Greek-farer, Harald »the Hard« (see below, p. 402-404).

About 25 rune stones in the east of Sweden (especially Södermanland and Uppland), forming the vast majority of rune stones of »Greek-farers«, commemorate men who went to »Serkland« with Ingvar¹⁴⁶. One of them commemorates Harald, the »brother of Ingvar«, who might have been the unfortunate leader's half-brother¹⁴⁷; others mention that the commemorated was part of Ingvar's troop, went with Ingvar or belonged to his men¹⁴⁸.

The actual route and goal of Ingvar has been tentatively reconstructed, but the sources are not precise¹⁴⁹. The Ing-

var-related rune stones refer both to the East and the South, and J. Shepard assumed that the expedition first went to Russia with the final destination of the Caspian Sea¹⁵⁰. There is also evidence, however, that Ingvar and also Harald might have reached the Persian Gulf (modern Katar), on the basis of more recent archaeological finds, which would be the furthest southeast point of Varangian presence hitherto known¹⁵¹.

Ingvar himself died in Serkland, a toponym that is found on five rune stones¹⁵². Serkland probably means land of the Saracens (Muslims), but a derivation from Latin *sericus*, silk, has also been suggested¹⁵³. The exact area of Serkland is disputed, with the area south of the Caspian Sea favoured, however, with a shift towards Islamic areas beyond Russia in the later period. According to the skaldic corpus, it most plausibly refers to the Islamic and Arabic areas beyond Russia¹⁵⁴. The Ingvar Saga provides the date of 1041 for Ingvar's death and mentions that he was only 25 years old when he died¹⁵⁵, which is also found in Icelandic annals¹⁵⁶.

The story of Ingvar (Yngvar[r] in the saga material) sounds like a Hollywood fairy-tale¹⁵⁷, although there is no happy ending: descending from Swedish royalty he decided at a young age to follow in the footsteps of his father, who had already fought for Yaroslav/Jarisleif. He started out with thirty ships, as is mentioned in the song »Holmgard and Beyond«, and made his way to the court of Yaroslav, where he stayed for three years. His thirst for adventure was, however, not quenched, and so he decided to go further, along the rivers to the east: »He heard talk of three rivers that flowed east through Russia, and the middle one was the biggest. So Yngvar travelled widely throughout the east and asked whether anyone knew where that river came from, but no one could tell him.«¹⁵⁸ He met dragons, a men-eating giant with dead bodies hanging from his belt, a beautiful Queen, but also »disgruntled demons« and »sex-mad heathen floozies«¹⁵⁹. Although this is principally an adventure story, it is also »hagiographical« in the sense that Ingvar tries to convert the »heathen creatures« in the East, similar to Crusade rhetoric¹⁶⁰.

The court of Jarisleif and Serkland connect the story of Ingvar with another well-known Scandinavian who travelled to the East: the Harald »the Hard« who is the subject of the next songs.

140 On the saga material in general s. Ross, *Old Norse-Icelandic Saga*.

141 Shepard, *Yngvarr's Expedition* 222-223. Shepard long article is still a reference work, critically discussing many aspects of Ingvar's journey. – S. also Scheel, *Skandinavien und Byzanz* 960-961, NI27-NI29; 962, NI32; 963, NI34.

142 Jesch, *Ships and Men* 102.

143 See Shepard, *Yngvarr's Expedition* 222 on the date of the saga. – Edition: *Yngvars Saga* (Jónsson). – For an English translation of the saga s. *Saga of Yngvar* (Tunstall; online).

144 Ross, *Old Icelandic Literature* 306-308. – Scheel, *Skandinavien und Byzanz* 701-703, 705.

145 Scheel, *Skandinavien und Byzanz* 697; s. esp. n. 489 on the same page, discussion the connection that was made between Ingvar and the Rus» attack on Constantinople in 1043.

146 Källström, *Runic Inscriptions* 169. – S. for an analysis of the Ingvar stones: Jesch, *Ships and Men* 102-104. – Shepard, *Yngvarr's Expedition* 231-240.

147 Jesch, *Ships and Men* 102.

148 Jesch, *Ships and Men* 103.

149 See on this problem Scheel, *Skandinavien und Byzanz* 698 and n. 493.

150 Shepard, *Yngvarr's Expedition* 271.

151 Isitt, *Vikings in the Persian Gulf*.

152 Jesch, *Ships and Men* 104.

153 Shepard, *Yngvarr's Expedition* 232-238 with a discussion of the toponym Serkland.

154 See Jesch, *Ships and Men* 104-106, for a discussion.

155 *Yngvars saga* 447-448 (Jónsson).

156 Barraclough, *Viking Voyages* 198 with sources (n. 9).

157 Retold by Barraclough, *Viking Voyages*, esp. 197-198. – Scheel, *Skandinavien und Byzanz* 698-699.

158 *Yngvars Saga* 434 (Jónsson).

159 Both Barraclough, *Viking Voyages* 198.

160 Scheel, *Skandinavien und Byzanz* 702-703.



Fig. 8 The »Wingfield-Digby Crozier«, made in Norway from carved walrus ivory with traces of gilding, late 14th century, Victoria and Albert Museum London, inv. no. A.1-2002. – (© Victoria and Albert Museum).

Nordbrikt: Harald Sigurdsson, aka Haraldr harðráði, Harald »the Hard«

Although only the pseudonym »Nordbrikt« appears in the song »Five Hundred and One«, written sources inform us that this was the »code name« of the Norwegian Prince who later became King of Norway: Harald Sigurdsson, aka Haraldr *harðráði*, Harald »the hard ruler«. He had enrolled in the Varangian Guard under the name Nordbrikt, »North-Bright«, spent roughly eight years in Byzantine service¹⁶¹ and is the

»prototypical Varangian« of the Norse sagas¹⁶². He is well known for his involvement and death in the events of 1066 – at the time being King of Norway – fighting King Harold II Godwinson (1066-1066), the last Anglo-Saxon King, at the battle of Stamford Bridge¹⁶³ (mentioned in the song »End of an Empire« on Turisas' album »Stand Up and Fight«).

The story of Harald's wide journeys to Russia, Byzantium, Asia Minor, Africa, Bulgaria, Sicily and the Holy Land are based on a wide range of source material, especially the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas. However, the sagas are all of a later date and typically embellish the stories around Harald, thus presenting problems when trying to differentiate between fact and fiction, but can be at least in parts compared to contemporary Byzantine reports¹⁶⁴.

The *Morkinskinna* (»mouldy parchment«), an Old Norse kings' saga, reporting the history of the Norwegian kings in the 11th and 12th centuries and written in the early 13th century¹⁶⁵ (thus c. 200 years after the events), describes Harald as a »formidable warrior«¹⁶⁶, and also as a poet¹⁶⁷. *Morkinskinna's* account of Harald's career in Constantinople reads like a collection of adrenaline-fuelled thrills and spills, some more plausible than others¹⁶⁸. Harald was the brother of Olaf, King of Norway (1015-1028, died 1030), who was sanctified in 1031. Saint Olaf was the most famous Nordic saint, after whom many churches are named, also in Constantinople¹⁶⁹. It is interesting to note that Olaf died through an axe-blow and that a long-shafted axe – the »hallmark« of the Varangian Guard (see below) – is an attribute of Saint Olaf (and held by the Lion rampant in the coat of arms of Norway), as can be seen from a 14th-century walrus ivory crozier¹⁷⁰ (fig. 8).

The story told in slight variations is that after the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030, in which Olaf and Harald were defeated by the Danish King Cnut »the Great« (1019-1035), Harald fled into exile¹⁷¹ and served in the army of the Kievan Grand Prince Yaroslav, »the Wise« (1019-1054), to which the song »Jarisleif« (the Scandinavian name for Yaroslav) refers. He stayed in Kiev for about four years and managed to achieve a high rank as an officer¹⁷².

