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Kaiser Wilhelm II's Fridtjov — a foreign statue on a fjord: nationalism, narcissism, and entertainment

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Kaiser Wilhelm II's *Fridtjov* — a foreign statue on a fjord:
nationalism, narcissism, and entertainment

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Remarks on conventions, translations, and provenance

While compiling this work, I have encountered many different spellings of the name *Fridtjov*, where the variations all occur in the second and third groups of consonants: *Fritjov*, *Fritjof*, *Fritiov*, *Fritiof*, *Frithiov*, *Frithiof*, *Frithjov*, *Frithjof*, *Fridjov*, *Fridjof*, *Fridtjof*, *Fridthjof*, or even *Fridjrjofr*. I have not been able to attribute any of the spellings to a particular language (except the last, which is Old Norse-Icelandic); they truly appear to be used randomly. I have therefore chosen to maintain the spelling of the name as it is inscribed on the statue: *Fridtjov*, unless I am directly quoting titles or texts with different spellings.

All quotations from languages other than English are given in English in the text, with the original language quotation in the footnote. In case single foreign (usually German) words are used, I give an English translation in brackets in the text. Unless marked differently, all translations are mine, in some cases supported by translation tools such as DeepL. Special thanks go to the developers and open-source maintainers of the tool Transkribus, which allowed me to access the correspondence of the Kaiser's Private Cabinet in the Prussian State Archives written in *deutsche Schreibschrift* (German manuscript).

I have used the original German names for the monarchs most prominent in this work: the Kaisers Wilhelm I, II, and Friedrich, Kaiserin Auguste Viktoria, (instead of *William*, *Frederick*, *Augusta Victoria*). Any other monarchs are named by their more usual English names: thus Frederick the Great (instead of e.g. *Friedrich der Grosse* or *Friedrich the Great*).

Parts of chapters 2, 3, and 5 of this dissertation are based on my earlier, unpublished Research Master's Thesis: *Kaiser Wilhelm II's Fridtjov on the fjord: sculptural excess, discordant discourse, and the power of the gift* (Leiden University: 2020), also under supervision of Prof. Korsten and Dr. Polak.

Acknowledgements

This project originated from a chance encounter with the colossal *Fridtjov* statue on a 2002 motorcycle trip through Norway. The *Rough Guide* mentioned a “slightly unpleasant” monument built by Kaiser Wilhelm II, triggering my interest in Imperial representation.¹ With my friend, the art historian Marcel Menz, I had travelled extensively through Germany previously to visit examples of imperial sites and artifacts: from the magnificent 2001 Magdeburg exhibition *Otto the Great* to Charlemagne’s palace chapel in Aachen, and from Quedlinburg Abbey, founded in 936 by Saint Matilda, Henry the Fowler’s widow, to the 1896 *Kyffhäuser* monument, which links the myth of Hohenstaufen Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa (*red beard*) to nineteenth century Kaiser Wilhelm I (*white beard*). These travel encounters kindled a deep interest in the importance for modern Germany of legitimizing itself through medieval Imperial history.

However, the huge bronze statue of *Fridtjov*, rarely visited and far away from Germany, did not easily fit the purpose of Imperial representation. I bought a brochure and then forgot about it for fifteen years.²

In 2014 I moved to Berlin and again became surrounded by Wilhelmine history – on one of our first weekend outings, we found the remnants of Wilhelm II’s *Siegesallee* at the Citadel of Spandau – encouraging me to pursue my interest in Imperial representation formally, and I enrolled to study history and art history at Humboldt University. Dr. Katja Bernhardt further stimulated my interest in monuments in a comparative seminar on equestrian statuary in Berlin and Cracow, and prof. Johannes Helmraht supervised my thesis on Charlemagne’s Nijmegen palace. In my subsequent Research Master’s course in Arts and Culture at Leiden University, I discovered the riches of methodologies available in cultural analysis at prof. Frans-Willem Korsten’s LUCAS seminar, while professors Kitty Zijlmans and Stijn Bussels extended my understanding of art historical theory and practice. For my thesis, I revisited the slightly irritating object I discovered on the fjord years earlier in a multidisciplinary approach combining art history, anthropology, and literary analysis. My art historian friend prof. Justin Kroesen from Bergen, Norway, joined me to revisit the *Fridtjov* in 2019 and generously shared his photography skills. Frans-Willem and dr. Sara Polak supervised the thesis and suggested to continue working on *Fridtjov* as a PhD dissertation. They tolerated my expansion of methodologies to include psychoanalysis and the history of nationalism and world fairs, and research objects to an Alsatian castle, an archaeological park and Hercules Farnese copy in Germany, an Achilles statue in Corfu, and an Eddic throne room in Rome.

¹ Jules Brown and Phil Lee, *Norway: The Rough Guide* (Rough Guides, 1997), 183.

² Arne Inge Sæbbø, *Fridtjov den Frøkne. Historia om statuen* (Vik Lokalhistoriske Arkiv, 2001).

My move to Rome in 2021 supplied yet another research object: the Kaiser's *Goethe* in Villa Borghese, a natural foil for the *Fridtjov*. I found an academic home away from home at the KNIR – the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome. The institute provided me with a six-month research grant, and allowed me to participate in its debates, research dialogues, and other initiatives until today. I want to thank prof. dr. Tesse Stek and dr. Rita Landeweerd for their warm welcomes, and Rita especially for her support of our joint 2024 project celebrating the life and work of the Dutch cineast Lili Rademakers (1930-2025), in which Frans-Willem also participated. Many thanks also to Dr. Susanna de Beer and Dr. Laura Overpelt for inviting me to contribute to their courses and for their friendship. I want to take the opportunity to highlight what the Institute calls its crown jewel: the KNIR debates. Here, visiting scholars, at all academic levels, present their research approach and are questioned critically by peers from other disciplines and universities, which has been an eye opener. Thanks to the bursaries I have met over the years for their friendship, interest and feedback on my project.

Credit goes to Frans-Willem Korsten and Sara Polak for keeping me on track while working remotely and keeping me in the loop on goings on at the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society. Special thanks to Frans-Willem and Jeannette for the annual research discussion meetings and dinners with Frans-Willem's other PhD students at their Utrecht home.

Ultimately, the most important people to thank are my family. My mother Ineke would have been as proud of my final completion of this project as is my father, Frank. My wife Pauline Diepenbroek through her career has not only brought us to the wonderful cities of Berlin and Rome (and soon Copenhagen), but throughout our holidays together has faithfully accompanied me to any strange monument I wanted to visit, sometimes not immediately seeing the link with my research subject: the *Fridtjov*. Without her unconditional support and encouragement, I would not have been able to complete this project. Our teenage boys have likewise always been either faithful travelling companions, or supportive of my absences. I dedicate this work to Pauline, Willem, and Hugo, hoping for many more adventures together.