

Wojtek Jeziernski

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1305-808X>

Department for Archaeology, Conservation and History, University of Oslo

Paweł Żmudzki

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1012-6104>

Faculty of History, University of Warsaw

*The authors dedicate this article
to Professor Jacek Banaszkiewicz*

**FEASTING AND ELITE LEGITIMISATION IN POLAND
AND NORWAY: PROPAGANDA, POLITICAL ECONOMY,
AND RECOGNITION IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE,
1000–1300***

Abstract

This article explores the ways in which the political legitimacy of the elites was produced and demonstrated through feasting as it was practised in two peripheral high-medieval polities, Poland and Norway. By paying attention to the ways the political and moral economy of feasts and their use as a means of propaganda and political recognition were presented in contemporary sources, this article, through two case studies of peripheral languages of power and legitimisation, traces the similarities and differences in elite feasting in these disconnected contexts. Three aspects of political feasting are studied in comparison. First, the question of the supernatural charisma of rulers and ruling dynasties demonstrated through their – mythically and historically framed – ability to provide economic prosperity for their people and followers is examined. Second, we discuss how the rulers' social power, entitlement, and ability enabled them to extract material resources

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from the rest of the elites and their subjects, how resources were then redistributed and what symbolic capital these endowed upon the elites. The third section focuses on high-status feasts at which foreign elites from European centres were entertained to secure international recognition of the peripheral elites and gain institutional advantages such as coronations, archepiscopal titles, etc.

Keywords: ideology, political economy, legitimation, elites, Poland, Norway, feasts

INTRODUCTION

Lars Kjær and Anthony J. Watson in their influential volume on practices and perceptions of feasting, stressed that feasting was a form of world-making and community-building for the medieval elites. “To provide a feast was [...] sustaining the social order of the world; it was an act that confirmed one’s place in society, whether as a lord sustaining one’s retainers and neighbours, or as a loyal vassal hosting one’s king”.¹ Feasting also mattered because it directly related to the material sustenance of the elite’s lifestyle. As Brian Hayden adds, “feasting is [...] one of the most powerful cross-cultural explanatory concepts for understanding an entire range of cultural processes and dynamics ranging from the generation and transformation of surpluses to the emergence of social and political inequalities, to the creation of prestige technologies [...], and to the underwriting of elites in complex societies”.² These and similar insights from anthropology and archaeology have fuelled medievalists’ sustained interest in feasting and food consumption and the central role of feasts in elites’ language of power and status.³ Additionally, in material terms, before the introduction of bureaucracy and efficient tax systems, the political economy of feasting (which is intimately related to the question of itinerant kingship)⁴

¹ Lars Kjær and Anthony J. Watson, ‘Feasts and Gifts: Sharing Food in the Middle Ages’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 37 (2011), 1–5, here at 3.

² Brian Hayden, ‘Fabulous Feasts: A Prolegomenon to the Importance of Feasting’, in Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (eds), *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power* (Washington, 2001), 23–64, here at 24.

³ C.M. Woolgar, ‘Food and the Middle Ages’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 36 (2010), 1–19; Lars Kjær and Anthony J. Watson (eds), *Feasts and Gifts of Food in Medieval Europe. Ritualised Constructions of Hierarchy, Identity and Community*, special issue of the *Journal of Medieval History*, 37 (2011).

⁴ Due to space constraints, however, we do not address this problem explicitly. Still fundamental: Carlrichard Brühl, *Fodrum, gistum, servitium regis: Studien zu den*

was one of the primary means through which the elites directed material resources their way and put them into circulation through political generosity to build their power base.⁵

Feasting mattered for the elites' political capital and moral economy, too. On the one hand, "throughout the medieval period feasting seems to have been perched at the intersection of ideas about authority, hierarchy and commensality, pious charity, and worldly splendor".⁶ In that sense, feasting accentuated and reiterated the issues of how elites were to demonstrate that they deserved to rule. Feast halls were hence both the tools of elevation and the arena where the dominant saw "their positions transformed from purely factual power relations into a cosmos of acquired rights", "to know that they are thus sanctified", which they deserved in comparison with others.⁷ On the other hand, these efforts ran the risk of being seen as vainglorious or wasteful and thus as unrecognised by others.⁸ As a language of power, feasting had certain material, social, and moral limits, which begs the question: where were these limits for the two political cultures under study?

To peripheral elites, we contend, feasting mattered in a particular way, however. During the High Middle Ages, both East Central European and Scandinavian elites were being pulled into the gravitational sphere of European culture.⁹ Yet no matter how much power or raw wealth

wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen des Königtums im Frankenreich und in den fränkischen Nachfolgestaaten Deutschland, Frankreich und Italien vom 6. bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts, i–ii (Cologne, 1968).

⁵ Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London, 2017), 168–213; Bjørn Poulsen, Helle Vogt, and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (eds), *Nordic Elites in Transformation, c. 1050–1250*, i: *Material Resources* (New York, 2019); Björn Weiler, *Paths to Kingship in Medieval Latin Europe, c. 950–1200* (Cambridge, 2021), 32–6.

⁶ Kjær and Watson, 'Feasts and Gifts', 3; Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (eds), *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power* (Washington, 2001).

⁷ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. by Hans Gerth, C. Wright Mills (New York, 1946), 157, 271.

⁸ Timothy Reuter, *Medieval Politics & Modern Mentalities*, ed. by Janet L. Nelson (Cambridge, 2006), 113; Lars Kjær, 'Glory and Legitimation in the Aristocratic Hall', in Wojtek Jezierski, Kim Esmark, Hans Jacob Orning, and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (eds), *Nordic Elites in Transformation, c. 1050–1250*, iii: *Legitimacy and Glory* (New York, 2021), 154–74.

⁹ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton, 1993); Jonathan Shepard, 'Networks', *Supplement 13: The Global*

they accumulated, self-elevation was not enough.¹⁰ To fully enter the European ‘cosmos of acquired rights’ (recognition, royal titles, etc.) and other forms of symbolic capital that the centres dispensed, these peripheral elites needed to display how cultured they were. Feasting on the “international stage”, a form of ceremonial labour involving both the peripheral and central elites, was a way of demonstrating the former’s entitlement and receiving the latter’s sanctifying recognition.¹¹ The question is, which central elites were the target audience for such peripheral festive projections, and how was this accomplished?

This article comparatively explores elite feasts in Poland and Norway as languages of power and legitimisation by focusing on the political and moral economy of feasting and their use as a means of propaganda and recognition. Elite feasts are considered from the intersection of two vantage points: as a structural means of organising elite relations at the local level and as a phenomenon that shaped – and was shaped by – these peripheries’ relations with different European centres.

ELITE FEASTING BETWEEN ANTHROPOLOGY AND COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY

As the evidence collected here demonstrates, feasting occupies an important place in both Old Norse and Polish historiography and political cultures. It seems, however, that the roles feasting played for political legitimisation in each context accentuated very different aspects of elite economy, politics, and ideology. As a consequence, scholars have studied these feasting cultures from opposing vantages, and in their approach to the problem have taken inspiration from other disciplines: political and legal anthropology¹² in Norway and

Middle Ages, ed. by Catherine Holmes, Naomi Standen, *Past & Present*, 238 (2018), 116–57, at 120–31.

¹⁰ Kevin J. Wanner, ‘Kings, Gods, Poets, and Priests: Varieties and Transformations of Circuits of Charismatic Legitimation in Norway’, in Wojtek Jezierski, Kim Esmark, Hans Jacob Orning, and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (eds), *Nordic Elites in Transformation*, iii (New York, 2021), 83–104, at 89–91.

¹¹ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual. Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York, 1967), 84–5; Ármann Jakobsson, ‘Image is Everything: The *Morkinskinna* Account of King Sigurðr of Norway’s Journey to the Holy Land’, *Parergon*, 30 (2013), 121–40, at 121–5.

¹² Hans Jacob Orning, ‘Norsk middelalder i et antropologisk perspektiv. Svar til Knut Helle’, *Historisk tidsskrift* (N), 89 (2010), 249–62.

comparative mythology in Poland. Due to space constraints, the previous results are summarised here, whereas concrete findings by previous scholars are perused throughout the article.

