Abstract

In view of recent research, the introduction of chess into Europe is to be dated to the first half of the 10th century. Apparently, Old West Norse (i.e. to a large extent, Old Icelandic) chess nomenclature – terms of the game, pieces and game endings – has a central European style, and it entirely conforms to the terms of Middle Latin (mainly attested in medieval Germany). In contrast, there are no significant concordances to Middle English terminology that could establish a North Atlantic chess connection between England and Iceland. Thus linguistic evidence indicates that the game was transferred from central Europe to (western) Scandinavia, probably by travellers returning from Italy and/or Germany. It remains unclear whether the game reached North Europe via an Eastern route.

CHAPTER 3.2

Old West Norse chess terminology and the introduction of chess into Scandinavia[1]

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Introduction

ACCORDING to *opinio communis*, the game of chess had its origins in India, entering Persia as early as the 6th or 7th century and then, after the conquest of the Sassanid Empire, spreading over the Arab-Islamic world where the game was called (*aš-)šaṭranǧ, šiṭranǧ* and became quite popular during the 8th century. Chess reached the Umayyad emirate of Córdoba by the mid-9th century and came to Sicily approximately at the same time. In the Byzantine Empire, the game was known since the early 9th century, though it seems it never became very common there.[2]

Chess was introduced into the occident via two transfer zones, viz. the Iberian Peninsula and southern Italy. The game was soon assimilated and acculturated by the medieval societies of southern, western, and central Europe during the 10th and 11th centuries, accentuating social connotations later on. The early source material is rather limited, but surprisingly heterogeneous – there are texts of various types (fiction and non-fiction prose, didactic poems, letters, charters, glosses, etc.) as well as archaeological finds.

Most remarkably, the earliest known account of the game comes from Switzerland: it is the *Einsiedeln poem* which has survived in two manuscripts. According to B Bischoff, the entry of the Einsiedeln codex 365 is to be dated mid-10th century;[3] the text may be slightly older. Another chess poem, *Ludus scacorum*, was composed in the late 11th century and achieved great popularity: it is preserved in 16 manuscripts from Germany, Italy, France and England. Chess pieces are mentioned as bequests in several Catalonian charters; well-known examples are the last wills declared by Count Ermengaudus I of Urgell (1008/10) and Countess Ermessindis of Barcelona (1045) respectively. The oldest literary reference is a chess episode in *Ruodlieb*, a Middle Latin narrative written by a southern German poet in the Bavarian abbey of Tegernsee about 1050. Initial ecclesiastical reservations against the game are

Abbreviations

Arab. = Arabic
Dan. = (modern) Danish
E = (modern) English
Far. = (modern) Faroese
Icel. = (modern) Icelandic
Lat. = Latin
MDu. = Middle Dutch
ME = Middle English
MGr. = Medieval (Byzantine) Greek
MHG = Middle High German
MLat. = Middle Latin
MLG = Middle Low German
MPers. = Middle Persian
NHG = New (modern) High German
OCat. = Old Catalan
OCz. = Old Czech
OE = Old English
OF = Old French
OIcel. = Old Icelandic
OItal. = Old Italian
ON = Old Norse
ONorw. = Old Norwegian
OPers. = Old Persian
OWN = Old West Norse
OSp. = Old Spanish (Old Castilian)
OSwed. = Old Swedish
Russ. = (modern) Russian
VLat. = Vulgar Latin

documented in a letter written by Cardinal Bishop Petrus Damiani a few years later.[4] From *c.*1100, the popularity of the game led to a major increase of textual evidence – chess had become an element of medieval courtly life.

Among extant artefacts, there are some early chess pieces made of precious materials (rock crystal, gemstones and ivory) that have survived in churches or church treasuries. In the Aachen cathedral, two sets of Arab-abstract (i.e. non-figurative) chalcedony and agate stone pieces, donated by King Henry II, were affixed to the ambo (finished 1014). Fifteen rock crystal chess pieces, dating to the early 11th century, are stored in the parish church of Àger (Catalonia). Another group of quartz artefacts, belonging to two or three sets, became part of the Osnabrück cathedral treasury. However, chess was not restricted to the social élite in those days. Wood and bone chess pieces were excavated from small fortified settlements near Haus Meer (Büderich, Lower Rhine area) and Colletière (Charavines, north of Grenoble) – evidently, the 'pre-chivalric' and/or agricultural population of western and central Europe also used to play chess in the early 11th century. Important 12th-century evidence comes from the Falkenburg (near Detmold) where the fragment of a ♗ piece representing an (arch-)bishop [illus. 1] was unearthed recently.[5]

As can be seen in Map 1, early sources concentrate in Central Europe, but this is partially due to the advanced finds processing and recording in these regions; however, there is less archaeological evidence from northern Europe. A most impressive ensemble of 78 figurative pieces made of walrus ivory was found in the Isle of Lewis (Outer Hebrides). It seems that these Lewis chessmen (which are the topic of this volume) were produced in Norway in the second half of the 12th century. Two single ♖ pieces which were discovered in Trondheim, Norway, and in County Meath, Ireland [illus. 2], respectively, are directly comparable to the Lewis chessmen – probably all those pieces derive from the same workshop (located in Trondheim?). Finally, three abstract pieces (♘, ♖, ♗), dated *c.*1200, are known from Vreta abbey (Linköping, Östergötland); the rook, showing 'protuberances' at both sides and a centre hole, has a parallel in a piece found in Kiev.[6]

In Iceland and Norway, writing in vernacular language emerged gradually in the course of the 12th century. In those days, Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian dialects were practically varieties of one single language that is called Old West Norse. Literary sources are limited in medieval Norway; apart from a few mentions in charters from both countries, the bulk of references to chess is thus found in Old Icelandic prose narratives – i.e. the sagas. Most of the chess scenes (containing chess terms) occur, as expected, in more fictional saga genres, viz. in translated and original *riddarasǫgur* (chivalric sagas), that exhibit the courtly way of life.[7] The earliest text rendering chess

Illus. 1

♗ from the Falkenburg (near Detmold).

Peine and Treude 2012: 109, illus. 4

is *Tristrams saga ok Ísǫndar* (*The saga of Tristram and Isǫnd*) which was finished in 1226. Only a few years later, Snorri Sturluson wrote his *Ólafs saga ins helga* (*The saga of Saint Olaf*; two versions) with an account of a chess game that was supposedly played two centuries ago (see below).