In 1034¹⁷³, during the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Michael IV (1034-1041)¹⁷⁴, he left the court of Yaroslav according to the *Morkinskinna* because he had been promised one of Yaroslav's daughters in marriage, which had not been fulfilled¹⁷⁵. Not yet 20 years of age, he travelled on to Constantinople with 500 men. According to the song »Five

161 For an overview s. the account of the story in Davidson, *Viking Road* 207-229 (chapter »A Norwegian Prince in Byzantium«).

162 Jakobsson, *The Varangian Legend* 360.

163 On the 1066 events s. DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion of England* 23-68.

164 A reconstruction of Harald's journeys according to sagas and sources: Jackson, Harald.

165 English translation: *Morkinskinna* (Andersson/Gade).

166 *Morkinskinna* I 84 (Andersson/Gade).

167 DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion of England* 24-25. – Jackson, Harald 80.

168 Barraclough, *Viking Voyages* 247.

169 Van Arkel-de Leeuw van Weenen/Ciggaar, *St. Thorlac's in Constantinople* 428 and esp. n. 2, 3.

170 Williamson/Davies, *Medieval Ivory Carvings* 1, 442-445 no. 153.

171 Adam of Bremen, *History* 124 (Tschan). – Hollander, *Heimskringla* 577. – Adam of Bremen wrote in the 1070s, Snorri Sturluson c. 1230. S. Jackson, Harald, *Bolgar Brennir* 72-73.

172 *Heimskringla* 3, 41-42 (Finlay/Faulkes).

173 See on the date DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion* 29 and n. 27.

174 On the time of his arrival and the conflicting information in the sources on the name of the ruler s. Jackson, Harald 74-75.

175 *Morkinskinna* 131-132. – Jackson, Harald 73.

Hundred and One«, these 500 included the crew who had travelled to Kiev with Ingvar. Although not attestable by sources, this is a possible scenario.

The number of 500 men is mentioned in a Greek source, the *Strategikon* of Kekaumenos, written in the 1070s. In this text, Harald is named Araltes and he is erroneously called the son of the king of the Varangians¹⁷⁶, but otherwise the testimony by Kekaumenos – who called himself an eyewitness – is a very valuable source of information:

»He brought with him a company of 500 brave men, and entered the service of the Emperor, who received him in a seemly manner, and sent him to Sicily because the Roman army was there, making war in the island. Araltes went there and did many notable things, and when the war was over, he returned to the Emperor who gave him the title *Manglavites* [...] the Emperor rewarded him for his valour and gave him the title *Spatharokandidatos*.«¹⁷⁷

The *spatharokandidatos* was a subaltern officer, thus Harald's role in Byzantine service was apparently not as important as that described by Snorri Sturluson in the *Heimskringla*, who claimed that Harald became the leader of all Varangians¹⁷⁸. This is unlikely since the leader of the Varangians (*akolouthoi*) was usually a Byzantine officer¹⁷⁹, and, furthermore, the number of 500 men is not overwhelming in comparison to the five to six thousand men the Varangian Guard usually comprised¹⁸⁰. Nevertheless, he was apparently a member of the Varangian Guard, and according to one story he initially kept his royal bloodline secret due to the fact that no mercenaries of nobility were allowed in the Byzantine army¹⁸¹ – this is what the line »some concealing their royal descent« refers to in the song »The March of the Varangian Guard«¹⁸².

Harald's itinerary as mercenary in the Byzantine army reads like an adventure story suited to the taste of Heavy Metal. He was probably sent to hunt pirates in the Aegean soon after his arrival in Constantinople (see the song »Hunting Pirates« on the album »Stand Up and Fight«), went on a military expedition to Sicily (1036-1039/40) and took part in the suppression of an uprising in Bulgaria (1041), earning him the dubious nickname *Bulgar Brennir*, »Burner of the Bulgars«, in a skaldic poem¹⁸³. Further missions took Harald to the wars with the Saracens, to Palestine and Jerusalem, to Syria and Mesopotamia¹⁸⁴.

What happened in Constantinople also makes a good read, such as the possible love affair with Empress Zoe, famous for her four husbands and her mosaic in the Church

of Hagia Sophia, in which her face was exchanged to make her look younger – an early form of cosmetic surgery. According to the *Heimskringla*, Empress Zoe denied him the hand of her niece because she wanted him for herself¹⁸⁵. Her husband¹⁸⁶ had Harald put into the dungeon, from which a woman with her two servants rescued him because his saintly brother Olaf had once healed her¹⁸⁷. Another story tells of Harald's involvement in the blinding of Zoe's adoptive son and successor to her husband Michael IV, Michael V Kalaphates, in a revolt. Whether Harald himself gouged his eyes out or was only present during the ugly events remains unclear¹⁸⁸, but in any case, he seems to have seen much action.

Harald left Constantinople in 1043-1044¹⁸⁹, and it must have happened without a great farewell. The song »The Great Escape« refers to the adventurous tale in the cloak-and-dagger style: Harald and his men with two boats were trying to get over the chain across the entrance to the Golden Horn (see map in **fig. 13**), which flows north past the old city of Constantinople. There were naturally-protected harbours on the northern shores of the city, including the naval headquarters¹⁹⁰, from which Harald could take a boat. This story is reported by Snorri Sturluson in the *Heimskringla*:

»[...] they went to the Væringjar's galleys and took two of the galleys, rowing after that in to Sjáviðarsund. And when they got to where iron chains were lying across the channel, then Haraldr said that the men were to sit at the oars on each galley, while the men that were not rowing were all to run to the rear of the galley and each one was to hold his sleeping bag in his arms. So the galleys ran up onto the chains. As soon as they stuck and they lost way, then Haraldr told all the men to run forward. Then the galley that Haraldr was on tipped forward and it leapt off the chains with its momentum, but the other one broke when it balanced on the chains, and there were many perished there, though some were rescued from the water. Thus Haraldr got out from Mikligarðr and so sailed into Svartahaf [the Black Sea].«¹⁹¹

Those who survived this daring manoeuvre headed home. The *Morkinskinna*, the *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, all written before 1230, describe how Harald became king of Norway by sharing the throne with Magnús¹⁹² and also the wealth he had brought with him from his travels. Harald's wealth has been described in many sagas and skaldic poetry, and Snorri Sturluson goes so far as saying that »no one in northern countries had seen so much in the possession of

176 *Strategikon* (Beck 140) (»Advice for the Emperor«). – S. also Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium* 57-58.

177 Quoted after Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium* 57-58.

178 *Heimskringla* 3, 43 (Finlay/Faulkes).

179 Jackson, *Harald* 75 with further literature.

180 Jackson, *Harald* 75.

181 DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion* 29 n. 28.

182 However, other sagas assume that Harald was well known in Byzantium, DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion* 29.

183 Jackson, *Harald* 76 with further literature and sources.

184 For Harald's itinerary and the dates suggested for these missions s. Jackson, *Harald* 75-77.

185 *Heimskringla* 3, 51 (Finlay/Faulkes).

186 Named Constantine Monomachos, which is a misunderstanding.

187 *Heimskringla* 3, 51 (Finlay/Faulkes).

188 Jackson, *Harald* 80.

189 See Jackson, *Harald* 77.

190 For further reading s. Daim, *Die byzantinischen Häfen Konstantinopels*.

191 *Heimskringla* 3, 52 (Finlay/Faulkes).

