

If Frederick Barbarossa's ties to the kings and dukes of Bohemia, Poland and Hungary had no feudal basis, we must ask what else shaped relations between the Staufer king and the Arpads, Piasts and Přemyslids. This paper proposes an imperial interpretation, positing a hierarchy among the polities that then prevailed: The Staufer rulers claimed precedence over their east-central European neighbours, and they enforced this through diplomatic and military means. Their neighbours assented to their position within the empire and invoked it repeatedly, by requesting that the German-Roman emperor advance them in rank, judge succession disputes and other conflicts, and support them against their enemies. Every time they did so, they confirmed and strengthened this asymmetrical relationship, which came to be expressed in many forms—in the titles of those involved (emperor, prince, king, duke, etc.), through outright subordination and superiority, via the tribute of dependency, in pacts of amicitia, and later also in feudal relationships. We must develop a terminology that describes and explains hierarchical relationships between the centre and the periphery such as these, without calling upon national, totalitarian or anachronistic vocabulary (such as "Landeshoheit", sovereignty, territorial integrity, "Staatsrecht", and so forth).