Hanne Monclair, Hans Jacob Orning, and Viðar Pálsson recently published the most comprehensive studies of Norse elites' feasting as their language of power, communication, and form of governance.¹³ They approached descriptions of feasting in the sagas as fairly reliable information about how the elites' power relations were organised through such social occasions and how these social events enabled the elites to gain access to material resources and demonstrate their deservedness to rule. Their results produced three major findings. First, next to *thing*-meetings, feasts were the most important arena in which both the secular and clerical *potentes* demonstrated, compared, and adjusted their relative standings through displays of wealth, gift-giving, and redistribution. The sheer amount of attention paid by the saga authors to feasting and the insight they provided into its dynamics exceeds anything found in any other European political culture from that period, which suggests feasting had a unique role as a means of and an arena for political communication. Second, though feasts remained one of the crucial engines for demonstrating elite legitimation, how they functioned and what they represented did slowly evolve. Major societal and religious transformations, such as the shift from the Old Norse religion to Christianity, were accommodated by and implemented through changes in feasting and their offertory or sacrificial character.¹⁴ The same applied to the shift from horizontal to more hierarchical forms of kingship and the introduction of courtly culture: both processes were incorporated by feasting

¹³ Hanne Monclair, *Lederskapsideologi på Island i det trettende århundret: en analyse av gavegivning, gjestebud og lederfremtoning i islandsk sagamateriale* (Oslo, 2003), 143–205; Hans Jacob Orning, 'Festive Governance: Feasts as Rituals of Power', in Wojtek Jezierski, Lars Hermanson, Hans Jacob Orning, and Thomas Småberg (eds), *Rituals, Performatives, and Political Order in Northern Europe, c. 650–1350* (Turnhout, 2015), 175–208; Viðar Pálsson, *Language of Power: Feasting and Gift-Giving in Medieval Iceland and Its Sagas* (Ithaca, NY, 2016).

¹⁴ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Håkon den gode og guderne. Nogle bemærkninger om religion og centralmagt i det tiende århundrede – og om religionshistorie og kildekritik', in Peder Mortensen and Birgit M. Rasmussen (eds), *Høvdingesamfund og Kongemagt. Fra Stamme til Stat i Danmark* (Aarhus, 1991), ii, 235–44; Orning, 'Festive Governance', 180–3.

and transformed it. Third, the Norse elites' feasting and hospitality were highly ambiguous affairs. Though, in functionalistic terms, they were arranged to foster conviviality and unity, feasts frequently featured agonistic conduct. This was particularly the case when the members of the elite were competing for power, and their deliberate demonstrative actions sought to influence others' interpretations, epitomised in the practice of *mannjafnaðr* (a comparison of men) in which two or more noblemen competed to boast about their wealth or personal qualities.¹⁵ A great deal of antagonistic behaviour and killings also occurred at Norse feasts (when they might be used as opportunities to eliminate political opponents). This overrepresentation of violence at the expense of unity at feasts has been attributed to the saga authors' penchant for conflict as a storytelling device. It has also been related to the high levels of violence during the Civil War period in Norway (1130–1240). It did not help either that the Norse feasts were renowned for heavy drinking, which famously led King Sverre Sigurdsson (r. 1177/1184–1202) to compose a speech against drunkenness to moderate his elites' mores.¹⁶ Crucially, for comparative purposes, the violent and agonistic character of feasting in Norway sticks out against the nature feasting in other political cultures in the rest of Scandinavia and continental Europe.¹⁷

The scholarship on the Polish elites' feasts has mostly focused on how such practices expressed the ideology of rulership, chiefly the connection to prosperity and the dynastic myths of the Piasts. Czesław Deptuła and Jacek Banaszekiewicz, in particular, have analysed this myth-making by studying the literary motifs and Biblical tropes and through the use of the Dumézilian comparative method of tri-functional mythology, respectively.¹⁸ These different approaches that

¹⁵ Orning, 'Festive Governance', 192.

¹⁶ *Sverris saga*, ed. by Þorleifur Hauksson (Reykjavik, 2007) (hereinafter: SVS), chap. 104, pp. 159–61; chap. 181, p. 280.

¹⁷ Wojtek Jezierski, Lars Hermanson, Hans Jacob Orning, and Thomas Småberg (eds), *Rituals, Performatives, and Political Order in Northern Europe, c. 650–1350* (Turnhout, 2015); Kasper H. Andersen and Stefan Pajung (eds), *Drikkekultur i middelalderen* (Aarhus, 2014).

¹⁸ Jacek Banaszekiewicz, *Podanie o Piaście i Popielu. Studium porównawcze nad wczesno-średniowiecznymi tradycjami dynastycznymi* (Warszawa, 2010); Czesław Deptuła, *Galla Anonima mit genezy Polski: Studium z historiozofii i hermeneutyki symboli dziejopisarstwa średniowiecznego* (Lublin, 2000).

largely ignore the political economy of feasting are partially explainable by the character of the Polish sources, written exclusively in Latin by erudite clerical authors and which hardly lend themselves to an ethnographic reading like the sagas. It has also been stressed that elite feasts in Poland were strongly associated with peace and unity; their descriptions barely feature any conflicts, treachery, or intoxication.¹⁹ Importantly, for comparative purposes, with such strong insistence on peaceful feasts and prosperity as cornerstones of dynastic power and political culture, the Polish evidence in part stands out against the Central-European background (particularly Bohemia, where violence at feasts can be found), in which Poland is usually studied, although we should acknowledge that there are certain similarities with the dynastic myths of the Přemyslids.²⁰

COMPARATIVE METHOD AND SOURCES

As this overview shows, our insights into the practices and beliefs related to feasting in Norway and Poland are uneven and patchy due to the disparities in evidence and distinct research traditions. It seems we are dealing with two political cultures for which feasting was one central means of elite legitimation, but for very different reasons and both of which appear as outliers in their respective peripheral contexts. Given the tendency to limit comparative studies of Polish and Norse elites to their East Central European or Scandinavian settings, an impression emerges that the way these two examples of elite feasting relate to political legitimation are so idiosyncratic that they are incommensurable.

This is where the comparative approach comes into play to cast light from one periphery, from one set of evidence, and from one research tradition to the other to help us judge how idiomatic these cases really

¹⁹ Jacek Banaszkiewicz, 'Trzy razy uczta', in Stefan K. Kuczyński (ed.), *Społeczeństwo Polski średniowiecznej*, v (Warszawa, 1992), 95–108; Gerd Althoff, 'Der frieden-, bündnis-, und gemeinschaftstiftende Charakter des Mahles im früheren Mittelalter', in Irmgard Bitsch, Trude Ehlert, and Xenja von Ertzdorff (eds), *Essen und Trinken in Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Sigmaringen, 1990), 13–25.

²⁰ Banaszkiewicz, *Podanie o Piascie i Popielu*, 66–76; Martin Wihoda, *První česká království* (Prague, 2015), 67–75; Dušan Treštík, 'Mír a dobrý rok: Státní ideologie raného přemyslovského státu mezi křesťanstvím a "pohanstvím"', *Folia Historica Bohemica*, 12 (1988), 23–45.

are. Also, more generally, a comparison of the shared and distinct features of these two ostensibly outlier examples, which goes beyond treating them simply as the results of a common genetic descent, as literary motifs, or as universal religious archetypes, offers a heuristic opportunity to understand the general structural problems of how elite legitimation was demonstrated through feasting as well as the specific peripheral challenges and vicissitudes of those phenomena during the period of Europeanization.²¹ In terms of the comparative methodology, we thus approach elite feasting as Carlo Ginzburg's spyholes [*spie*] "through which we could look to pinpoint elements of a social reality".²² The trick is how to drill holes through partitions separating two such geographically and culturally distant cases and dissimilar sets of evidence.

To ensure a systemic comparison – and due to space constraints – we focus on how three aspects of elite legitimacy expressed through feasting were presented in contemporary sources, which by no means exhausts the topic. First, we study the question of the supernatural, cosmic charisma of leaders and ruling dynasties demonstrated through their ability to provide economic prosperity for their people and followers. Second, we assess how the entitlement and capacity of elites to extract material resources, mainly food, from the rest of the elites and subjects and how this redistribution was perceived. The third section explores how high-status feasts with foreign elites helped the peripheral elites gain international recognition.