192 Jackson, *Harald* 77.



Fig. 9 CD »The Varangian Way« by Turisas (2007) with abstract »sign of Perun«. – © Century Media Records, with kind permission).

one man«¹⁹³. It has been discussed whether Harald's riches were made in Constantinople or in Kiev, but it seems that it was rather in the former and brought home via the latter¹⁹⁴. Whether he acquired his wealth through misappropriation of the imperial treasury or (also) after the revolt against Emperor Michael V, when he might have filled his pockets, remains unclear, but he seems to have come home with what the Varangians usually went for: »for fame and for gold«. However, the question remains whether the influx of Byzantine coins in Scandinavia can actually be connected with Harald's return to Scandinavia¹⁹⁵. In any case, Harald's name and career are somewhat glorified in the sagas (which does not seem to entirely reflect what the Byzantines thought), and »no doubt Harald is presented in the sagas in accordance with a certain stereotype for depicting Scandinavian kings outside their countries«¹⁹⁶.

Religious Identity of the Varangians

Information on the first-person narrator of the story, »Hakon the Bastard«, can be gained from the song »A Portage to the Unknown«: »All I have left is a symbol on my chest [...]

Branded at birth with the sign of Perun«, described as consisting of six triangles in a round shape¹⁹⁷ and depicted on the »Varangian Way« CD itself (fig. 9). Perun was the supreme Slav god¹⁹⁸, the god of thunder and lightning, similar to the Greek Zeus. Perun shares the same roots with the Germanic god Thor, the god of thunder, and Thor's hammer is equivalent to Perun's axe – it is not unfitting that the Varangian's hallmark was the axe¹⁹⁹.

The first written record of Perun is assumed to be in a Byzantine source: it was Prokopios of Caesarea (c. 500-562), the court writer of the famous Byzantine Emperor Justinian I. (527-565), who – probably referring to Perun – first describes the supreme god of thunder, venerated by the Slavs with animal sacrifices²⁰⁰. A very important witness is the already-mentioned Nestor Chronicle (Primary Chronicle), according to which Perun was the divine warrantor of the contracts between the Kievan Rus and the Byzantine Empire in the years 907/912, 944/945 and 971²⁰¹. As to the contract of 944/945, the Nestor Chronicle says that those from the Russian lands who want to destroy the friendship with Byzantium and who have not been christened shall not receive help from God or Perun²⁰². From this treaty it becomes clear that by the 10th century there were already Christians amongst the Rus'²⁰³. This had practical implications: the baptised Rus' would take an oath – so important for the Northmen – in church and on the cross, the unbaptised on their weapons and armour²⁰⁴.

Vladimir I »the Great« (prince of Novgorod, grand prince of Kiev, ruler of the Kievan Rus' 980-1015), had wooden statues of Perun, clad in silver and gold, erected in Kiev and other places in 980; these, however, did not survive the Christianisation of the Rus' later that century²⁰⁵. The last line of »A Portage to the Unknown« (»wherever I'm going, the Gods are on my side«) means that the 11th-century Hakon, and probably his companions, were not affected by Byzantine attempts to Christianise the »barbarians« of the north.

That the Slav Perun was chosen over Thor in this song reflects the Varangians' Rus' connection and the part they played in the foundation of the first large empire in this region. The Scandinavians in the Rus' were naturally in contact with many people and open to innovations. »From a historical perspective, Christianity was perhaps the most important of these innovations, and Scandinavians [...] appear to have been »natural« carriers and disseminators of the new faith.«²⁰⁶ Historical stages of Christianisation of the Slavs were the christening of Olga of Kiev in 957, ruler of Kievan Rus' as regent for her son Svyatoslav (945-c. 960), and the

193 Heimskringla 3, 53 (Finlay/Faulkes).

194 Jackson, Harald 77-80 with a discussion of different sources referring to Harald's wealth.

195 Skaare, Heimkehr eines Warägers.

196 Jackson, Harald 75.

197 See on the use of this hexagram shape amongst the Slavs Zdeněk, Mythologie 217.

198 On Perun s. Lajoye, Perun. – Also Yoffe/Krafczik, Perun. – On Slav mythology, gods and religion in general s., e.g.: Zdeněk, Mythologie. – Lübke, Religion der Slawen.

199 Zdeněk, Mythologie 48. 72.

200 Prokop, De bello Gothico III 14 (Veh 526-529). – On the literary evidence regarding Perun s. Lajoye, Perun 24-36.

201 For the sources s. Lajoye, Perun 26-28. – S. also Rapp, Foreigners 159.

202 Nestorchronik 57-58 (Müller).

203 See Tolochko, »Varangian Christianity« 66.

204 Tolochko, »Varangian Christianity« 67.

205 Lajoye, Perun 28-29.

206 Tolochko, »Varangian Christianity« 58.

christening of Vladimir I and his turning towards the Eastern Orthodox Church in 988. This was also a political decision which resulted in military support and marital ties to Byzantium and its Emperor Basil II »Bulgaroktonos« (»the Bulgar-slayer«, 976-1025)²⁰⁷. However, as is typical, the process of religious change was gradual and not revolutionary, and especially among the Rus', Nordic and Slavic elements mingled²⁰⁸. Olga's son refused Christianity, and on the occasion of a contract with the Byzantines, he swore his oath on his pagan gods²⁰⁹. J. Lind has coined the term »Varangian Christianity«, characterised by »certain curious phenomena«²¹⁰: they were »either indifferent to or unaware of dogmatic and institutional differences between the Latin and Greek churches«²¹¹, and Varangian Christianity was influenced both by Constantinople and the Latin West²¹². By the end of the 11th century, Christianity had roots in Rus' and Scandinavia and the awareness of theological differences led to divided affiliations: the Rus' towards Orthodox Christianity, Scandinavia to the Latin Church²¹³.

»The Dnieper Rapids«

The Dnieper Rapids, the names of which are sung by the choir in the song with the same title, were the feared rapids in the river Dnieper as it descended 50m over the length of only c. 70km (changed to a system of locks in the 20th century). This was one of the most dangerous parts of the journey: apart from the rapids themselves being dangerous to the ships, their crews and cargo, this was also an area in which travellers were often attacked by the nomadic tribe of the Pechenegs²¹⁴, who took advantage and regularly ambushed passing ships. The Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (913-959) described these rapids at great length, and also provided their names – not only Greek but also Slavic²¹⁵:

»At first they come to the first barrage, called Essoupi, which means in Russian and Slavonic ›Do not sleep!‹; the barrage itself is as narrow as the width of the Polo-ground; in the middle of it are rooted high rocks, which stand out like islands. Against these, then, comes the water and wells up and dashes down over the other side, with a mighty and terrific din. Therefore the Russians do not venture to pass between them, but put in to the bank hard by, disembarking the men on to dry land[...] When they have passed this barrage, they

re-embark the others from the dry land and sail away, and come down to the second barrage, called in Russian Oulvorsii, and in Slavonic Ostrovouniprach, which means ›The Island of the Barrage‹. This one is like the first, awkward and not to be passed through.«²¹⁶

This detailed description, which also includes the traversing of these rapids, suggests that the trade route was comparatively new at the time of Constantine Porphyrogenetos and it was deemed to be important and to make a note of them for contemporaries.

Other names for the rapids translate to »be wakeful«, »yelling« or »ever-fierce«²¹⁷. These self-explanatory names circumscribe the dangers of these rapids, for example »The Insatiable One«. The latter is mentioned in the song, and crew member Karl falls victim to it. His name, however, has survived on the only rune stone in Eastern Europe, the 11th-century »Berezan' Rune Stone«. This was actually a part of a sarcophagus commissioned by Karl's »business partner« Grane. It was found on Berezan' Island (St Aitherios Island) where the Dnieper River meets the Black Sea²¹⁸. This is where the river »came to an end« and the final goal was ahead of the travellers: Miklagard.