Terms[8]

The implementation of an entire nomenclature, like that of chess, usually results from intercultural transfer by means of taking over new words for new objects or concepts. Basically there are two types of borrowings entering a recipient language: loanwords (lexical borrowings), e.g. NHG *Zeitnot* > Russ. цейтнот *cejtnot* 'time trouble', and loan translations (semantical borrowings), e.g. NHG *Zeitnot* > E *time trouble*. The adaptation of chess terms follows a process that has been called loan shift (cf. *inter al.*, Hock 1991: 398–9) – influenced by a foreign word, an established native lexeme acquires an additional terminological sememe [Table 1].

In order to distinguish between terminological and non-terminological meanings, I use notations such as OIcel. *konungr* '♚' (in the sense of chess piece that matches E *king*, NHG *König*, Dan. *konge*) v *konungr* 'king' (in the sense of 'monarch'). The (Arab. and medieval) pieces are represented by the symbols ♔ (= modern ♚, E *king*), ♕ (≠ ♛, E *queen*), ♗ (≠ ♝, E *bishop*), ♘ (= ♞, E *knight*), ♖ (= ♜, E *rook*), ♙ (= ♟, E *pawn*). In contrast to modern rules, ♕ (Arab. *firzān*), the predecessor of the modern ♛ piece, moves one square diagonally, and ♗ (Arab. *fīl*), the predecessor of the modern ♝ piece, moves two squares diagonally (jumping over a piece between).

There are three kinds of loan shifts, depending on whether non-terminological sememes in the donor and recipient languages are identical (i.e. translation Arab. *faras* '♘; horse' ⇴ MLat. *equus* '♘; horse'), similar (i.e. rendering Arab. *faras* '♘; horse' ⇒ MLat. *eques* '♘; someone belonging to the horse: horseman, equestrian, knight'), or different (i.e. variation Arab. (*al-*)*fīl* '♗, elephant' ⇴ MLat. *comes* '♗; count').

The core Old West Norse chess vocabulary covers the game (1), the pieces (2–7) and various game-endings (8–10). In comparison, Old French and Middle High German nomenclatures are better attested; the latter even has a particular expression 'board game term, (especially) chess term', i.e. MHG *zabelwort* (cf. Honemann 2004: 366–7).

1. Chess

OIcel. *skák* c.1300 (*Mágus saga jarls* I, ch. 6, MS C) 'chess'; else OWN *skáktafl* c.1300 (*Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, ch. 6, MS

Illus. 2

Queen piece from Co. Meath (Ireland).

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		Arab. *faras*	MLat. *equus*
stage 1	non-terminologic terminologic	'horse' '♘'	'horse'
stage 2	terminologic	'♘' →	'♘'

H) 'chess, chess game', furthermore as first element in OIcel. *skáktafls-borð* a. 1226 (*Tristrams saga ok Ísǫndar*, ch. 17) 'chess board' = Icel. Far. *skák* 'chess', OSwed. *skak-tafl* 14th century 'chess'.

Formal-semantic analogues are MLat. *ludus scac(h)orum c.*1050 (*Ruodlieb*), 'game of the *scachi* (i.e. chess pieces)' rare *scachum* (-*us*?) a. 1058 (Petrus Damiani, epistle 57),[9] *scac-*, MLat.–MGr. σκάκον *skákon* 15th century (Dukas, *Historia Byzantina*), OF *eschiec*, *eschec*, *eschac*, *escac* 12th century, (OF *eschès* plural >) ME *ches*, *chesse*, *esches c.*1300, OHG *scāhzabil* 11th century (glossing MLat. *alea*, here 'board game'), MHG *schâchzabel* 12th century, MDu. *schaec*, *sca(e)c* and -*spil* 13th century, MLG *schāk*, *schack* and -*spil*, -*tafel* 14th century, all of them meaning 'chess, game of chess'. MLat. *scac(h)um* 'chess' is a loanword reflecting Arabic *šāh* that underwent semantic change, viz. either Arab *šāh* (substantive) '♔ most important chess piece' → MLat. *scac(h)um* '(any) chess piece' → 'chess' or Arab *šāh* 'check' = MLat. *scac(h)um* 'check' (*Carmina Burana* no. 209) → 'chess'. The expression 'check' is not attested in Old West Norse.

Alternative medieval terms are (a) OSp. *acedrex* (*açe-* , *axe-*) 13th century 'chess', a loanword reflecting Arab (*aš-*)*šaṭranğ*, *šiṭranğ* 'chess'. – (b) MGr. ζατρίκιον *zatríkion* 'chess' (Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*), probably a loanword reflecting MPers. *čatrang* 'chess'.

MLat. *scac(h)um* shows phonetic substitution Arab [ʃ] *š* → mlat [ṣc] ‹sc› and Arab [h] *h* → MLat. [k] ‹c›, ‹ch›,[10] and OHG *sc(h)ach* has initial [ṣc-] or [ṣç-] that developed to [ʃ-] in MHG *schâch*. As in Modern Spanish and in other languages without phonological contrast /s/ vs /ʃ/, the fricative phoneme /s/ in OHG (and Germanized MLat.) was realised as a postalveolar sound [ṣ]. The addition of homoiorganic [c] or [ç] was perhaps influenced by a West Germanic word for 'robbery, prey', viz. OHG *scāh*, MHG *schâch*, MLG *schāk,* etc. (< WGerm. **skēka-*).

In his authoritative work, H J Murray (1913: 396–7) concluded from the Middle Latin spelling ‹sc› that the chess word would have existed in Latin by the 9th century 'before the sound laws that modified *sc-* had begun to work'. But there are two major objections:[11] (i) By ascribing the change *sk-* > *š-* to (all of) 'the European words' denoting 'chess', Murray takes a kind of overall development for granted. However, sound changes take place only in a particular speech community (and only at a particular time), but they do not concern a whole

language mosaic like that of early medieval Europe. This is well illustrated by the fact that, for instance, Italian *scacchi* (plural) 'chess' does not show *sk-* > *š-* until now. (ii) There is a lack of correspondence between Roman alphabet orthography and phonetic reality. For example, there are spellings ‹sch› for [ṣk⁽ˣ⁾] /sk⁽ˣ⁾/ even in the earliest Old High German literary sources, and Middle High German scribes used ‹sk›, ‹sc› for [ʃ] /š/ vice versa.[12] Thus, the spelling MLat. ‹sc› does not attest to the time of borrowing.