The primary sources used for this comparison are historiographical works penned in each polity during the High Middle Ages. We study historiography because these are the only sources in which any information about the forms and ideas of elite feasting is found in both cases, before scanty evidence of specific obligations or regulations concerning hospitality surfaces in diplomas in the late thirteenth century. For the Polish case, we use the *Gesta Principum Polonorum*, written between 1113 and 1116 in the milieu of the Polish episcopate and the court

²¹ Bruce Lincoln, *Apples and Oranges: Explorations In, On, and With Comparison* (Chicago, 2018), 25–7, 40–1, 109, 153.

²² Chris Wickham, 'Problems in Doing Comparative History', in Patricia Skinner (ed.), *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History: The Legacy of Timothy Reuter* (Turnhout, 2009), 5–28, at 12; Carlo Ginzburg, 'Clues: Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes', *History Workshop*, 9 (1980), 5–36, at 27–8.

of Duke Bolesław III Wrymouth (Krzywousty; r. 1102–1138), whom the author made the main protagonist of the chronicle. The chronicler is called Gallus Anonymous due to his possible origin in France.²³ For the later period, we use the *Chronica Polonorum*, written c. 1190–1208 by Bishop Vincent Kadłubek (Master Vincentius) of Kraków (r. 1208–1218).²⁴ These texts are supplemented with other materials where possible.

To understand Old Norse prehistory and early history, we use the thirteenth-century kings' sagas,²⁵ mostly Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and the anonymous *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna*, whose contents partially overlap with Snorri's text.²⁶ For the historical situation of the thirteenth century, we utilise the contemporary king saga, *The Saga of King Hakon Hakonsson*, by Snorri's nephew and, like him, an Icelandic chieftain, Sturla Thordarson.²⁷ Here, too, we expand the evidence where possible, for instance, with *The Saga of King Sverrir* mentioned above. The twelfth-century so-called synoptics (*Ágrip*, Theodoricus Monachus's *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, and the anonymous *Historia Norvegiae*), which would seem like an earlier and more comparable source material for the Polish chronicles, considering that most of them were written by clerical authors in Latin, are not used here. This is because they do not contain any descriptions of feasts, and they reveal very little about the practical

²³ Gallus Anonymous, *Gesta principum Polonorum/The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*, ed. and trans. Paul W. Knoll, Frank Schaer (Budapest, 2003) (hereinafter: Gallus, *GPP*).

²⁴ Vincentius, *Chronica Polonorum*, ed. by Marian Plezia, Monumenta Poloniae Historica, nova series, 11 (Kraków, 1994) (hereinafter: Vincentius, *CP*).

²⁵ Carl Phelpstead, *An Introduction to the Sagas of Icelanders* (Gainesville, 2020), 7–9.

²⁶ Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavik, 1941), i–iii (hereinafter: *HSK*, preceded by a specific saga title and volume), translation from: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, 2011–2015), i–iii; *Morkinskinna*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson (Reykjavik, 2011), i–ii (hereinafter: *MSK*), translation from: *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)*, trans. Theodore M. Andersson, Kari Ellen Gade (Ithaca, NY, 2000); *Fagrskinna*, in *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum: Nóregs konunga tal*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson (Reykjavik, 1985) (hereinafter: *FSK*), translation from: *Fagrskinna. A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, trans. Alison Finlay (Leiden, 2003).

²⁷ *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, ed. by Þorleifur Hauksson, Sverrir Jakobsson, and Tor Ulset (Reykjavik, 2013), i–ii (hereinafter: *HSH*).

aspects of the lifestyle of the elites. We address this silence in relation to the Polish material below.

To ensure a consistent comparison we study descriptions of feasts in both historiographical corpora mainly as relics or artefacts [*Überrest*] of the authors' and elites' ideas and less as historical accounts [*Berichte*] of what actually happened. It is evident that the sources on both sides operate predominantly with fictitious, sometimes fantastic, depictions of feasts and their political economy. But even when events and dialogues are written in a realistic tone, they likely fell victim to authorial bias and anachronisms due to the considerable historical distance. Fiction is not a problem but an opportunity, however. We explore beliefs, practices, and cultural facts rather than historical accuracies. In this endeavour, the question of how bias, misrepresentations, and fantasies structure – and are structured by – contemporaries' perceptions and beliefs is of particular interest.²⁸

PREHISTORY, PROSPERITY, AND DYNASTIC MYTHS

As already mentioned, the topic of the feast in the Polish tradition is dominated by the original legend of the Piasts, the first Polish ruling dynasty.²⁹ The narrative of the accession to the throne of the Piast rulers was written by an anonymous chronicler, the author of the first history of Poland – in his view, it is primarily the history of the dynasty. Gallus was a foreigner, and his knowledge of Poland's distant past was based on the local oral tradition, which he transformed into an appealing Latin narrative.

In the dynastic legend, the circumstances of two simultaneous feasts become the setting for events which explain why God chose the son of a ploughman, Piast, to become a prince. The story begins with the preparations of the previous prince of Gniezno, Popiel, for the feast on the occasion of his sons' ceremonial hair-cutting, a kind of initiation of boys into adulthood. Many nobles and friends of Popiel were invited to the ceremony. It also happened, by the will of God, that

²⁸ William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, 1990), 45–51; Orning, 'Festive Governance', 178–80; Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence*, 34–40.

²⁹ Przemysław Wiszewski, *Domus Boleszlai. Values and Social Identity in Dynastic Traditions of Medieval Poland (c. 966–1138)*, trans. Paul Barford (Leiden, 2010), 157–81.

two mysterious wanderers stood at the gates of the capital. They were however unkindly chased away and instead went to the ploughman Piast and his wife Rzepka, the dynastic protoplasts. The poor couple received them hospitably and served them beer and pork prepared for a modest meal on the occasion of their son's hair-cutting ceremony, which occurred simultaneously with the ceremony in the ducal castle. When the concurrent feasts began, the duke's grand, sumptuous one and the ploughman's modest, poor one, suddenly Popiel's guests found their dishes empty while in Piast's hut a miraculous multiplication of beer and meat able to feed everyone occurred. This miracle, the wanderers prophesied, would give future glory and power to the descendants of Piast and Rzepka. Then they cut their son's hair, naming him Siemowit. Finally, the prince and all his guests were invited and came to the poor ploughman's hut, becoming both witnesses and recipients of the miracle of the multiplication of food.³⁰ Later, when Siemowit grew up, he was made prince of Gniezno by God's grace. It was also God who banished Popiel and his offspring from the kingdom. In exile, Popiel was persecuted by supernaturally bloodthirsty mice who eventually devoured him.³¹

At its core, this legend of a miraculous power shift was meant to legitimise the rule of the Piasts, which led some scholars to naïvely interpret it as a vestige of an actual *coup d'état* that occurred in the early Polish polity.³² Yet, it is clear that what is at stake in this feast is a political myth. Piast, a poor ploughman, is rewarded by God for his hospitality with a miracle mediated by mysterious wanderers. The multiplication of beer and pork takes place during a feast accompanying the hair-cutting ceremony of his son, Siemowit, which becomes an omen of his future fortunes and Piast's own elevation to the throne. In both etymological terms and seen through the lens of trifunctional comparative mythology, Piast's and Siemowit's names and functions have been interpreted as the fertile one, the one who

³⁰ Czesław Deptuła, 'Mit monarchy – dawcy żywności w Polsce średniowiecznej. Na przykładzie podania o Piaście', *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL*, 3 (1975), 41–56.

³¹ Gallus, *GPP*, book I, chap. 1–4, 16–27.