»Miklagard Overture«: Miklagard – Tsargrad – Constantinople

The song »Miklagard Overture« is a hymn to Constantinople (fig. 13): »The sublime, The greatest of our time, Tsargrad! [...] The greatest of all, Miklagard«. Miklagard was the Nordic name for Constantinople, found on rune stones and in the sagas²¹⁹, whilst Tsargrad is the Slavonic term, from »tsar« for caesar/emperor and »grad« for city.

This was the goal of so many Greek-farers: Konstantinoupolis, founded in 330 by Emperor Constantine I »the Great« (306-337), the »City of Constantine«, resisting (almost all) foreign attacks from all sides until 1453, when the Byzantine Empire fell to the Ottoman Turks. The ruler of the Byzantine Empire is described as the »Greek King« in »Five Hundred and One«. However, the ruler of the Byzantine Empire understood himself as an emperor, as *the* Roman emperor and only successor of the ancient Roman emperor. This role was heavily challenged in the year 800, when Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire by Pope Leo III in Rome,

207 On religious implications of Vladimir's Christening and the question of his inclusion in the »Byzantine Commonwealth« s. the recent publication by G. Prinzing, »Familie der Könige«.

208 See e.g. Lübke, Religion der Slawen 407.

209 Lind, Role of the Varangians 435.

210 Lind, Role of the Varangians 410. – S. also Tolochko, »Varangian Christianity« 58.

211 Tolochko, »Varangian Christianity« 58.

212 Lind, Role of the Varangians 436.

213 Lind, Role of the Varangians 436. – S. in general on the subject Garipzanov/Tolochko, Early Christianity.

214 Pritsak, Pechenegs 1613-1614. Mentioned in the book by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, De administrando imperio, s. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De administrando imperio, chap. 37 (Moravcsik/Jenkins 167-171).

215 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De administrando imperio, chap. 9 (Moravcsik/Jenkins 59-61).

216 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De administrando imperio, chap. 9 (Moravcsik/Jenkins 59).

217 Davidson, Viking Road 86. – On the discussion of the names s. Duczko, Viking Rus 250.

218 See Duczko, Viking Rus 252.

219 Jesch, Ships and Men 100-101. 158-159.

much to the dissatisfaction of the Byzantines – this led to serious diplomatic discord and political and religious disruption. The historical concept in Scandinavian literature of the late Middle Ages solved this »Zweikaiserproblem«²²⁰ (»two-emperor issue«) by referring to the Byzantine ruler as »king«, for example by the mid-12th-century abbot Nikulás Bergsson²²¹. According to an Icelandic world chronicle, the Byzantine rulers were kings since the coronation of Charlemagne, sitting on the throne of Emperor Constantine I the Great²²².

The description of Constantinople in the song is enthusiastic and describes the »temples and churches« and the vibrant atmosphere as if the expectations of the Varangians were exceeded. The praise of Constantinople is accompanied by two lines in Greek sung by a choir: Σήμερον τῆς σωτηρίας ἡμῶν τὸ Κεφάλαιον, καὶ τοῦ ἀπ’ αἰῶνος Μυστηρίου ἡ φανέρωσις²²³. This is part of a hymn on the Virgin Mary attributed to Saint Bartholomew²²⁴. The positive view very much reflects the views of Constantinople as given in the Nordic sources (discussion see below)²²⁵, such as the Saga of Harald »the Hard« in the *Heimskringla*: »The mighty prince saw Mikligarðr’s metal roofs before the forestem.«²²⁶ The city’s mighty land walls referred to in the songs are still preserved today and date from the times of Emperor Theodosios II (408-450)²²⁷.

In the song, the imperial palace in Constantinople next to the Hippodrome in the southeast of Constantinople is alluded to; it sadly does not exist anymore except for some mosaic remains of the 6th century. It is almost exclusively contemporary descriptions that allow us to gain an idea of the arrangements and interiors of the rooms²²⁸. The »man-made birds in their trees« mentioned in the »Miklagard Overture« refer to the automatons described, for example, by the 10th-century historian, diplomat, and bishop of Cremona, Liudprand of Cremona (c. 920-972)²²⁹. On the occasion of the first embassy to the city in 949, Liutprand described in his work *Antapodosis* (»Retribution«) a reception room in the imperial palace in Constantinople equipped with »gimmicks«:

»Before the emperor’s seat stood a tree, made of bronze gilded over, whose branches were filled with birds, also made of gilded bronze, which uttered different cries, each according to its varying species. The throne itself was so marvellously fashioned that at one moment it seemed a low structure, and at another it rose high into the air. It was of immense size and was guarded by lions, made either of bronze or of wood cov-

ered over with gold, who beat the ground with their tails and gave a dreadful roar with open mouth and quivering tongue. Leaning upon the shoulders of two eunuchs I was brought into the emperor’s presence. At my approach the lions began to roar and the birds to cry out, each according to its kind.«²³⁰ Liudprand’s description is roughly half a century older than the observations of the Varangians, but we can safely assume that the methods to impress visitors to the imperial palace in Constantinople was still in use in the 11th century.

Presence of Varangians in Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire

The presence of Scandinavians in Constantinople is well attested, especially through many written sources, although less so through material remains. Some runic graffiti, two of them on the gallery of the famous Hagia Sophia, are very revealing. One runic inscription mentions Halfdan, and although the rest of the inscription is considered illegible, it would probably read as »Halfdan has carved these runes«, as is written in other graffiti²³¹. A brick found near the Pam-makaristos Church (Fetiye Camii), today lost, might have referred to a companion of Ingvar »who was lucky enough to make it as far as Constantinople«²³². There were also special Varangian churches dedicated to Saint Olaf and Saint Thorlac, and also a Church of Saint Mary Varangiotissa, but the latter was first mentioned only in the 13th century²³³.

Greek inscriptions with names and titles shed further light on Varangian presence in Constantinople. A unique lead seal mentions a certain Michael with his official titles²³⁴: *pansebastos* (supreme commander), *sebastos* (venerable) and *megalodiermeneutes* (grand interpreter) of the Varangians (dated to before the Palaiologan period, c. mid-13th century²³⁵), who would have translated for those Varangian not able to speak Greek. Equipped with the titles of *pansebastos* and *sebastos*, the Grand Interpreter was an official state representative, a decision-maker responsible for things like inspections and payments²³⁶. Interestingly and unusually, a long-shafted axe is placed at the end of the inscription, apparently as a »hall-mark« of the Varangian Guard. Another seal mentions a certain Kouropalates Bardas Varagos²³⁷. The name of the *Sebastos* Georgios Varangopoulos appears, for example, in

220 For a short overview on this problem s. Anton, Zweikaiserproblem.

221 Sources in Shepard, Yngvarr’s Expedition 225.

222 Veraldar Saga 69-70 (Benediktsson). – S. Scheel, Jenseits der »Warärgergarde« 155.

223 Without diacritics in the CD booklet.

224 Follieri, *Initia hymnorum ecclesiae graecae* 3, 495. – Giovanelli, *Catalogo* 53.

225 To gain an idea of how the city could have looked like around the year 1200, s. the website <http://byzantium1200.com> (27.3.2017) which is based on research but of course to be taken *cum grano salis*.

226 *Heimskringla* 3, 42 (Finlay/Faulkes).

227 For an in-depth study of the Theodosian wall s. Asutay-Effenberger, *Land-mauer*.

228 On the Byzantine palace s. contributions in Ödekan, *Byzantine Court*.

229 On Liudprand and his embassies and writings s. a concise overview in Rapp, *Cosmopolis* 157-159.

230 Liudprand of Cremona, for a translation s. Liudprand 207-208 (Wright).

231 Svärdröm, Runorna. – Knirk, *Runer*. Knirk mentions a further five runic inscriptions in the same church and suspects that there might be more. – Johanson, *Mutmaßungen* 816-818 suggested that the runic inscriptions might be forgeries.