Old West Norse *skák* is usually considered as a loanword from Middle Low German,[13] but the alternative possibility that Middle Latin was the donor language cannot be ruled out. At any rate, Old West Norse did not borrow from Old French or Middle English (OF *esch-*, *esc-*, ME (*e*)*ch°* ≠ OWN *sk-*).

2. '♔'

OIcel. *konungr c.*1400 (*Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, ch. 3) '♔; king' = Icel. *kóngur*, Far. *kongur*, OSwed. *konunger* 15th century '♔; king'.

Semantic equivalents are MLat. *rex c.*950 (*Einsiedeln poem*), OSp. *rey* 13th century, OF *roi* 12th century, ME *kyng* 15th century, MHG *künic*, *künec c.*1200, MDu. *coninc* 13th/14th century, MLG *koning*, *konink* 14th century, all of them meaning '♔ king'. MLat. *rex* and OSp. *rey* are calques translating Arab *šāh* '♔ (interpreted as king, monarch)' (< MPers. *šāh*).

The Old Icelandic term corresponds to forms of all potential donor languages, so that it is impossible to fix the provenance of the word.

3. '♕'

ONorw. (?) [DRŌTTNING] 2nd half of 12th century (figural: Lewis, Trondheim and County Meath)[14] '♕; queen' = Icel. *drottning* 16th century (Gottskálk Jónsson), OSwed. *drotning* 15th century '♕; queen'.

Semantic equivalents are MLat. *regina c.*950 (*Einsiedeln poem*),[15] OF *röine* 14th century (*hapax: La vieille*), ME *quēne* 15th century, MHG *küniginne*, *küneginne* 13th century, MDu. *coning*(*h*)*inne* 13th century, MLG *koninginne* 14th century, all of them meaning '♕; queen'. MLat. *regina* etc. vary Arab. *firzān*, *firz*(*a*) '♕ (interpreted as councillor); the denomination refers to accompanying the '♔; king'. (Arab-abstract ♕ and ♔ pieces have the same or a similar shape, differing only in height.)

Alternative medieval terms include (a) MLat. *femina* 11th century (*Ludus scacorum*) '♕; woman' = Icel. *frú* 17th century (Stefán Ólafsson), Far. *frúgv*, varying '♕; queen'. – (b) OF *fierce*, *fierge* 12th

century, ME *fĕrs* 14th century, OSp. *alf(f)erza* 13th century '♛' is a loanword reflecting Arab *firzān*, *firz(a)* '♛ (interpreted as councillor).

The pieces from Lewis, Trondheim and County Meath – representing enthroned and crowned women that wear veils and mantles or cloaks – were produced in Scandinavia, probably in Norway (Trondheim?). However, they prove that the ♛ piece was designated by 'queen' in Old West Norse in the late 12th century; by accident, the term is not attested in Icelandic until the early modern period. It is doubtful that Old West Norse *dróttning* is an adapt from Old French or Middle English, for the regular terms in those languages are *fierce*, *fierge* and *fĕrs*, respectively.

4. '♝'

ONorw. (?) [BISKUP(R), BYSKUP(R)] 2nd half of 12th century (figural: Lewis),[16] OIcel. *biskup* '♝; bishop', first element in *biskups-mát c.*1300 (*Mágus saga jarls* I, ch. 7) 'mate with ♝' = Icel. *biskup*, Far. *bispur* (*biskupur*).

Semantic equivalents are MLat. *episcopus c.*1250 (*De vetula*, verse 614),[17] MLG [BISCHOP] late 12th century (figural: Falkenburg near Detmold, see above), E *bishop* a. 1562 (James Rowbotham), all of them meaning '♝; Bischof'; cf. furthermore OCz. *pop* 14th century '♝; pope, priest'. The term varies Arab. (*al-*)*fīl* '♜'; the denomination refers to the high social rank (: '♚; king'), and, most notably, to the shape of the Arab-abstract piece (see below).

There is a number of alternative medieval terms: (a) MLat. *alficus* 11th century (*Ludus scacorum*), *alfinus* 13th century (*De vetula*), OSp. *alffil* 13th century, OF *aufin* 12th century, ME *aufin*, *alfin* 15th century, MDu. *alphijn* 15th century, OHG *altphil* late 11th century (glossing Lat. *senio*),[18] all of them meaning '♝'. OSp. *alffil* is a loanword reflecting Arab. (*al-*)*fīl* '♜; elephant' (< MPers. *pīl*) that appears in dissimilated forms (MLat. *alficus*, *-inus*, etc.) too. – (b) OHG *alt-phil* late 11th century, MLat. *senex* 12th century (Alexander Neckam, *De naturis rerum*), MHG (*der*) *alte*, *alter* 12th century, MDu. (*de*) *oude* 13th century, MLG (*de*) *ōlde* 14th century, OSwed. *olle* 15th century, all of them meaning '♝; old man'. MLat. *senex* etc. vary Arab. *fīl*; the denomination refers to accompanying the '♚; king' (as a councillor) and, in particular, to the limited moving facility.[19] – (c) The same applies to MLat. *curvus c.*950 (*Einsiedeln poem*) '♝; bent, crooked (by age)' and (d) MLat. *calvus c.*1100 (*Winchester poem*) '♝; bald head (i.e. old man)'. – (e) MLat. *comes c.*950 (*Einsiedeln poem*) '♝; count'; again, the denomination refers to high social rank (and accompanying the '♚; king'). – (f) MLat. *stultus* 13th century (*Deventer poem*), *stolidus* ibid., OF *fol* 13th century (only in *Roman de la Rose*), all of them meaning

3a

b
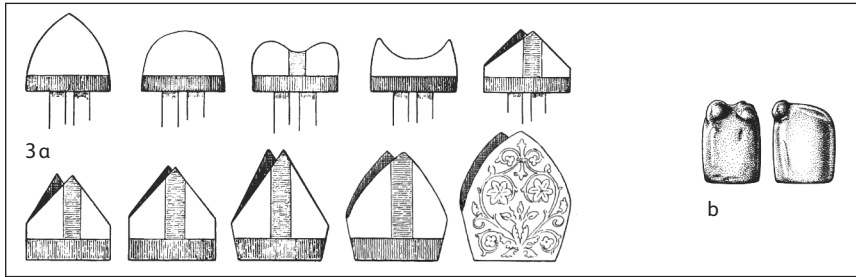
'♝; fool'. It seems that these denominations have nothing to do with the shape of the Arab-abstract piece.[20]