³² Przemysław Urbańczyk, "'Zamach stanu" w tradycji piastowskiej Anonima Galla', in Arkadiusz Sołtysiak (ed.), *Zamach stanu w dawnych społecznościach* (Warszawa, 2004), 219–26; Przemysław Urbańczyk, *Trudne początki Polski* (Wrocław, 2008), 181; Paweł Żmudzki, 'Jakiego „Początku” Polski potrzebują badacze?', *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, 53 (2009), 19–23.

feeds (the community), and the one who organises and makes the polity glorious by expanding it through military achievements, respectively.³³ Similar explanations were also given for Piast's great-grandson's name Siemomysł (the one who thinks/cares about the kin/land), whom the *Gesta* presents as the father of the first historical and Christian Polish Duke, Mieszko I (d. 992).³⁴ Both in Gallus's and in his informants' conviction, the semi-sacral attributes of Piast and Rzepka evermore shaped the qualities of all their descendants, thus legitimising the dynasty's rule. The chronicler thus provided examples of the exceptional hospitality of the Polish princes and kings, who are ever able to feed everyone during their feasts wondrously.

The tendency to see rulers as responsible for prosperity was perhaps even stronger in the Old Norse tradition. It repeatedly appears in what is the closest equivalent to Gallus's prehistoric myth-making, Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglingasaga*, which in the thirteenth century was similarly employed for dynastic legitimation.³⁵ For instance, it said that "Fjölfnir, son of Yngvi-Freyr, then ruled over the Svíar and the wealth of Uppsala. He was powerful, and blessed with prosperity and peace".³⁶ Mythical kings under whom harvests failed could be sacrificed to bring the affluence back.³⁷ This happened to another ruler, Dómaldi, in whose time "there was famine and hunger in Svíþjóð [Sweden]".³⁸ Eventually, when his subjects' attempts to placate the gods with sacrifices failed, the king's life was on the line. They concluded that "Dómaldi, must be the cause of the famine, and moreover, that they should sacrifice him for their prosperity, and [...] kill him and redden the altars with his blood".³⁹ The sacral aspects of kingship applied both to historical

³³ Banaszkiewicz, *Podanie o Piaście i Popielu*, 60–125.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Claus Krag, *Ynglingatal og Ynglingesaga: En studie i historiske kilder* (Oslo, 1991), 205–8, 221–6; more generally: Björn Weiler, "Tales of First Kings and the Culture of Kingship in the West, ca. 1050 – ca. 1200", *Viator*, 46 (2015), 101–27; see also Ben Allport's and Rafał Rutkowski's contribution in this special issue.

³⁶ 'Ynglinga saga', in *HSK*, i, chap. 11, 25: "Fjölfnir, sonr Yngvifreys, réð þá fyrir Svíum ok Uppsalaauð. Hann var ríkr ok ársæll ok friðsæll", trans. Finlay, Faulkes, i, 15.

³⁷ *FSK*, Appendix 2, 365–6.

³⁸ 'Ynglinga saga', in *HSK*, i, chap. 15, 31: "Á hans dögum gerðisk í Svíþjóð sultr ok seyra", trans. Finlay, Faulkes, i, 18.

³⁹ 'Ynglingasaga', in *HSK*, i, chap. 15, 31–2: "Þá áttu höfðingjar ráðagörð sína, ok kom þat ásamt með þeim, at hallærit myndi standa af Dómalda, konungi þeira, ok þat með, at þeir skyldi honum blóta til árs sér ok veita honum atgöngu ok drepa

rulers and those contemporary with the saga author. The harvests were good under Olaf I Tryggvason and Olaf III Peaceful (Kyrre),⁴⁰ and in his propagandistic *Saga of King Hakon Hakonsson* Sturla claimed that the year 1217, when his patron, King Hakon IV, was elected king, was so prosperous that fruit trees bore fruit twice and the wild birds laid eggs twice as well.⁴¹ The normative mid-thirteenth-century *King's mirror* (*Konungs skuggsiá*), which was written at Hakon's court, also directly linked and equated bad rulership and competing claims to kingship with famine in nature and the dearth of food in the land.⁴² Ruler ideals in Norway had a very long shelf life, it seems.

It is against this background we should consider the episode from the *Saga of Halfdan the Black* from *Heimskringla*, which features an astonishingly close parallel to Gallus's myth. It tells the story of Harald the Fairhair's ascension to kingship, which supposedly occurred in the late ninth century. Harald's father, Halfdan the Black, celebrated the Yule feast in Hadaland (north of Oslo) when suddenly "all the food disappeared from the tables and all the ale".⁴³ His guests vacated the hall, and the old king, seeking an explanation for his misfortune, began to torture a certain Sámi. Both the Sámi and Harald escaped and spent the rest of the winter at the farm of a powerful nobleman, who hosted them at a series of great feasts. When spring came, he revealed to his guests that the provisions were miraculously transferred from King Halfdan's table to his own and that with the old king gone, Harald could take over the rule:

An amazingly damaging loss for himself your father made out of it when I took some food away from him last winter, but I will compensate you for it with joyful news. Your father is now dead, and you must go home.

hann ok rjóða stalla með blóði hans, ok svá gerðu þeir", trans. Finlay, Faulkes, i, 18; David Graeber, Marshall Sahlins, *On Kings* (Chicago, 2017), 68, 403–5.

⁴⁰ Oddr Snorrason, *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*, trans. Theodore M. Andersson (Ithaca, NY, 2003), chap. 63, 113; MSK, ii, chap. 57, 7, 10, trans. Andersson, 280–1.

⁴¹ HSH, i, chap. 28, 203; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'The Appearance and Personal Abilities of goðar, jarlar, and konungar: Iceland, Orkney and Norway', in Beverly Ballin Smith, Simon Taylor, Gareth Williams (eds), *West over Sea. Studies in Scandinavian Sea-Borne Expansion and Settlement Before 1300* (Leiden, 2007), 95–109, here at 103–4.

⁴² Sverre Bagge, *The Political Thought of The King's Mirror* (Odense, 1987), 49–51, 180–1.

⁴³ 'Hálfðanar saga svarta', in HSK, i, chap. 8, 91–2: "at þar hvarf vist öll af borðum ok allt mungát", trans. Finlay, Faulkes, i, 52.

You will then get all the realm that he has ruled, and in addition you will gain all Norway.⁴⁴

Although the transfer of food occurs here not by celestial intervention as much as by magic (alluded to by the presence of the Sámi person), prosperity and the right to rulership were tightly connected in the Old Norse tradition, too.

Saga of Halfdan the Black serves as a bridge between Snorri's 'new prehistory' of the *Ynglingasaga* and the *Heimskringla*'s historical accounts.⁴⁵ In Poland, too, Gallus's freshly invented myth fed into history. The transition between these epochs is mediated by another feast, which Siemomysł prepared for his seven-year-old son, Mieszko I. Born blind the boy remained hidden from the feast participants, as the father was ashamed of his heir's disability. As the feast proceeded, the news spread that little Mieszko regained his sight. His mother brought the boy to the feast, and he could recognise his parents and dignitaries for the first time. Siemomysł's advisors said that the miracle signalled future victories of Duke Mieszko I, who would subdue the surrounding peoples.⁴⁶ In the *Gesta*, however, it is not Mieszko but his son Bolesław I the Brave (Chrobry; r. 992–1025), who is presented as the ideal monarch, ever able to host all his subjects and provide prosperity to them: "His table was maintained in such magnificent array that every non-festal day there were forty main courses laid out (not counting the minor ones)".⁴⁷ Gallus saw Bolesław I's *largitas et magnitas mense* as a perpetuation of the transfer of prosperity to Piast and the same magnanimity continued to his own times as demonstrated by his patron, Duke Bolesław III.⁴⁸ The myth and promise of prosperity were perpetual because they became inheritable between individual

⁴⁴ *Hálfðanar saga svarta'*, in *HSK*, i, chap. 8, 92: "Furðu mikit torrek lætr faðir þinn sér at, er ek tók vist nokkura frá honum í vetr, en ek mun þér þat launa með feginsögu. Faðir þinn er nú dauðr, ok skaltu heim fara. Muntu þá fá ríki þat allt, er hann hefir átt, ok þar með skaltu eignask allan Nóreg", trans. Finlay, Faulkes, i, 63.

⁴⁵ Bruce Lincoln, *Between History and Myth: Stories of Harald Fairhair and the Founding of the State* (Chicago, 2014). For Theodoricus Monachus Norwegian dynastic history similarly begins with Harald Fairhair: Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium/An Account of the ancient history of the Norwegian kings*, trans. David McDougall and Ian McDougall (London, 1998), chap. 1, 5.