232 Cigaar, *Western Travellers* 127.

233 Cigaar, *Western Travellers* 126. – Van Arkel-de Leeuw van Weenen/Ciggaar, *St. Thorlac’s in Constantinople*.

234 See the short overview in Kazhdan, *Dignities and Titles*, with further reading.

235 On this seal s. Shandrovskaia, *Seal of Michael*; as to the date s. p. 310.

236 Shandrovskaia, *Seal of Michael* 309-310.

237 Schlumberger, *Sigillographie* 454. 712.

Fig. 10 Miniature from the Skylitzes Matritensis, fol. 26^r, depicting the body of Emperor Leon V dragged to the Hippodrome the Skyla Gate, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, Cod. Vitr. 26-2. – (After Tsamakda, Skylitzes 65 fig. 50).



the inscription of a 13th-14th-century Byzantine gold pendant cross with a lapis lazuli inlay, today in the Benaki Museum in Athens/GR²³⁸. The title *sebastos* was until the 12th century mostly given to members of the imperial family, but later, in the 13th and 14th centuries, to leaders of ethnic units. Therefore, the Georgios Varangopoulos on the cross might actually refer to a leader of the Varangian Guard²³⁹. The surnames Varangopoulos and Varangos are well attested in Byzantine texts and inscriptions in the 13th and especially the 14th centuries²⁴⁰, testifying to the long presence of Varangians (and their offspring) in the Byzantine Empire.

Constantinople and Back: Album »Stand Up and Fight« (2011)

The Varangian Guard

The second album »Stand Up and Fight« (2011) takes us further in the story with »The March of the Varangian Guard«. It describes the purpose of a Scandinavian's journey through Serkland (perhaps a survivor of Ingvar's expedition) to Constantinople, who is to join the famous household guard of the Byzantine emperor.

The Varangian Guard has an almost mythical status as the elite warrior bodyguard of the Byzantine emperors, faithful and loyal as the etymology of the word Varangian suggests (see above), which is also reflected in research. Many publications²⁴¹ have dealt with this »elite troop« that so seems to satisfy modern imaginations of the Vikings as tall, bearded, axe-bearing, fearless and loyal-to-the-death barbarians. The Varangians were initially comprised of Norsemen or Rus', but later in the 11th century others joined, such as Anglo-Saxons. The latter came in larger numbers after the Battle of Hastings in 1066, and the Varangian Guard became predominantly English²⁴².

The »axe-bearing barbarians« are mentioned in a famous Byzantine text, the 12th-century *Alexiad* by the historian Anna Komnene, the daughter of the first emperor from the Komnenian dynasty, Alexios I (1081-1118)²⁴³: »[...] Varangians from Thule [Scandinavia] (by these I mean the axe-bearing barbarians). [...] The Varangians [...] who carried their axes on their shoulders, regarded their loyalty to the emperors and their protection of the imperial persons as a pledge and ancestral tradition, handed down from father to son, which they keep inviolate and will certainly not listen to even the slightest word about treachery.«²⁴⁴

The axes were the hallmark of the imperial bodyguard²⁴⁵, and it is prevalingly the Varangian Guard that is referred to,

238 Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme* 197-198, no. Me31. Benaki Museum Athens, inv. No 1853.

239 Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme* 198.

240 PLP Faszikel 1 nos 2145-2154; Addenda nos 91435-91436; Addenda no. 93159 (this is the Georgios on the Benaki cross).

241 Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium*. – D'Amato, *The Varangian Guard*. – Jakobsson, *The Varangian Legend*. – Priestley, *Varangian Guard*. – The »Osprey Men-at-Arms« series devoted a whole booklet (48 pages) on the Varangian Guard (D'Amato, *The Varangian Guard*) and discusses their history, ethnic composition, organisation, guard service, equipment, weapons and clothing. Although in general a solid study, some of the reconstructive paintings contain flaws: S., e. g., D'Amato, *The Varangian Guard* 30, reconstruction »F«: the so-called »Gunthertuch« (»Gunther hanging«), today in the Diocese Museum Bamberg/D, is the largest preserved Byzantine silk (2,18m x 2,11m)

and unique in presenting what was probably a textile banner of this size (a »peplos«). In the reconstruction of the 1204 events in Constantinople (crusaders take and plunder Constantinople and establish a Latin rule until 1261) the »Gunthertuch« is shown as a small banner, thus out of proportion. On the »Gunthertuch« s. Prinzing, *Gunthertuch*, with discussion of previously published research.

242 Jakobsson, *The Varangian Legend* 345.

243 Anna Komnene, *Alexias* II 9, 4 (Reinsch/Kambylis I, 79, Z. 27. 30) and VII 3, 6 (Reinsch/Kambylis I, 211, Z. 55).

244 Translation after Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* 46 (Dawes).

245 Koliass, *Byzantinische Waffen* 165-167. – S. also on military attire: Parani, *Dressed to Kill*, esp 154. – D'Amato, *Military Iconography* (in scenes of the Betrayal of Christ, 11th-15th centuries).



Fig. 11 Miniature from the Skylitzes Matritensis, fol. 208r, depicting an episode in 1034 of a woman killing a Varangian who tried to rape her. On the right, his fellow-Varangians present her with his clothes, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, Cod. Vitr. 26-2. – (After Tsamakda, Skylitzes 234 fig. 493).

which used these axes up to the 14th century²⁴⁶. In the Byzantine *Taktika*, a military treatise written by Emperor Leon VI, »the Wise« (886-912) different types of axes are mentioned, single- and double-bladed examples, the latter with blades of either identical or differing shapes (straight or curved)²⁴⁷. The »great Danish« axes of the guard were long-shafted and at least 120-140cm long²⁴⁸. Although rarely depicted, there are some visual references to the »axe-bearers«, the most well-known of them in the 12th-century illustrated manuscript of the writings of the Greek historian John Skylitzes (early 1040s-after 1101)²⁴⁹. On fol. 26^v the imperial guard is depicted carrying long-shafted axes with one curved blade²⁵⁰ (fig. 10). Another illustration (fig. 11) accompanies a text that particularly mentions Varangians: on fol. 208^r a woman is shown killing a Varangian who had attempted to rape her, whereupon she is presented with his possessions by his fellow Varangians²⁵¹. The Varangians are here depicted with a »curiously swarthy facial appearance«²⁵² to distinguish them, but they do not carry axes, probably because they are off-duty. There is also a fresco of c. 1212 in the Church of St John at Arabissos (today Karsi Kilise, Turkey) that might show Varangians, due to the red hair and beards and the long-shafted axes. These again have one curved blade²⁵³, as has also been mentioned by the Byzantine writer Michael Psellos (1017/18-c. 1078)²⁵⁴, although double axes appear in depictions²⁵⁵. Archaeological finds²⁵⁶, for example from Bulgaria, seem to support the pictorial evidence of axe-heads with one curved blade for the Varangians, but this might have changed in the later 13th-14th centuries, in favour of double-headed axes²⁵⁷.