Obviously the two knobs or peaks (reflecting tusks) of the Arab-abstract *fīl* '♝; elephant' were reinterpreted as *cornua* of a mitre[21] and the piece as 'bishop', respectively [illus. 3 (a) and (b)]. Figural (Lewis, Falkenburg) and literary evidence (pseudo-Ovidian *De vetula*, written in France) indicates that the 'bishop' term was in use during the late 12th century. The denomination seems to be even a little older, since it refers to an earlier form of the mitre (with puffs or horns on the left and right sides of the head) that was worn during the first half of the 12th century.[22] Probably the term was not created in France, since Jean Lefèvre did not use it in his 14th-century Old French translation of Middle Latin *De vetula*;[23] at any rate, English provenance must be excluded because of the late appearance of *bishop* '♝'.

Illus. 3 (a) and (b)

(a) Development of the mitre from 11th century to present time.

Braun 1907: 475 (fig. 234).

(b) Arab-abstract ♝.

Kluge-Pinsker 1991: 46 (fig. 24, detail)

5. '♞'

OIcel. *riddari* early 13th century (*Ólafs saga ins helga*, ch. 144/153 etc.) '♞; equestrian, knight' = Icel. and Far. *riddari*, OSwed. *riddare* 15th century '♞; equestrian, knight'.

Semantic equivalents are MLat. *eques* c.950 (*Einsiedeln poem*), *equestris* c.1100 (*hapax: Winchester poem*), *caballarius* (*ibid.*), OSp. *cauallero* 13th century, OF *chevalier* 13th century, ME *knĭght*, *cniht* 15th century, MHG *ritter* 12th century, MDu. *ridder(e)* 13th century, MLG *ridder* 14th century, all of them meaning '♞; equestrian, knight'; furthermore MLat. *miles* 12th century (Neckam, *De naturis rerum*) '♞; soldier, knight'. MLat. *eques* and OSp. *cavallero* are loan shifts rendering Arab *faras* '♞; horse' (⇒ '♞; horseman: equestrian, knight').

The only medieval alternative term is (a) OCat. *caballo* 11th cent., OSp. *cauallo* 13th century, MLat. *equus* 12th/13th century (*Ludus scacorum*), all of them meaning '♞; horse' translating Arab. *faras* '♞; horse'.

OIcel. *riddari* with its geminated -*dd*- (: OIcel. *ríða*, to ride), is a loan from MLG *ridder(e)*,[24] of course, replacing the older native formation OIcel. *ríðari*, *ríðeri* 'equestrian, knight'.[25] The spread of the imported word was due to the literary influence of the Old West Norse *Kings' sagas* (*konungasǫgur*), the historical sagas (antiquity sagas) and the

romances (*riddarasǫgur*). For instance, non-terminological *ríðari* 'knight' in the oldest manuscript of Old Icelandic *Elucidarius* (AM 674a, 4°; 1150–1200) was replaced by 'modern' and more prestigious *riddari* in more recent codices.[26] By reason that chess entered Scandinavia during the 11th or (first half of the) 12th century, the loan *riddari* is probably to be considered as a substitution of older un-attested *ríðari*, *ríðeri* '♘' in a terminological sense, too.

6. '♖'

OIcel. *hrókr* '♖', first element in *hróks-mát c.*1300 (*Mágus saga jarls* I, ch. 3; *Mágus saga jarls* II, chs 8, 16) 'mate with ♖' = Icel. *hrókur* ~ Far. *rókur*, OSwed. *rokker* 15th century '♖'.

Formal-semantic analogues are MLat. *rochus c.*950 (*Einsiedeln poem*), OSp. *roque* 13th century, OF *roc* 12th century, ME *rōk(e)*, *roche* 14th century, MHG *roch c.*1200, MDu. *roc*, *roch* 13th century, MLG *roch* 14th century, furthermore MGr. -ρούχ *-rū́kh* 15th century (Dukas, *Historia Byzantina*), all of them meaning '♖'. MLat. *rochus* and OSp. *roque* are loanwords reflecting Arab. *ruḫḫ* '♖' ('chariot', 'giant bird').

The only medieval alternative term is (a) MLat. *marchius c.*950 (*Einsiedler Schachgedicht*) '♖; margrave'.

The '♖' word is an interlexeme showing Hispano-Arab. *o* < classical Arab. *u*, as Murray (1913: 395) already noted.[27] The substitution of Arab. *ḫ* [x] by [k] is as expected. The Old Icelandic term exhibits inital *h-* and a long vowel, perhaps influenced by *hrókr* 'a kind of crow (rook)'. Fischer and others regarded the Old Icelandic ♖ term as loan from Old French,[28] but there is no need to limit the scope of donor languages.

7. '♙'

OIcel. *peð* 14th century (*Sigurðar saga þǫgla*, ch. 46) '♙; pedestrian',[29] furthermore first element in *peð(s)-mát c.*1300 (*Mágus saga jarls* I, ch. 3, *Mágus saga jarls* II, chs 8, 16 *bis*) 'mate with ♙' etc. = Icel. *peð*, Far. **peð* second element in *bekkja-peïni* (i.e. **bekkjar-peðini*) plural 18th century (Nicolai Mohr) 'edge-♙, rook-♙'.[30]

Formal-semantic analogues are MLat. *pedes c.*950 (*Einsiedeln poem*), infrequent MLat. *pedester c.*1100 (*Winchester poem*), *pedinus* 13th century (Johannes Gallensis, *Communiloquium*), *pedo* 14th century, OCat. *pedo* 11th century, OSp. *peon* 13th century, OF *pëon*, *pöon*, *päon* 13th century, all of them meaning '♙; pedestrian, foot soldier'; furthermore ME *poun(e)*, *paun c.*1400 only terminologic '♙'. MLat. *pedes*, OCat. *pedo* and OSp. *peon* are calques translating Arab. *baiḏaq*, *baidaq* '♙ (interpreted as foot soldier).