⁴⁶ Gallus, *GPP*, book I, chap. 4, 26–7.

⁴⁷ Gallus Anonymous, *Gesta*, book I, chap. 14, 62–3.

⁴⁸ Deptuła, 'Mit monarchy – dawcy żywności', 41–56.

members as the source of their symbolic capital. Prosperity thus became a longitudinal principle of the Piasts' dynastic continuity – a stable quasi-office that continued despite the titular shifts (between kings and dukes) of individual incumbents.⁴⁹

By comparison, in Halfdan's demise the food and beer were not transferred to Harald's table, like between Popiel's and Piast's tables. They went to an unspecified nobleman, but this did not result in any allocation of power to him.⁵⁰ Even though both Polish and Old Norse authors operated with very similar ideals of the rulers' responsibility for prosperity, how this responsibility translated into dynastic principles seemed different. As shown by scholars, based on the sagas' authors' assessments of rulers in the short biographies summarising each regnal period and based on the use of the literary motif "prosperity and peace" [*ár ok friðr*] in relation to rulers in several Old Norse and Latin sources, it appears that the ability to ensure prosperity and good harvests was seen as the rulers' personal obligation. Such magic capital of ensuring good harvests was non-hereditary – it was a function of an individuals' cosmic charisma.⁵¹ For instance, Dómaldi's father, King Vísbur, had no trouble with providing prosperity. And after Dómaldi's demise, his son, King Dómar, enjoyed good seasons and peace, too.⁵² Regardless of whether the *ár ok friðr* motif stems from the Old Norse religion or is a local variation of a wider Christian theme, it seems that the conviction was that this ability did not necessarily transfer from one generation to another and could not become a dynastic principle. Each incumbent had to reproduce it anew. Tellingly, the sagas' authors did not use "prosperity and peace" as ruler-legitimising epithets for depicting the Civil War period in Norway (1130–1240), and the motif's use, as we saw, triumphantly returned with Hakon IV's rule.⁵³

Perhaps the best way to sum up the general differences between the sorts of political implications good harvests and prosperity had

⁴⁹ Graeber, Sahlins, *On Kings*, 139–41.

⁵⁰ Lincoln, *Between History and Myth*, 68–71.

⁵¹ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'The Appearance and Personal Abilities', 101–6; Simon Leboutteiller, 'Prosperity and Peace: Glorification of Rulers in Medieval Scandinavia', in Jezierski *et al.* (eds), *Nordic Elites in Transformation*, iii, 61–82; Marshall Sahlins, 'Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5 (1963), 285–303, at 289.

⁵² 'Ynglinga saga', in *HSK*, i, chap. 14, 30–1, chap. 16, 32–3.

⁵³ Leboutteiller, 'Prosperity and Peace', 67–70.

for the legitimacy of the Polish and Norwegian rulers is to make a parallel with Marshall Sahlins's distinction between Polynesian chiefs and Melanesian big-men, respectively:

The important comparative point is this: the qualities of command that had to reside in men in Melanesia, that had to be personally demonstrated in order to attract loyal followers, were in Polynesia socially assigned to office and rank. In Polynesia, people of high rank and office *ipso facto* were leaders, and by the same token the qualities of leadership were automatically lacking – theirs was not to question why – among the underlying population. Magical powers such as a Melanesian big-man might acquire to sustain his position, a Polynesian high chief inherited by divine descent as the *mana* which sanctified his rule and protected his person against the hands of the commonalty. The productive ability the big-man laboriously had to demonstrate was effortlessly given Polynesian chiefs as religious control over agricultural fertility, and upon the ceremonial implementation of it the rest of the people were conceived dependent.⁵⁴

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF FEASTING: EXTRACTION, REDISTRIBUTION, AND MAGIC

Sahlins's contrasting typology is also a fitting segue into our second topic: the questions of elite extraction and redistribution. The basic tenets of the political economy of the Polish and Norse elites during this period were generally quite similar. In broad terms, we are dealing with groups whose material base gradually went from being dominated by plundering expeditions and the control of a slave population working the land to reaping surpluses from landowners and tenant farmers.⁵⁵ Similarly, for both elites, a slow transformation occurred from the extraction of goods *in natura* towards monetary taxes in the thirteenth century.⁵⁶ For our purposes the actual economic and social differences

⁵⁴ Sahlins, 'Poor Man, Rich Man', 295.

⁵⁵ Poulsen, Vogt, and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (eds), *Nordic Elites in Transformation*, i, see particularly 'Introduction' and chap. 1, 2; Hans Jacob Orning, 'Den materielle basis for den norske kongemaktens utvikling i høymiddelalderen', *Historisk tidsskrif* (N), 84 (2006), 455–69; Karol Modzelewski, *Oranizacja gospodarstwa państwa piastowskiego, X–XIII wiek* (Poznań, 2000); Kåre Lunden, *Økonomi og samfunn: Synspunkt på økonomisk historie* (Oslo, 1972), 45–50.

⁵⁶ Christoph Kilger, 'Silver, Land, Towns, and the Elites: Social and Legal Aspects of Silver in Scandinavia c. 850–1150', in Poulsen, Vogt, and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson

between the two polities are negligible, however. We do not focus here on how resources for feasts – mainly food and gifts – were actually extracted or redistributed by the elites, but on how these practices were perceived. We will focus on whether and how they were considered to be lawful, deserved or not, and how they positioned rulers in each polity vis-à-vis the rest of elites and their subjects.

Let us start with Norway. The central term for elite feasting in Old Norse – *veizla*, pl. *veizlur* – which was used in the sagas makes it clear that feasts were inseparable from economic extraction. *Veizla* comes from *veita* meaning ‘to grant’, ‘to confer’, and is directly related to gift-giving and to the elites’ extraction of resources from their subjects.⁵⁷ Like elsewhere in Europe, all elite interaction, no just rulership, occurred face-to-face; this meant that large entourages were regularly crisscrossing the countryside. With every stop, the royal retinue drained resources from the peasants and local elites. These were either formally voluntary contributions, which would ideally be presented as gifts that hide the asymmetry between the parties, or in the worst case scenario, it would amount to the oppressive confiscation of food and drink for the *veizlur*.⁵⁸

The economic violence implied in the obligation of leaders to provide food for their followers – grounded both in the sacral ideals of leadership and in the practical exercise of power – is visible in the episode where St Olaf II Haraldsson (r. 1015–1028, d. 1030) sought acclamation in the region of Trondheim. At that time, Jarl Svein

(eds), *Nordic Elites in Transformation*, i, 130–60; Dariusz Adamczyk, ‘Money, Gift or Instrument of Power? Hybrid (Political) Economies in the post-Viking Age around the Baltic Sea’, in Dariusz Adamczyk and Beata Możejko (eds), *Monetisation and Commercialisation in the Baltic Sea, 1050–1450* (New York, 2021), 9–20; Frederik Rosén and Helle Vogt, ‘The War, and What Is Mine: Private Ownership in the Civil Wars in Norway and Denmark in the High Middle Ages’, in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Hans Jacob Orning (eds), *Medieval and Modern Civil Wars: A Comparative Perspective* (Leiden, 2021), 94–123.

⁵⁷ ‘Veizla’, in Johan Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske Sprog* (Oslo, 1883–96); ‘Veisle’, in Johannes Brøndsted, John Danstrup, and Lis Jacobsen (eds), *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder fra Vikingetid til Reformationstid* (København, 1956–1978); Viðar Pálsson, *Language of Power*, 64–67; Orning, ‘Festive Governance’, 196–200.

⁵⁸ Ágrip, in *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum: Nóregs konunga tal*, chap. 29, 28–29; Orning, ‘Festive Governance’, 196–7; Miller, *Bloodtaking*, 77–109; Rosén and Vogt, ‘The War, and What Is Mine’, 102–9, 112–3.