The legendary imperial fighters and their role in Byzantium have been discussed intensively by R. Scheel²⁵⁸ (see Scheel's essay in this volume), who has »deconstructed« much of the legend of the »Varangian Guard«. Their ethnic composition

remains as unclear as the question of their organisation. The sources do not speak of a special *tagma*, a military unit²⁵⁹, and although Anna Komnene in the 11th century mentions the Varangians, again this does not mean they formed a unit of »special forces«. Furthermore, the founding date of the Varangian Guard in 988 has been questioned²⁶⁰: this story was reported by Michael Psellos who wrote more than half a century later – between 1059 and 1063 – that a group he called »Tauroscythians« had come from the North to Byzantium and supported the Byzantine Emperor Basileios II (976-1025) in fighting a revolt²⁶¹. The 12th-century Nestor Chronicle, written even later, also suggests that there was a special Scandinavian unit, but contemporary 10th-century sources are not that clear²⁶². Thus, Scheel comes to the conclusion that there never was a *tagma tōn Varangōn*, at least not before the Komnenian period (1081-1185)²⁶³. However, the legend lives on, and although the post-album research has questioned the legend of the Varangian Guard – which according to Norse sources alone would be necessarily legendary²⁶⁴ – they still make excellent material for songs – and fan shirts (see below, fig. 15).

The Hippodrome of Constantinople: *Panem et Circenses* – Bread and Games

The story told in the album »Stand Up and Fight« continues with songs related to Constantinople, the most unusual being the song referring to a race in the Hippodrome (circus), »Βένετοι! – Πράσινοι!« (»Vénetoi – Prásinoi!«, »Blues – Greens«, referring to the colours of the most important racing teams, comparable to the team colours in football (including the hooligans²⁶⁵). The inhabitants of Constantinople

246 Parani, Reality of Images 136.

247 Leon, *Taktika*, Constitution 5 »About Weapons«, chap. 2 (Dennis). – S. Parani, Reality of Images 136. – Kolias, Byzantinische Waffen 169.

248 D'Amato, The Varangian Guard 36. – D'Amato, Military Iconography 71.

249 See for this manuscript Tsamakda, Skylitzes.

250 Fol. 26^v, Tsamakda, Skylitzes 65-66 and fig. 50.

251 Fol. 208^r, Tsamakda, Skylitzes 234 and fig. 493. – S. also Cigaar, Western Travellers 108.

252 Tsamakda, Skylitzes 234.

253 D'Amato, The Varangian Guard 1-2. – D'Amato, Military Iconography 83-84.

254 Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* VII 24 (Sewter 220).

255 See Parani, Reality of Images 137-138 for a discussion of other images.

256 See for a brief overview Pedersen, Viking Weaponry 205-206.

257 D'Amato, The Varangian Guard 35-36 and illustrations on these pages.

258 Scheel, Skandinavien und Byzanz 77-291 (chapter II, »Von Warangoi und Axträgern: Das byzantinische Bild der Skandinavier und Skandinaviens«).

259 Scheel, Skandinavien und Byzanz 94-95. – Scheel, Jenseits der »Warägergarde« 159.

260 Scheel, Skandinavien und Byzanz 96-100.

261 Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* I 13 (Sewter 220).

262 Scheel, Jenseits der »Warägergarde« 159.

263 Scheel, Jenseits der »Warägergarde« 158-159.

264 Jakobsson, The Varangian Legend 360.

265 Cameron, Circus Factions 271.

supported different teams, the Blues, the Greens or one of the two other teams, the Reds and the Whites²⁶⁶. A Byzantine marble gambling »automat« used to bet on the racing teams is a rare testimony to what was going on around the arena and actually depicts a race²⁶⁷.

The structure of the Hippodrome and some remains are still visible in Istanbul on the Sultan Ahmed Square. It was situated next to the Byzantine imperial palace, and the emperor had direct access to an imperial box, the *kathisma*²⁶⁸. This arrangement in the »New Rome« copied in its structure the situation of the Palatine hill in Rome with the imperial palace next to the Circus Maximus.

The Hippodrome had a similar function for games and chariot races (comparable to the film »Ben Hur«), but was also a public place for punishments and executions as well political expressions of the people of Constantinople, often culminating in riots²⁶⁹. The teams combined forces only rarely, for example, during the famous Nika rebellion in 532, during which the Hagia Sophia and much of the city were destroyed²⁷⁰. Emperor Justinian I (527-565) had it rebuilt in only six years, and this is the building we see today (now with additions such as the Ottoman minarets) and also on the cover of the Turisas album »Stand Up and Fight!« (fig. 3).

The Hippodrome was functioning until 1204, when the Crusaders took the city – afterwards it fell to ruins. During the time in which the Turisas albums are set, it was still a landmark and political and cultural centre, so we can safely assume that members of the Varangian guard – known for their heavy drinking²⁷¹ and surely also gambling – were regulars. It is probably not without reason that the Nestor Chronicle reported a warning to the Byzantine emperor, that he should not let the Varangians into the city because they are up to mischief²⁷².

»The Bosphorus Freezes Over«

The last song of the album »Stand Up and Fight« is called »The Bosphorus Freezes Over«. The fictional lyrics are a quote from Hakon Halfdansson, the first-person narrator (who eventually seems to have found his name), and the date is also provided: »appr. 1043«.

The picture accompanying the song lyrics (fig. 12) shows a seated lion with drawings on its shoulders and legs. This is the famous c. 3 m-tall »Piraeus Lion«, made from marble and dating from the 4th century BC, which used to stand at the entrance of Athens' harbour in Piraeus together with three other lions, but since 1692 guarding the Arsenal in Venice²⁷³. The lion sculpture bears three runic inscriptions



Fig. 12 The »Piraeus Lion«, booklet of the album »Stand up and Fight« (2011), p. 12. – (© Century Media Records, with kind permission).

presumed to date from the 11th century and which are believed to have been carved by members of Varangian troops. Amongst the Varangians serving in the Aegean (and as far as Sicily) was also Harald »the Hard« from the 1030s to the 1040s, although he was not the only one: a certain Haursi mentioned in one of the inscriptions might have been one of Harald's Varangians. He seems to have died before he could receive his share of the booty, the »geld«. We do not know whether Harald himself had anything to do with the lion and its inscriptions, but the narration ends here: »and there, on the side of a lion, this story found its end«.

The Image of Byzantium Reflected in the Songs

The image of the Byzantine emperor and of Constantinople presented in the two albums is positive as, for example, in the song »Miklagard Overture« and its enthusiastic description of »the greatest of them all« – Constantinople as the dream goal of a long and dangerous journey for the Varangians, exceeding their expectations by far. Although the last songs of the album »Stand Up and Fight« give way to a more differentiated view of the futility of war and fighting in general, the described journey is a reflection of what is known of the Scandinavian historical concept as displayed in Late Medieval

266 See for the Circus Factions the reference work by Cameron, Circus Factions.
 267 Byzanz, Pracht und Alltag no. 134 (A. Effenberger).
 268 For a model of the Hippodrome (2004) s. Byzanz, Pracht und Alltag no. 138 (A. Effenberger).
 269 Cameron, Circus Factions 157-192 (chapter on »The Emperor and his People at the Games«).

270 Cameron, Circus Factions 278-280.
 271 Cigaar, Western Travellers 66.
 272 Nestorchronik 97 (Müller).
 273 See Snædal, Piraeus Lion for this paragraph, esp. 191-192. 196. 197. 202.



Fig. 13 Map of Constantinople with the chain from the east of the Neorion Harbour to Pera. – (After Asutay-Effenberger/Effenberger, *Byzanz* 56 fig. 14, with permission; chain drawn in by the author).

Scandinavian sources, especially the sagas. The *Morkinskinna* and the *Heimskringla* as well as other sagas reveal a positive view in their stories, which are always mingled with fiction. Byzantium provided an attraction for Scandinavia that could not be beaten by the Occident, although Scandinavia was affiliated steadily with the Latin Church. The Byzantines on the other hand had purposefully intensified a successful trading network and supported trading immigrants to increase mercantile activities. Furthermore, the appeal of the exotic, for the unknown and for adventure in general should not be underestimated²⁷⁴. Thus, the positive image of Byzantium was an expression of centuries of productive cultural exchange²⁷⁵, attested by the material culture of Scandinavia, such as imitation coins and Byzantine-style cross pendants. Thus, the »semantics of Byzantium in the cultural memory remains remarkably stable«²⁷⁶.