Another medieval term is (a) MHG *vende* masculine *c.*1200 '♙; pedestrian, foot soldier, boy, young man', furthermore MDu. *vende*, *vinde*, *vinne* feminine 13th century, MLG *vinne* feminine 14th century, OSwed. *finna/-e* feminine/masculine 15th century, Far. *finna* feminine, the latter forms meaning only terminologic '♙'. MHG *vende* is an alternative calque translating Arab. *baiḏaq, baidaq.* – (b) An isolated term is OF *garçon* 13th century '♙; boy, guy' (*hapax: Roman de la Rose*); the denomination might refer to weakness in combat.

OIcel. *peð* is obviously a loan from MLat. *pedes*. The substitution of [d] by [ð] is due to Old Icelandic distribution regulations,[31] and there are other examples of gender changing in loans (e.g. Lat. *crocus* masculine > OIcel. *krog* neuter 'crocus'). Fischer and others considered Romance or Old French, respectively, as the donor language,[32] but there are severe phonetic and morphological problems. Loss of intervocalic early OF ð (spelled ‹dh› in the *Strassburg oaths*) began to take effect in the Gallo-Romance dialects around 900,[33] so that *peon* (< early OF *peðon* < VLat. *pedone*) is the regular OF form of the 11th and 12th centuries. Even more decisive is the fact that the Old West Norse adapts usually retain the foreign *n*-formative (cf. OF *baron* > OWN *barón*, *bar(r)únn* 'baron'): early OF *peðon* would have yielded OWN †*peðón* or †*peðún*, not *peð*.

8. 'MATE'

OIcel. *mát* (adjective) 13th century (*Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, ch. 17) and (substantive) *c.*1300 (*Mágus saga jarls* I, chs 3, 6; *Mágus saga jarls* II, chs 8, 16, etc.) 'mate', furthermore second element in *hróks-, biskups-, peð(s)-mát* 'mate with ♖, ♗, ♙', and in pejorative *peðryttu-, fretstertu-, fuðryttu-mát c.*1300 'mate with the ♙-guy, farting guy, cunt guy', these three expressions denoting a disgraceful mate with the king's ♙ (*Mágus saga jarls* I, chs 3, 7; *Mágus saga jarls* II, chs 8, 16)[34] = Far. *mát* (adjective) 'mate'.

Formal-semantic analogues are MLat. *mattus* (adjective) 11th century (*Ludus scacorum*), *mattum* (substantive) (*ibid.*), *mat* (interjection) 11th/12th century (*Carmina Burana* no. 209), OSp. *mate* (adjective) 13th century (cf. *xa-mat* [adjective], 'checkmate'), OF *mat* (adjective, substantive) 12th century, ME *māt* (adjective, substantive, interjection) 14th century, MHG *mat* (adjective, substantive, interjection), 12th century,[35] MDu. *mat* (substantive) 13th century, MLG *mat* (substantive) 14th century, all of them meaning 'mate'. MLat. *mattus* and OSp. *mate* are loanwords reflecting Arab. *māt* 'mate (helpless, overwhelmed)'[36] (= MPers. *māt*).

OIcel *mát* was supposed to be a loan from Old French or Middle Low German,[37] but Middle Latin comes into consideration as well.

9. 'BARE ♟'[38]

OIcel. *litla bert* 15th century (*Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, ch. 3) 'little exposed-ness, bare ♟', cf. *varð keisari berr* 'the emperor was exposed (had no pieces left)' (*Mágus saga jarls* I, ch. 7) = Icel. *bert* 18th century (Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson) 'exposedness, bare ♟'.

A medieval semantic analogue is MLat. *nudus* 15th century (*hapax: Cracow poem*) 'exposed, bare ♟; naked'; cf. *rex nudatus* (*ibid.*) 'denuded ♟'.

An alternative term is OF *have* 12th century (Chrétien, Yvain; *Roman de la Rose*), 'exposed, bereft; dark, sombre'.

MLat. *nudus* 'exposed, bare ♟' is attested late and only once, so that the terminological extension of OIcel. *bert* should be an independent native Norse process.

10. 'DRAW'

OIcel. *jafntefli* 14th century (*Víglundar saga*, ch. 22; *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, ch. 3) 'even game, draw' is a Norse neologism. (E *draw* 19th century, NHG *remis* 19th century.)

There is no term for 'stalemate' in Old Icelandic.

In addition, OIcel. chess vocabulary includes *bekkr* 'rank; bench' (~ MLat. *linea*), *fingrbrjótr* 'bad move', *reitr* 'square, place, space (marked out)' (~ MLat. *campus*, MHG *velt*), (*í*) *uppnám* 'en prise; receipt (of a fee or similar)', *tafl* 'board game, game, game board, piece' (~ OE *tæfl*, MHG *zabel* 'game board, board game [with dices], dice', etc.) and its derivations *tafla*, *tǫfl* 'piece', *tefla* 'to play a board game, to move a piece, to win a game. Presumably none of these expressions is a borrowing, since the semantic shifts (terminological extensions) of *bekkr* 'bench', *reitr* 'place' and *uppnám* 'receipt' seem to be genuine Norse. *Fingrbrjótr* is obviously an OIcel. neologism, and *tafl* is an old loan-word reflecting Lat. *tabula* that was nativized a long time before chess entered Europe.

Conclusion

More than a century ago, D W Fiske argued from analogous terms that chess reached Iceland from England during the late 12th century.[39] He thought that the pairing ME *rōk(e)* – OIcel. hrókr '♖' would already yield 'sufficient evidence'; yet, the term is isolated neither in Western and central European languages (OF *roc*, MLat. *rochus*, MHG *roch*, MLG *roch*), nor in Scandinavian languages (Far. *rókur*, OSwed. *rokker*). Fiske's second argument was that only English and Icelandic designate the ♗ piece by 'bishop'; but E *bishop* is not attested until

late 16th century and there is, however, counter evidence from MLat. *episcopus* in *De vetula* and the bishop-shaped piece from the Falkenburg. In addition, terms matching ME *aufin*, *alfin* '♗' and *fĕrs* '♛' (that are borrowed from Old French) are unknown to Old West Norse. Finally, the initial sound of ME *ches(se)*, *esches* 'chess', pronounced [tʃ-], [estʃ-] (cf. OF *esch(i)ec*, *eschac* [estʃ-], [esk-]), deviates from OWN *skák(-tafl)*, so that the transfer of chess via a western route to Scandinavia (and a North Atlantic connection from England to Iceland in particular) is implausible from the linguistic angle [Table 2, see below].