(d. 1015) and Einar Thambarskelfir (c. 980–1050) strongly opposed Olaf's ascension. To force Olaf's hand, they organised their Christmas feast at Stjórafalur, so that Olaf and his followers would have to take their Yule feast at neighbouring Steinker, where they could be easily ambushed. The cunning "King Óláfr, when he got to Steinker, took charge of the provisions for his entertainment ['veizluna'] and had them loaded onto his ships and got hold of some transport ships and took away with him both food and drink and set off as fast as he could and sailed all the way out to Niðaróss".⁵⁹

In his discussion of this episode, Viðar Pálsson points to the sense of *veizla* as not just a feast, but also the material, moveable provisions for such occasions and its contributive, tax-like character.⁶⁰ What this example also shows is the exploitative limit to how ruler legitimacy was produced through the forcible seizure of resources. There was no such thing as a free lunch in Norse elite society, as Orning stresses: someone always had to pay.⁶¹ It was, therefore, decisive how this payment was negotiated and framed, as a good deal of contributions and irregular levies presented as taxation were simply a form of legitimate plunder.⁶² Snorri included this exceptional case to prove St Olaf Haraldsson's shrewdness with which he not only fed his followers but also incapacitated and de-legitimised his competitors by building his local power base through feasting at their expense and without squeezing the local farmers: "King Óláfr took his ships up into the Nið. There, he straight away had things put to rights in the buildings that were standing, and had those that had collapsed rebuilt, and employed large numbers of men in this, and also had both the drink and the food carried up into the buildings, intending to stay there over Yule".⁶³

⁵⁹ 'Óláfs saga helga', in *HSK*, ii, chap. 42, 53: "Óláfr konungr, þá er hann kom til Steinkera, tók hann upp veizluna ok lét bera á skip sín ok aflaði til byrðinga ok hafði með sér bæði vist ok drykk ok bjósk í brot sem skyndiligast ok helt út allt til Niðaróss", trans. Finlay, Faulkes, ii, 32.

⁶⁰ Viðar Pálsson, *Language of Power*, 70–2.

⁶¹ Orning, 'Festive Governance', 197; Orning, 'Den materielle basis', 461–8.

⁶² Thomas Lindkvist, *Plundring, skatter och den feodala statens framväxt: Organisations tendenser i Sverige under övergången från vikingatid till tidig medeltid* (Uppsala, 1988); Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence*, 136–51.

⁶³ 'Óláfs saga helga', in *HSK*, ii, chap. 42, 54: "Óláfr konungr helt skipum sínum upp í Nið. Lét hann þar þegar búask um í þeim húsum, er uppi stóðu, en reisa upp

The Steinker episode and kings' sagas in general also show that *veizlur* were closely associated with accession acts. While the use of the assembly/*thing* as the crucial arena for the legitimisation of newly acclaimed rulers conforms with the continental and other peripheral evidence, the paramount importance of feasting in this regard seems to be a distinctly Nordic trait.⁶⁴ Here, a newly acclaimed king performatively instituted his rule by embarking on a tour of meetings with local elites and using *things* and feasts as occasions to re-wire the political networks and friendships from a previous generation and putting himself at their centre. The sagas implicitly suggest a ruler was entitled to embark on such an itinerary-cum-hospitality form of *Herrschaftsgastung* right after taking power. For example, when supposedly in 872 “Harald Fairhair had succeeded to his inheritance [...] from his father Hálfðan [the Black] he went on a progress of feasts [...] and took with him sixty retainers”.⁶⁵ The same applied to when the Danish ruler, Harald Bluetooth (Gormsson, d. 985/986) “established [Earl] Hákon [Sigurdsson, r. 975–995] in authority over the land and told him to accept feasts and administer the laws of the land and pay tribute from it to the king of the Danes”.⁶⁶ So, too, did Olaf Haraldsson when he was hailed king after his return from the Kiyvan Rus'.⁶⁷ Importantly, the Polish sources do not feature this practice of ascension-through-feasting at all, even if scholars hypothesise about a similar pattern in the Piast polity, which suggests the difference in historiographical traditions can explain this disparity.⁶⁸

bau, er niðr váru fallin, ok hafði þar at fjöldi manns, lét ok þá flytja upp í húsin bæði drykkinn ok vistina ok ætlaði þar at sitja um jólin”, trans. Finlay, Faulkes, ii, 33.

⁶⁴ Orning, ‘Festive Governance’, 196–7; Alexandra Sanmark, ‘At the Assembly: A Study of Ritual Space’, in Wojtek Jezierski, Lars Hermanson, Hans Jacob Orning, and Thomas Småberg (eds), *Rituals, Performatives, and Political Order in Northern Europe*, c. 650–1350 (Turnhout, 2015), 79–112; Piotr Boroń, *Słowiańskie wiece plemienne* (Katowice, 1999).

⁶⁵ FSK, chap. 3, 65: “Þá er Haraldr hafðitekiti fǫðurleifð sína [...], þá er hann tók veizlur ok eigi var ófriðr, hafði með sér sex tigu hirðmanna”, trans. Finlay, chap. 3, 47.

⁶⁶ FSK, chap. 16, 110: “ok setti hann Hákon til gæzlu landsins austr til Líðendisness ok gaf hónungu jarls nafn ok bað hann taka veizlur ok dæma landslög ok gjalda Danakonungi af skatta”, trans. Finlay, chap. 16, 85.

⁶⁷ ‘Óláfs saga helga’, in HSK, ii, chap. 73–4, 100–1, chap. 128, 219, chap. 162, 296; Orning, ‘Festive Governance’, 199.

⁶⁸ Banaszkiwicz, ‘Trzy razy uczta’, 95–108.

In Norway, such ascension feasts and generally all elite feasts served as occasions for the rulers and magnates to create and adjust closer ties with the communities that were politically dominated by local magnates and powerful farmers. In that sense, *veizlur* were as much about the seizure of resources as about their immediate redistribution, particularly during long winters when royal retinues remained stationary. As Viðar Pálsson stresses, economic extraction funnelled even through extended periods of feasting was not about the royals enriching themselves by carrying resources away from the affected regions. Instead, it was predominantly about community-building redistribution that was consumed locally, with the ruler acting like an above-mentioned Melanesian big man personally brokering relationships and gifts.⁶⁹ The surplus rulers reaped from feasting was symbolic and social, not material. This brings the political economy of feasting and gift-giving in Norway, particularly during the early period, close to Sahlins's notion of pooling, a mixture of *within* and *between* relations embedded in collective action organising "reciprocities under chiefly aegis".⁷⁰

The authors of the kings' sagas that focus on this early period are exceedingly forthright about the material aspects of the political economy of feasting and the drain of resources created by such a pooling. It suggests there were some limits to the scale of hospitality and feasts rulers were entitled to – limits beyond which they ran the risk of their subjects being disgruntled. For instance, when Olaf Haraldsson stayed in Raumaríki and "[...] the provisions did not last because of the large numbers, then he made the farmers in the area give contributions to lengthen the visits, when at times he found it necessary to stay on, but in some places, he stayed a shorter time than had been intended, and his travels turned out quicker up to the lake than had been arranged".⁷¹

⁶⁹ Viðar Pálsson, *Language of Power*, 95–6; Monclair, *Lederskapsideologi*, 65–74; Sahlins, 'Poor Man, Rich Man', 291–3.

⁷⁰ Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 169–71; Graeber, Sahlins, *On Kings*, 14–15; Rosén and Vogt, 'The War, and What Is Mine', 112–3.

⁷¹ 'Óláfs saga helga', in *HSK*, ii, chap. 74, 104: "En er veizlur endusk eigi fyrir fjölmennis sakir, þá lét hann þar bændr til leggja at auka veizlurnar, er honum þótti nauðsyn til bera at dveljask, en sums staðar dvalðisk hann skemr en ætlat var, ok varð ferð hans skjótari en á kveðit var upp til vatsins", trans. Finlay, Faulkes, ii, 66.