Conclusion

The concept albums »The Varangian Way« and »Stand Up and Fight« by Turisas revolve around the 11th-century stories of Ingvar, »the Far-Travelled«, and Harald, »the Hard«, re-

ferring to historical events and legends, woven together to form a story around Scandinavia, the Rus' and Byzantium. The lyrics demonstrate a deep interest in the historical background and a careful avoidance of anachronisms. S. Trafford and A. Pluskowski have already noted that »Viking metallers tend to take their subject seriously, evincing contempt for the popular and Hollywood version of the Vikings«²⁷⁷. However, the bands appropriate iconic and sometimes anachronistic emblems to visualise their lyrics²⁷⁸, not aiming at historically authentic representations²⁷⁹ but rather »communicat(ing) messages about the sorts of qualities attributed to the Vikings: freedom, masculinity, adventure and chaos«²⁸⁰.

In the two albums considered, the lyrics draw from different historical sources and sagas and create a historically conceivable story with a vivid picture of the 11th century and of the »Way of the Varangians to the Greeks« as well as the Byzantine capital Constantinople and its wonders. The cover art uses images evoking the Viking past, such as a Viking ship surrounded by Scandinavian knotwork on the cover of »The Varangian Way« (fig. 1). However, the cover art also shows contemporary medieval objects, such as the ancient Piraeus Lion with 11th-century runic inscriptions (fig. 12), or the 6th-century Hagia Sophia (fig. 3), the imperial church of

274 Scheel, *Skandinavien und Byzanz* 291.

275 Scheel, *Skandinavien und Byzanz* 15.

276 See on the topic of the Scandinavian view on Byzantium Scheel, *Jenseits der »Warägergarde«* 154-156. Quote taken from p. 155 translated from German into English by the current author.

277 Trafford/Pluskowski, *Vikings in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal* 65.

278 See again Trafford/Pluskowski, *Vikings in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal* 65.

279 Trafford/Pluskowski, *Vikings in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal* 61.

280 Trafford/Pluskowski, *Vikings in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal* 61.



Fig. 14 T-shirt inspired by Byzantine icons with the Archangel Michael surrounded by saints – all given the facial features of the band members. – (Screenshot from <https://shop.turisas.com/>).



Fig. 15 T-shirt with the double-headed eagle motif and a Greek inscription referring to the »Tagma tōn Varangōn« (»unit of the Varangians«). – (Screenshot from <https://shop.turisas.com/>).

Constantinople, still existent in the 11th century and until today a recognisable emblem of the city, avoiding an overload of Viking symbols to evoke a heroic past.

The image of Byzantium displayed here reflects what is known from Scandinavian sources, especially the saga material. Byzantium is depicted as the greatest city, as a haven of culture and riches and a goal worth fighting for. The recognition of the Byzantine emperor as a »king« is connected to Scandinavia's solid inclusion in the Catholic Church.

The interest in Byzantine topics has continued in Turisas' 2013 album »Turisas 2013« with the song »Greek Fire«. This legendary »weapon« of the Byzantines was known as »liquid fire« and »has gone down in history as one of the most intriguing lost technologies of the pre-modern era«²⁸¹, although experimental archaeology has shed light on this mystery in the meantime²⁸².

Furthermore, two T-shirts available from the online shop of the Turisas website²⁸³ play with well-known hallmarks of Byzantium: the painted icon and the double-headed eagle (fig. 14-15). The image on the black T-shirt has the look of a Byzantine icon with the Archangel Michael holding a sword. According to the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse of John, 12,7-9), he was the vanquisher of Satan. Here, Saint Michael

was given the facial features of the lead singer and songwriter Mathias Nygård, who is surrounded by saints with the features of the other band members. The ornamented band surrounding the »icon« is inspired by 10th-century Byzantine book illumination, whilst song references were added at the bottom, such as the Piraeus Lion and a Viking ship. The red T-shirt shows the double-headed eagle²⁸⁴, a symbol forever connected with Byzantium and today employed by the Greek-Orthodox Church. The inscription refers to the »Tagma tōn Varangōn« (»unit of the Varangians«), making the wearer feel like a member of the Varangian guard.

The band's deep interest in Byzantine topics is rare, and the research put into writing the songs was in-depth. The two albums discussed here display a treatment of historical and legendary topics far beyond arbitrariness in the use of Viking motifs and the so often encountered stereotypical description of Vikings in Heavy Metal music. The songs and the cover art avoid impossible anachronisms and create a consistent story that can be followed through the two albums. Turisas present an important part of medieval history to modern listeners who much too rarely encounter songs about Byzantium and its capital Constantinople.

281 Haldon, Greek Fire 316. S. a 12th-century depiction in the above mentioned Skylitzes Manuscript, fol. 34^v, Tsamakda, Skylitzes 75 and fig. 70.

282 Haldon, Greek Fire, esp. 297-315. – S. also the book by Karatolios, Greek Fire. – See also the paper given by J. Haldon during the conference »Testing and Translating Textual Evidence: A Greek Medieval Treatise on Goldsmith-

ing« (12-15 March 2018, Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum Mainz/D, organised by S. Greiff / A. Bosselmann-Ruickbie).

283 <https://shop.turisas.com/> (18.4.2018).

284 See Cutler, Eagles. Instead of Varangiōn read Varangōn.

Appendix: Track Lists and Selected Lyrics ²⁸⁶

Album »The Varangian Way« (2007)

1. To Holmgard and Beyond
2. A Portage to the Unknown
3. Cursed be Iron
4. Fields of Gold
5. In the Court of Jarisleif
6. Five Hundred and One
7. The Dnieper Rapid
8. Miklagard Overture

1. To Holmgard and Beyond

Far beyond the sea and distant lands
Came men with thirty ships
Had wanted to reach the Neva by night
But the weather was not on their side

And as the wind grew stronger and stronger
The rain ran down our cheeks
The bow was turned towards Gardar
The sail flew up again

Holmgard and beyond
That's where the winds will us guide
For fame and for gold
Set sail for those lands unknown

Osmo and Dalk, Kyy, Kokko and Ulf
Were glad to be off the oars
Turo had eaten too much again
Now hanging himself overboard

The Tostensson twins were excited as always
Adventure was their game
Myself, Hakon the Bastard
was out to find my name

Holmgard and beyond
That's where the winds will us guide
For fame and for gold
Set sail for those lands unknown

Who is »I« without a past?
A river without a source?
An event without a cause?

Threads of different lengths
Some longer, some shorter
So many of them spun together

The crones keep on weaving
The algorithm of our lives
Cause and effect, the fates of men

We know the way to Aldeigju
Upstream the river Alode
You take us to the portage
And further [South]

Long is the way to the unknown
Long are the rivers in the East
Far lies the land that Ingvar
And his men desire to reach

Many dangers lie ahead
Some of us may never return
Rather sold as a slave to the Saracens
Than chained to your bed, chained by your life!