Old West Norse lacks Arabisms except for the usual interlexemes *hrókr* '♖' and *mát* 'mate'. R Eales feels sceptical about an import of chess from the East because of two reasons: first, Swedish Varangians in Old Russia (*Rus'*) should be distinguished from Danish and Norwegian Vikings in western Europe; second, the norsemen would often have been impervious to other cultures until Christian times.[40] Yet there is no reason for making such a clear distinction between western Vikings and eastern Varangians – old Scandinavia was a common cultural area without barriers in mental, linguistic, religious, social, political, etc. respects. So a lot of Danes and Norwegians also came to *austrvegr*, i.e. the regions southeast of the Baltic Sea. The most prominent individual was Haraldr hardráði (born in 1014/5) who fled

Table 2

Chess terms in Old West Norse and medieval contact languages.

Significant borrowings are coloured grey. Counter evidence is marked by slashes.

Frequency specification of alternative terms: :1: = attested once (*hapax legomenon*), ≤ = attested rarely.

	ME	OF	OWN	MLat.	MHG	MLG
'chess' (1)	ches(se), esches	eschec, esc(h)ac	skák-tafl skák :1:	ludus scachorum scachum ≤	schâch-zabel	schāk-tafel, -spil schāk ≤
'♚' (2)	kyng	roi	konungr	rex	künic	koning
'♛' (3)	quēne ≤ fĕrs	röine :1: fierce, fierge	[DRŌTTNING]	regina	küniginne	koninginne
'♝' (4)	aufin, alfin	aufin	biskup	episcopus :1: senex ≤ alficus, alfinus	(der) alte, alter altphil (OHG) :1:	[BISCHOP] :1: (de) ōlde
'♞' (5)	knĭght	chevalier	riddari (*ríðari)	eques, miles ≤	ritter	ridder
'♜' (6)	rōk(e)	roc	hrókr	rochus	roch	roch
'♟' (7)	poun(e), paun	pëon, pöon, päon	peð	pedes	vende masculine	vinne feminine
'mate' (8)	māt	mat	mát	mattum	mat	mat
'bare king' (9)		have	bert	nudus		
'draw' (10)			jafntefli			

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from Norway to Kiev and Byzantium, where he joined the Varangian Guard and went to Greece, North Africa and Sicily; then he returned to Norway and became king there, losing life and limb in the Battle of Stamford Bridge (1066) – a spectacular example of Viking-Age mobility. Contrary to Eales' claim, Arabs and Scandinavians had rather intensive intercultural contacts. This is proven by the fact that a large amount of objects have found their way to Scandinavia, such as thousands and thousands of dirhams (Arab silver coins); furthermore, weapons, textiles, clothing, jewellery and ivory objects.[41] (By the way, ivory was called OIcel. *fílsbein*, OSwed. *fīlsbēn*, 'elephant's bone' in Scandinavia; the first element of the compound is OIcel. *fíll*, OSwed. *fīl* < Arab. *fīl* 'elephant' in non-terminological sense.) Alas, there is a deficit of archaeological evidence for a transfer of chess to Scandinavia by means of an eastern route during the Viking Age. Actually, we can only speculate about the entire early history of the game in Eastern Europe, for there is no authoritative comparative survey on chess pieces found in Old Russia and their archaeological datings.[42]

Old West Norse chess terminology neither has a western European look (such as Old French, Middle English) nor exhibits eastern (Arabic) specifics – it clearly represents the central European nomenclature type. First, OWN *skák*, *skák-tafl* 'chess' equates to MLat. *scac(h)um*, *ludus scachorum*, OHG *scāh-zabal*, MHG *schâch-zabel* and MLG *schāk*, *schāk-tafel* (the latter both showing *sch-* < *sk-*). In addition, Old West Norse shares the denomination of the ♗ by 'bishop' with Middle Latin and Middle Low German (evidenced by the Falkenburg piece) – an infrequent, and hence significant, kind of labelling for that piece. However, the key point is that OIcel. *peð* '♙' must be a loan from MLat. *pedes*, since Middle Low German has a different term, viz. *vinne* (feminine!) '♙'.[43] All items of the Old West Norse chess nomenclature are compatible then with that of Middle Latin (which is mainly attested in the German-speaking regions).[44]

Thus linguistic evidence points to a transfer to Scandinavia via central Europe, viz. in the 11th or first half of the 12th century, the Lewis chessmen providing a *terminus ante quem*. In *Ólafs saga ins helga* (written *c*.1230), as mentioned above, Snorri Sturluson refers to a chess game played in Roskilde between Cnut the Great and Earl Ulf in 1026.[45] There is a gap of 200 years separating this chess incident and the later account of it, so that we cannot be sure if it is fact or fiction (Snorri could have replaced chess for *hnefatafl*, a hunting board game of the Viking Age). Then again, the *Chronicon abbatiae Rameseiensis* also knows Cnut, king of Danmark, Norway and England, as a chess player too;[46] but this is another case of non-contemporary and thus problematic evidence, since the Ramsey chronicle was not composed until the late 12th century. According to various sources, Cnut travelled to Rome in order to attend Conrad II's imperial

coronation in 1027,[47] and he exchanged gifts with the pope, emperor, and other aristocrats there – maybe he got a chess set? However, it is certainly not appropriate to confine the transfer merely to the person of Cnut, but it could have been upper class persons like Cnut that brought the game to the North. In his prosopographic survey, D Waßenhoven discusses no less than 57 Scandinavians travelling to Rome within the period 1000–1250,[48] and additionally there must be a considerable number of undocumented cases. At any rate, tour guides such as abbot Nikulás' *Leiðarvísir* (written *c*.1150) provide precise information on the routes from (Iceland, Norway and) Denmark to northern Germany and the Rhine, and from there over the Swiss Alpine passes to Italy.[49]

Þat hefi ek lengi haft í hug mér at ganga suðr um sinnsakir ('For a long time I have aimed to travel to the south one day'), says Bolli Bollason, a main character of mid-13th century *Laxdœla saga* (ch. 7) – and it seems that chess was brought to (western) Scandinavia as a kind of souvenir when travelling back from (southern and) central Europe.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference 'Spiel und Sport im mittelalterlichen Nordeuropa' (Göttingen, 1–2 October 2010). An expanded version (in German: full references) appeared in the conference volume (i.e. Teichert [ed], 2014).

2 For the early history of the game, see e.g. Murray 1913: 51–94, 149–351; Wieber 1972: 48–75; Eales 1985: 19–38; Karpozilos and Kazhdan 1991; Thieme 1994; Plessow 2005: 111–6.