The burden created by the pooling of resources could easily become a point of contention, particularly when the retinue's size was considerable or when it suddenly increased. It has been suggested, for instance, that the strong opposition St Olaf faced from the famed five petty kings during his Christianisation of Opplanda had as much to do with the conversion as with the size of the entourage Olaf surrounded himself with to crush the pagan resistance in the first place. According to Snorri, Olaf's army amounted to 300 men, which might be an exaggeration, but even a host half this size would have depleted local resources fast.⁷² The above example from Raumaríki, where Olaf ordered his army to alternate the farms they stayed on, shows self-limiting facets of his feasting motivated by material and political considerations to avoid discontent.⁷³ Similarly, when in the 1060s or 1070s, Olaf III the Peaceful not only drastically expanded the lavishness of his feasting in Bergen but also doubled the size of his retinue to 120 men, which now included 60 retainers [*húskarlar*, housecarls]) and 60 'guests' [*gestir*, low-rank servants], upped from the standard 60 men his predecessors enjoyed, the farmers upon whom this burden had fallen confronted him. They inquired "why he had more attendants than the law provided for or than previous kings had had when he travelled round to banquets where the farmers had put them on for him".⁷⁴ To this, the king responded: "I would not be able to rule the kingdom any better, and I would not keep people more in awe of me than they were of my father, even if I had twice as many attendants as he had, but it is not just for the sake of imposing burdens on you or because I want to increase your expenses".⁷⁵

Both in principle and in typical circumstances, the level of extraction and burden were thus negotiable and materially limited, depending on a more or less explicit agreement between the ruler and the local

⁷² Orning, 'Festive Governance', 199.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ '*Óláfs saga Kyrra*', in *HSK*, iii, chap. 4, 207: "En er bændr spurðu konung þess, fyrir hví hann hefði meira lið en lög váru til eða fyrri konungar höfðu haft, þá er hann fór á veizlur, þar sem bændr gerðu fyrir honum", trans by Finlay, Faulkes, iii, 124; see also: *FSK*, chap. 79, 300–2.

⁷⁵ '*Óláfs saga Kyrra*', in *HSK*, iii, chap. 4, 207: "Eigi fæ ek betr stýrt ríkinu ok eigi er meiri ógn af mér en af fǫður mínum, þótt ek hafa hálfu fleira lið en hann hafði, en engi þynging gengr mér til þessa við yðr eða þat, at ek vilja þyngja kostum yðrum", trans. Finlay, Faulkes, iii, 125.

communities who supported him. Only in exceptional circumstances, as at Steinker, was the food transferred to a different political grouping, injected from the outside, so to speak. And, vice versa, for those communities or regions who refused to swear allegiance and to confer legitimacy to the rulers, the first way of showing this was to deny proper upkeep and hide the food, like the peasants in Østerdalen did to Sverre Sigurdsson during the Christmas of 1177.⁷⁶

While the Norse sources from that period expose the mechanics of the economic and extractive aspects of feasting and how the political labour that went into organising them shaped elite legitimacy, the Polish material reveals frustratingly little about these issues. The little it does mention is significant, however. Instead of presenting any realistic allocation of resources among the elite, it throws us back into the chroniclers' moralising political fables. If we were to believe Gallus, the Piasts had just two sources of income to redistribute among their followers: plunder and tributes which had been won outside their polity (like those Bolesław III had gained during his expeditions in Pomerania in the 1100s) and direct transfers from heaven. As Gallus's string of hyperbolic negations⁷⁷ about Bolesław I shows, the king had no need to extract or even ask for anything from his subjects, "for it was not for nought that God heaped on him his grace upon grace".⁷⁸ The author constantly stresses how unimposing Bolesław I's rule was. The above-mentioned plus forty courses daily procured on the king's tables were "all supplied not at other persons' expense, but at his own".⁷⁹ During festivals, his subjects specifically eulogised him for being "not the squanderer of other people's

⁷⁶ SVS, chap. 22, 37–8; Hans Jacob Orning and Frederik Rosén, 'Sverris Saga: A Manifesto for a New Political Order', in Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Hans Jacob Orning (eds), *Medieval and Modern Civil Wars: A Comparative Perspective* (Leiden, 2021), 62–93, here at 83–7; Rosén and Vogt, 'The War, and What Is Mine', 102–9.

⁷⁷ Kirill Postoutenko, 'Preliminary Typology of Comparative Utterances: A Tree and Some Binaries', in Angelika Epple, Walter Erhart, and Johannes Grave (eds), *Practices of Comparing: Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice* (Bielefeld, 2020), 39–86, here at 75–6.

⁷⁸ Gallus, *GPP*, book I, chap. 16, 66–7: "non enim in vacuum Deus illi gratiam super gratiam cumulavit".

⁷⁹ Gallus, *GPP*, book I, chap. 14, 62–3: "et nichil tamen de alienis, sed de propriis, in hiis omnibus expendebat".

money but the honest steward of the commonwealth”.⁸⁰ Bolesław demanded no hospitality “when he travelled by, no one on the road or at work would ever hide his sheep and cattle,” for “everywhere he had his stations and defined services [...] and stayed in cities and in castles”.⁸¹ He “did not treat his peasants like a lord and exact forced labour” either.⁸² Bolesław I’s reign and redistribution were an economic miracle – they essentially cost nothing.

These obsessive reassurances and idealisation of Bolesław I the Brave – a ruler who literally compared to no one and thus lent himself to become the moral-economic linchpin for his descendants and *nobiles*⁸³ – exposes the chronicler’s discomfort about elite extraction that is being obfuscated here. A century later, Kadłubek had fewer qualms about pointing out exploitation or unjust levies. His criticism targeted the nobles, not the rulers, however. Writing about the ascension of Duke Kazimierz II the Just (*Sprawiedliwy*; r. 1177–1194 as senior duke of Poland) in the 1170s, the chronicler praised him for effectively eradicating all taxes and labour services, again creating a vision of rulership whose economic base was shrouded in mystery: “Thus he breaks the fetters of servitude and the yoke of collectors, introduces tax reliefs; he not so much lightens the burden as completely eliminates it, orders rents and easements to be abolished”.⁸⁴

Kadłubek immediately contrasted this fiscal open-handedness with the wasteful, aggressive, potlatch-like behaviour of the Polish nobles. “These people had an ancient law, as if by a tradition established custom, that whenever a nobleman travelled with his retinue [*pompaticae*] he forcibly took chaff, hay, and straw from the poor”, which he would then give to his horses. Not even to feed them but to trample

⁸⁰ Gallus, *GPP*, book I, chap. 15, 64–5: “non aliene pecunie dissipator, sed honestus rei publice dispensator”.

⁸¹ Gallus, *GPP*, book I, chap. 12, 58–9: “Nec quisdam eo transuente viator vel operator boves vel oves abscondebant [...] ubique enim stationes suumque servitium determinatum habebat [...], sed in civitatibus et castris frequentibus habitabat”.

⁸² Gallus, *GPP*, book I, chap. 12, 58–9: “Suos quoque rusticos non ut dominus in agrariam coercebat”.

⁸³ Jacek Banaszekiewicz, ‘Giecz na Gallowej liście wielkich grodów Bolesława Chrobrego’, in *id.*, *W stronę rytuałów i Galla Anonima* (Kraków, 2018), 279–91.

⁸⁴ Vincentius, *CP*, book IV, chap. 8, 148: “Igitur servitutis loramenta dirumpit; exatoria iuga dissipat, tributa dissolvit; vectigala relaxat; onus non tam alleviat, quam penitus exonerat, anagrias ac perangrias exspirare iubet”.

upon them instead.⁸⁵ Such nobles acted against God's laws: they stole horses for corrody, squandered the foodstuffs of simple people [*pauperes*], and expropriated the goods and lands of the Church.⁸⁶ One could add that it was almost as if they purposely mocked Bolesław I's ideals. Fortunately, Kazimierz II, supported by the entire episcopate and by Pope Alexander III, put a stop to this behaviour by threatening the nobles with excommunication.⁸⁷

The background of this criticism of such a highly exploitative form of banal lordship are the *Statutes of Łęczyca* issued by Kazimierz II in 1180, quoted in the *Chronica*. The statutes were a set of privileges and immunities to the Church, which, among others, eradicated the *ius spoli*, which allowed princes and nobles to appropriate the goods of deceased bishops.⁸⁸ Setting aside the above fragment, which is Kadłubek's veiled critique against the policies of Mieszko III the Old (Stary; r. 1173–1177), Kazimierz II's predecessor as senior prince, such specific targeting of pompous, wasteful conduct is very suggestive. It attests to the intensified spread of courtly culture at the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, which demanded a more ostentatious and expensive lifestyle not just from the nobles but also from those who aspired to become knights as the ideal trickled down the social ladder.⁸⁹

The only Polish source from this period depicting feasts where the ruler feeds himself at the expense of the elite is the anonymous *Polish Chronicle* from the late 1280s, written in the milieu of the Silesian Cistercian monastery at Lubiąż. It presents a previously unknown reason why the Poles, after King Mieszko II died in 1034, exiled his widow and their only son, Kazimierz I. The queen, noticing the pagan

⁸⁵ Vincentius, *CP*, book IV, chap. 9, 148: "Fuit autem huic genti ex antique persolenne et quasi consuetudinis auctoritate approbatum, ut quisque potentum quorsumlibet pompaticè vergens, pauperum non tantum paleam, fenum, stipulam, sed annonam, horreis ac tuguriis perfectis, potestative diriperet, nec tam depascenda quam caballis percalcanda profunderet".