Holmgard and beyond
That's where the winds will us guide
For fame and for gold
Set sail for those lands unknown

2. A Portage To The Unknown

We've sailed across the sea
Rowed for miles and miles upstream
Passed by Aldeigjuborg
Seen Lake Ilmen gleam
Ingvar took the lead
After Holmgard as agreed
What the end of Lovat meant
Was soon to be seen

Dripping with sweat a new day dawn on
The ropes cut flesh, as they've done in times foregone
I see my breath, my hands are going numb
Far from home we have come

An endless trail in front of my eyes
A swift take off, had no time for goodbyes
What will we find and what was left behind
There's no return, get it off your mind

The water's changed to sand
Lakes and rivers turned to land
Plough up the rocky seas
Ride felled down trees
Foot by foot we edge
Once a ship, now a sledge

Six regular edges and six vertices
Six equilateral triangles
Six square faces in another dimension
Plato's earth transparent

Give me all you have!
Pull as hard as you can
Plough up the rocky seas
Ride felled down trees
The water's changed to sand
Lakes and rivers turned to land

The rug has been pulled from under my feet
All my life made of lies and deceit
All I have left is a symbol on my chest
My only lead on my desperate quest

Branded at birth with the sign of Perun
East of the sun and West of the moon
The road now continues, Northwind be my guide
Wherever I'm going, the Gods are on my side

286 »The Varangian Way« and »Stand Up And Fight«, written by Mathias Nygård, © Reservoir Media Music (ASCAP). Published by Reservoir Media Management, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Used By Permission.

6. Five Hundred And One

New friends
Last night
An offer was made

Nordbrikt
Would leave
Five hundred strong

Long is the hour when lying awake
Sleeping his hard when so much is at stake
I've reached my goal, called the final door
Behind it- three doors more

Lying in my bed
Thinking of the things they said
Time is running out
What to do I moon about

Out in the open sea I've swum without a sight
A sight of an opposite shore, a sight of some light
Turning back, staying here, my strength is running out
Forward, or I drown

Rising from my bed
Thinking of the things they said
The moment draws nigh
One chance a year when the water is high

Corridors
I run
Heavy doors
Which one?

Where did I come from? Was I already here?
It all seems familiar, yet I have no idea

New friends
Last night
An offer was made

Nordbrikt
Would leave
Five hundred and one

»Joy and sorrow we have encountered
Always stood as one
Your heart will follow, and maybe tomorrow
You will find what you seek

Go now, and don't look back!
Bring my greetings to the Greek King!«

The wind flew the raven banner with pride
Eagles were soaring aloft
Filled with hope and excitement side by side
Five hundred and one cast off

So long is the way to the unknown
Long is the way we have come
At the head of the ships a horn was blown
We sailed off with the morning sun
Five hundred and one

7. The Dnieper Rapids

A terrible noise heard from far away
Drowning all other sounds
No cry of the birds nor voice of man
Just an awful groan

Silence fell over the men
As the river seemed to end
Then ...

Clouds of spray, Pechenegs prey
The Insatiable One is hungry today
Avoid the rocks for all you're worth
Whirlpools gaze from the depths of earth

Like dominoes six locks will fall
One after another
The World Serpent will rise from the silt
And poison the sky

Clouds of spray, Pechenegs prey
The Insatiable One is hungry today
The violent current swept Karl away
One mistake - with your life you pay

Silence fell over the men
As the river seemed to ...

A sight they had dreamt of
Now opened in front of them
Fraught with danger and travail
The river came to an end

8. Miklagard Overture

Long have I drifted without a course
A rudderless ship I have sailed
The Nile just keeps flowing without a source
Maybe all the seekers just failed?

To Holmgard and beyond
In search of a bond
Far from home I've come
But the road has just begun

Breathing history
Veiled in mystery
The sublime
The greatest of our time
Tsargrad!

»Come with us to the south
Write your name on our roll«
I was told:

Konstantinopolis
Sui generis
The saints and emperors
Of bygone centuries
The man-made birds in their trees
Out loud their paeon rings
Immortality!

In astonishing colours the East meets the West
The hill-banks arise in their green
In wonder I sit on my empty chest
As we glide down the strait in between

To Holmgard and beyond
In search of a bond
Distant church bells toll
For their god they chant and troll

Breathing history
Veiled in mystery
The sublime
The greatest of our time
Tsargrad!

The Norwegian of rank
In the court of The Prince
I was convinced

Konstantinopolis
Ten gates to eternity
Seen all for centuries
Your unconquerable walls
Your temples and your halls
See all, hear all, know it all

My sun rose in the North and now sets in the South
The Golden Horn lives up to its name
From tower to tower a chain guards its mouth
Unbreakable, they claim

To Holmgard and beyond
In a search of a bond
Adventures lie ahead
Many knots lie unravelled on my thread

Breathing history
Veiled in mystery
The sublime
The greatest of our time
Tsargrad!

Konstantinopolis
Queen of the cities
Your welcoming smile
Made all worthwhile
The sweat and the pain

Bathing in gold
Endless rooftops unfold
The sun sets for a while just to rise again

Great halls
Great halls
Greatest of all, Miklagard

Album »Stand Up And Fight« (2011)

1. The March Of The Varangian Guard
2. Take The Day!
3. Hunting Pirates
4. Venetoi! – Prasinoi!
5. Stand Up And Fight
6. The Great Escape
7. Fear The Fear
8. End Of An Empire
9. The Bosphorus Freezes Over

1. The March Of The Varangian Guard

The sun rose over the wasteland
As far as the eye can see
Sand fills the vast plains of Serkland
It's vultures jeering at me

But they can circle until they drop dead
I have not come this far
To end, but to pursue my own thread
To join The Varangian Guard

Guards of glory and of might
Red as blood and black as night
Flies our banner as we march
In the East, for the king of the Greek

There's men of the cross and the hammer
A few of the moon crescent
Men simply searching for glamour
Some concealing their royal descent

The axe-bearing foreigners they have aptly named us
All we've come from afar
Diversity is what unites us
We are The Varangian Guard

Guards of glory and of might
Red as blood and black as night
Flies our banner as we march
In the East, for the king of the Greek

Miklagard, in the second indiction, in the 6542 year of the world

*To Holmgard and beyond
This is where the winds have us guided
For fame and for gold
We once set sails for these lands unknown*

Guards of glory and of might
Red as blood and black as night
Flies our banner as we march
In the East, for the king of the Greek

6. The Great Escape

Word I bring – from far up North
Songs I sing – from you nephew's court
Convened Ting – on the death of Harthacnut
Proclaimed king – and the Danes salute

End you exile – Your claim to the throne is strong
Svein's your ally – The Swedes will fight along

Norway awaits me – It's time to cross the north sea
First I must break free – We could ask Constantine?

I'm needed elsewhere ... – No way, my troops I can not spare!
This seems quite unfair ... – Can't you hear? My answer is NO!

My Basileus, my Emperor
I have honourably served this kingdom
Sand have I won, and furthermore
Blood of Saracens have flowed by my work of sword

My Basileus, my Emperor
You have left me no choice but to escape
Taking my men, and from the Horn
We are breaking our way out after nightfall

»This is insane, we're trapped in the sound!«
Row for all you're worth, despair to mirth!
»The chain will not break, there's no way around!«
Over we shall go! So, hasten now, from stern to bow

Tilt the galley over, for no emperor nor chain will stand in my way!

Man the oars! Out to the sea!
Bid farewell and wave goodbye
Because gentlemen, we are heading home!

Rising, a new day rising
New kingdoms await
New lands there to take
Your son's heading home

He's a Viking, the last of The Vikings
With chests full of gold
Great tales to be told
Your king's heading home

9. The Bosphorus Freezes Over

So there it was, the thing we dread the most. Time had caught up with us. The thread ended.
I felt betrayed and disappointed. Was that really it?

And looking down at myself lying on the ground of Piraeus harbour,
Snowflakes falling down on me ... The night the Bosphorus froze

We watch the sand trickle, anxious about its steady flow.
But what we really fail to see is, that any minute, the glass might just burst into pieces.
You see, it's not about what you take with you, it's about what you leave behind.
And there, on the side of a lion, this story found its end.

– *Hakon Halfdansson* – *appr. 1043*

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