3 *Einsiedeln poem:* Silagi and Bischoff 1979: 652–5; also cf. Gamer 1954: 741–50. Stiftsbibl. Einsiedeln, cod. 365 (220), fol. 95[r]–94[v]: *Versus de scachis*, *c*.950, cod. 319 (645), fol. 298[r]: *De aleae ratione*, early 11th century.

4 *Ludus scacorum:* Schumann and Bischoff 1970: no. 210 (18 distichs). – Ermengaud's will: Baraut 1980: no. 300 (*meos schacos*). – Ermenssind's will: Rosell 1945: no. 491 (*suos eschacos christalinos*). Petrus Damiani's letter: Reindel 1988, no. 57 (for the dating a. 1058, see *ibid.* 163 n.1). – *Ruodlieb:* Vollmann 1985 (chess episode: fr IV, verse 185–230).

5 Aachen cathedral: Kluge-Pinsker 1991: 34–5 (fig. 15, p. 32), 46–8 (fig. 24). – Àger church: *ibid.* 35–7 (fig. 18). – Osnabrück cathedral: *ibid.* 37–8 (fig. 20–1). – Haus Meer: *ibid.* 131–2 (A 32; fig.). – Colletière: *ibid.* 106–7 (A 6; fig.). – Falkenburg: Peine and Treude 2012.– For the early chess pieces, cf. also Plessow 2005: 115–21.

6 Lewis: Caldwell, Hall and Wilkinson 2009 (figs); Caldwell, Hall and Wilkinson 2010 (figs). – Trondheim: McLees and Ekroll 1990 (fig. 3). – Co. Meath: Wallace and Ó Floinn 2002: 268 (no. 7:16), 282 (fig.). – Vreta: Wichmann and Wichmann 1960: 289 (no. 35; fig.); Linder 1979: 76 (fig.). – Kiev: Linder 1979: 74–5 (fig.); Linder 1994: 224 (fig.).

7 The most prominent chess passages are found in *Mágus saga jarls* I (shorter version), chs 3, 7; *Mágus saga jarls* II (longer version), chs 8, 16 (cf. Nedoma 1992: 95–108), *Sigurðar saga þǫgla,* chs 21, 46 (cf. Teichert 2007: 91–9), *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, ch 3, and *Víglundar saga ok Ketilríðs*, ch 22 (cf. Nedoma 2003), the latter being a post-classical (and completely fictional) Icelandic family saga. – Editions of cited OIcel. texts: *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr:* Kölbing 1896; *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs:*

Helgason 1924; *Karlamagnús saga ok kappa hans:* Unger 1860; *Laxdœla saga:* Kålund 1889–91; Nikulás' *Leiðarvísir:* Kålund 1908: 12–23; *Mágus saga jarls* I*:* Cederschiöld 1884: 1–42; *Mágus saga jarls* II*:* Þórðarson 1858; *Ólafs saga ins helga:* Johnsen and Helgason 1941 (separate saga), Jónsson 1895–8 (*Heimskringla* version); *Sigurðar saga þǫgla:* Loth 1963: 93–259; *Tristrams saga ok Ísǫndar:* Kölbing 1878; *Víglundar saga:* Halldórsson 1959: 61–116; *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs:* Loth 1964: 1–136.

8 For an explanation of the language abbreviations used in this paper see page 243.

9 In his letter to pope elected (according to Reindel, Nikolaus II) and Archdeacon Hildebrand, Petrus Damiani uses *scachum* as an antonym to *alea* 'board game, dice game', so *scachum* does not mean 'chess piece', but 'chess'.

10 The double example Arab. *šarāb* 'drink, fruit juice, wine' > OItal. *sciroppo* 14th century vs MLat. *syropus*, *syrupus* 'syrup' 13th century (cf. Kiesler 1994: 309) illustrates the fact that Arab. *š-* was replaced by *sc-* as well as by simple *s-* in medieval Italy.

11 Murray's claim was challenged by referring to missing evidence (Gamer 1954: 737–8) and more fundamental reasons (Eales 1985: 40, stating 'Etymology is not a precise science'); of course, I disagree with the latter.

12 See Braune and Reiffenstein 2004: 140; Paul, Klein et al. 2007: 174.

13 Fischer 1909: 85; de Vries 1962: 480; Haugen 1982: 30 ('probably'); Magnússon 1989: 825.

14 Lewis: Caldwell, Hall and Wilkinson 2009: 156–7 (figs 1i–2g), 163 (figs 8f–g), 191–2; Caldwell, Hall and Wilkinson 2010: 23–4 (figs 4.9–4.16), 31 (fig. 6), 59 (fig. 16), 65 (fig. 20). – Trondheim: McLees 1990: 58 n.1, 59 (fig. 22); McLees and Ekroll 1990: 151–3 (fig. 3). – Co. Meath: Wallace and Ó Floinn 2002: 268 (no. 7:16), 282 (fig.).

15 Yalom (2004: 24) thinks that Adelheid (mother of Otto II, 973–83) or Theophanu (his wife) 'served as the model for the chess queen in the Einsiedeln Poem', but this is, of course, a mere guess.

16 Lewis: Caldwell, Hall and Wilkinson 2009: 157–9 (figs 2h–4e), 162 (fig. 7i), 192–3; Caldwell, Hall and Wilkinson 2010: 24–6 (figs 4.17–4.32), 32 (fig. f), 58 (15).

17 *alphinus episcopus ipse est Iupiter* 'the *alphinus*, also *episcopus*, is Jupiter' (Klopsch 1965: 216).

18 The glossator of the *Vaticanus codex* Pal lat 1710 mistook Lat. *senio* '6 (on the dice)' as *senius = senex* 'old man; ♗', using the interpretament *altphil* (i.e. **alphil* with unorganic *t*); cf. Lloyd et al. I: 182.

19 The medieval ♗, moving two squares diagonally, can reach only 8 of the 64 squares on the board

(the ♗ c1, for e.g., is limited to the squares a3, a7, c5, e3, e7, g1 and g5). Next to the ♙, ♗ was the weakest chess piece, a fact mentioned by Alain of Lille in his 12th-century *Liber parabolarum: Sic inter scacos alfinus inutilis exstat,/ Inter aves bubo, fucus inter apes* 'So among the chess pieces the ♗ turns out as useless, among the birds the (eagle) owl, the drone among the bees' (Limone 1993: 66).

20 It is hard to believe that the two knobs or peaks of the Arab-abstract piece were reinterpreted as peaks of a fool's cap (and the piece as 'fool', respectively) – even the predecessor of the fool's cap, viz. the *gugel*, a sort of hood, was not in use until the 14th century (cf. Mezger 1993: 1024).

21 E.g. the *Ludus scacorum* (*Carmina Burana*, no. 210), verse 15,1 refers to the peaks of the ♗: *Alficus trivius, cornuta fronte timendus,* 'The ♗ at the crossroad, fearsome with his horned front' (Schumann and Bischoff 1970: 56).

22 Cf. Braun 1907: 459, 463; Schramm 1954: 61.

23 In *La vieille*, he merely refers to the shape of the *auphin* (♗) as bearing a bishop's mitre (verse 1603; Cocheris 1861: 80).

24 Fischer 1909: 37; de Vries 1962: 44; Magnússon 1989: 758.

25 OWN *ríðari*, *ríðeri* is attested in the oldest MSS dating to the late 12th century and *c.*1200, respectively; see Larsson 1891: 264; Holtsmark 1955: 487.

26 *riþara* AM 674a, 4° : *riddara* AM 657, 4° (*Hauksbók, c.*1300) and other manuscripts (Scherabon, Firchow and Grimstad 1989: 25); here, early OIcel. *vísa tǫlu valdra ríðara* responds to Lat. *certum numerum electorum militum*.

27 The vowel *u* changes into *o* in West Arabic when followed by an emphatic, velar or pharyngeal consonant; cf. Steiger 1932: 346–7, 353–8; Kiesler 1994: 189.

28 Fischer 1909: 78; de Vries 1962: 259; Magnússon 1989: 377.

29 Cf. *Karlamagnús saga* IV, ch. 57 (Unger 1860: 314): *peðmenn eða gǫngumenn* cf. 'footmen (pedestrians) or walking men (vagrants)'.

30 'Bekkja-Peïni Finerne foran Kastellerne i Skak Spil' (Matras 1962: 30–1).

31 The phonological contrast between post-vocalic voiced plosives and voiced fricatives is neutralised in Old Icelandic ($C_0Vd/ð^{(o)} \rightarrow C_0Vð^{(o)}$).

32 Andreas Heusler *apud* Fischer 1909: 80 ('perhaps Roman. *pedone*'); de Vries 1962: 424 ('VLat. *pedone*, OF *pedon*'); Magnússon 1989: 704 ('VLat. *pedone*'). However, we cannot talk of *Vulgar Latin* since the *Strassburg oaths* (a. 842) at the latest, and 'OF *pedon*' with intervocalic *-d-* is an impossible form.

33 See e.g. Pope 1934: 140; Fouché 1961: 600. One of the earliest examples is the personal name *Free-*

laus a. 893 (< *Frede-*) in a Cluny charter (Bernard and Burel 1876: 58).

34 See Nedoma 1992: 96–108 (with lit.).

35 Because of rhyming with *rat* 'wheel', *stat* 'location, place', *bat* 'begged', *pfat* 'path', etc., MHG *mat* has a short vowel *ă*.

36 See Wieber 1972: 337. Frequently, Arab. *šāh māt* is interpreted as 'the king has died' (instead of 'checkmate'), but Wieber states that *šāh māt* has no article and an un-Arabic word order; however, *māt* mate was associated with homonymic *māt* 'died, dead', even in Arabic tradition.

37 Fischer 1909: 80 (OF); de Vries 1962: 380 (OF or MLG); Magnússon 1989: 608 (OF or MLG).

38 This is a situation where one player's king is denuded of his pieces, the opponent having no mating forces, e.g. ♖ + ♗ vs ♚. In Old Iceland, this ending was reckoned as a minor win (*hinn litli tafls munr*, as *Mágus saga jarls* I, ch. 7 states), so that King Rikard's female opponent in *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* refuses to deliver her stake to him (ch. 3; Loth 1964: 7–8). In an 18th-century account, Eggert Ólafsson explains, 'hvis han sættes Skak i det samme er det fuldt Bert; hvis ikke, kaldes det litla Bert' (if he checks simultaneously, this is the full *bert*; if not, it is called the little *bert*; Ólafsson 1772: 463). – For 'bare ♚' in Old Icelandic chess, see Nedoma 1992: 99–100 (with lit.).

39 Fiske 1880: 129; 1905: 4–5, 7–9; Murray 1913: 444–5 rightly disagrees.

40 Eales 1985: 47–8. More positive about the eastern route are, for instance, Holländer 1993: 392, and Plessow 2007: 19 n.5.

41 Cf. inter al., Steuer 2000: 520–3; Mikkelsen 2008: 545–8.

42 Chess pieces found in *austrvegr* have been dated to an earlier period by I M Linder (10th/11th–13th century; 1979: 49, 59; 1994: 170) and, contrary, to a later period by E A Rybina (1991; 2001: 215; finds from Novgorod: late 13th century).

43 MLG *vinne* (feminine) '♙' is obviously borrowed from MDu. *vende, vinde, vinne* (feminine) '♙' that is a loan on its part, namely from MHG *vende* (masculine) '♙; pedestrian, foot soldier'; cf. recently Lloyd et al. III: 150 (with lit.).

44 As to Old West Norse nomenclature, Eales (1985: 47) supposes 'derivation from the south (probably through Germany)' and does not discuss details.

45 *Ólafs saga ins helga* (separate version), chs 143–4 (Johnsen and Helgason 1941: 442–3); *Ólafs saga ins helga* (*Heimskringla* version), chs 152–3 (Jónsson 1895–98: 370–1).

46 *Ipse […] regem adhuc tesserarum vel scacchorum ludo longioris tœdia noctis relevantem invenit* 'He (i.e. Bishop Aetheric) has found the king still relieving the weariness of a long night with the dice game or chess' (ch. 75; Macray 1886: 137).

47 Cf. inter al., Waßenhoven 2006: 86–7, 221; Wolfram 2006: 103.

48 See Waßenhoven 2006: 72 (tab. 3.1), 427 (index, *sub voce* 'Rom').

49 Nikulás of Þverá († 1159) went on a pilgrimage to Rome and Jerusalem; he wrote *Leiðarvísir* after returning to Iceland.

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