⁸⁶ Rosén and Vogt, 'The War, and What Is Mine', 100–2, 114–5.

⁸⁷ Vincentius, *CP*, book IV, chap. 9, 148–9.

⁸⁸ Nora Berend, Przemysław Urbańczyk, Przemysław Wiszewski, *Central Europe in the High Middle Ages: Bohemia, Hungary and Poland c. 900 – c. 1300* (Cambridge, 2013), 378–9, 390.

⁸⁹ Marcin R. Pauk, 'Lords and Peasants: Polish Society and Economy in Transition', in Dariusz von Güttner-Sporzyński (ed.), *Writing History in Medieval Poland: Bishop Vincentius of Cracow and the 'Chronica Polonorum'* (Turnhout, 2017), 243–66, here at 252–8.

customs of the Poles and believing that they did not show due respect to the king, shrewdly introduced a law which forced magnates from different provinces to host the king on feast days devoted to important saints and to celebrate, sing, and rejoice together. This obligation proved so onerous that the Poles expelled the queen and her son.⁹⁰ This invented story clearly shows the civilising role of feasting, which eradicates pagan customs, promotes the cult of saints, and introduces the institution of servitude to the king. Yet, this servitude is so burdensome that it leads to revolt.

The Polish and Norwegian evidence is obviously incompatible here. The spyholes show radically opposed images on each side, as if drilled from inside an elevator stuck between floors: superstructure here, base there. But this incompatibility is telling. It reveals the Polish elites' – or at least the chroniclers' – fantasies about redistribution and how it should be framed in the propaganda. Rulers were entitled to little if anything. All extraction seemed unwarranted. In contrast to the Norwegian examples, food consumption and gift-giving in the *Gesta* that occurs at Piasts' feasts are not the result of pooling or a community-building organisation of reciprocities.⁹¹ It is an effortless and magical redistribution from a cornucopia, from haves to have-nots. These asymmetric handouts and apparently free lunches, again, halo the charismatic royal or ducal centre from which prosperity emanates.⁹² It is a projection of a single centre of prosperity which no other elite members can compete or compare oneself with. Gallus's imaginary politics of Piasts' feasting and gift-giving thus matches Dietler's notion of patron-role feasts, a "formalized use of commensal hospitality to symbolically reiterate and legitimize institutionalized relations of unequal social power".⁹³

⁹⁰ *Chronica Polonorum/Kronika Polska*, ed. by Ludwik Ćwikliński, *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, 3 (Lwów, 1878), s.a. 1034, 619–20.

⁹¹ Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 170–1.

⁹² Clifford Geertz, 'Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power', in *id.*, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (London, 1993), 122–46; Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World* (Cambridge, 1995), 63–4.

⁹³ Michael Dietler, 'Theorizing the Feast: Rituals of Consumption, Commensal Politics, and Power in African Contexts', in Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (eds), *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power* (Washington, 2001), 65–114, here at 82–3; Monclair, *Lederskapsideologi*, 146–7.

This conclusion needs a qualification, though. As the examples from Kadłubek and the *Polish Chronicle* show, in Poland, too, rulers ran the risk of alienation from the rest of the elite and their subjects through forcible extraction and consumption.⁹⁴ Dietler calls this subcategory of patron-feasts diacritical, organised to “reify concepts of ranked differences in the status of social orders or classes” by means of the style and exclusivity of feasting, which became particularly acute with the advent of courtly culture.⁹⁵ Though Gallus’s chronicle bears obvious traces of courtly ideals and heroic epic, the author is at pains to prove that the Piasts, notwithstanding their God-given charisma and wealth, never lost contact with the simple people. This chief-tends-to-poor-men attitude⁹⁶ is already noticeable in the hyperboles above but is particularly evident in the example of a poor cleric, who sighed loudly while he marvelled at the public display of King Bolesław II’s (r. 1076–1079) wealth in Kraków, allegedly in the late 1070s. Hearing his plea over the loud crowd surrounding them, the king reacted immediately. He promised the cleric solace for his poverty and put his mantle on the cleric’s shoulders, loading him with neck-breaking amounts of gold and silver.⁹⁷ Bolesław III was similarly known for his unbridled munificence. In 1103, for eight days preceding his wedding, he freely handed out castles, villages, gold vessels, and cloaks, something he later repeated as an act of piety during his penitence for blinding his brother Zbigniew in 1111–12.⁹⁸

The extraction of resources for rulers’ feasts vanished from view in later Old Norse historiography, too, particularly in *The Saga of King Hakon Hakonsson*. This had as much to do with the propagandistic character of the saga as with how taxation in Norway had increasingly assumed monetary forms.⁹⁹ The saga’s author, Sturla, did sporadically connect tax collection and providing for Christmas or Easter feasts

⁹⁴ Lars Kjaer, ‘Glory and Legitimation in the Aristocratic Hall’, 155–62.

⁹⁵ Dietler, ‘Theorizing the Feast’, 85.

⁹⁶ Sahlins, ‘Poor Man, Rich Man’, 285–303.

⁹⁷ Gallus, *GPP*, book I, chap. 26, 94–5; Szymon Wiczorek, *Galla Anonima opowieść o królu Bolesławie i ubogim kleryku* (Rzeszów, 2020).

⁹⁸ Gallus, *GPP*, book II, chap. 23, 160–1, book III, chap. 25, 27–81; Dalewski, *Ritual and Politics*, 86–7, 116, 128–30.

⁹⁹ Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence*, 34–40; Orning, ‘Den materielle basis’, 461–68.

in Bergen or Oslo,¹⁰⁰ but normally where all this food came from and how Hakon IV could afford such lavish gift-giving and hospitality remained a mystery. In other words, the king looked more and more like Bolesław the Brave, and like the above-mentioned Polynesian chiefs, who no longer needed to personally obligate anyone to do this or deliver that.¹⁰¹ Instead, the means of production of prosperity seemed to get ever more opaque and physically removed from its conspicuous consumption.¹⁰² This mechanistic, automatic way of producing legitimating prosperity led to the emergence of a new type of socio-economic magic of the royal office that fused bureaucracy with charisma.¹⁰³ Further, as part of the introduction of courtly culture to Norway, noticeable particularly in the *King's Mirror*, the forms of feasting became more ceremonial, more diacritical, and, consequently, socially less inclusive. Such occasions were used by Hakon and his court to project a stricter hierarchy and to elevate the king's position, which helped to centralise royal power in general.¹⁰⁴ As feasts became more common and ever more spectacular and as redistribution assumed an even more asymmetric character, the siphoning off of resources was pushed backstage and mystified. In Sturla's saga, Hakon IV lived out Gallus's fantasy of a ruler's incomparability, as it were. A fantasy even less curbed by social or material considerations than he would ever have enjoyed in Poland.¹⁰⁵ In this new landscape,

¹⁰⁰ *HSH*, i, chap. 63, 231, chap. 104, 268.

¹⁰¹ Sahlins, 'Poor Man, Rich Man', 295–6: "Masters of their people and 'owners' in a titular sense of group resources, Polynesian chiefs had rights of call upon the labour and agricultural produce of households within their domains. Economic mobilisation did not depend on, as it necessarily had for Melanesian big-men, the *de novo* creation by the leader of personal loyalties and economic obligations. A chief need not stoop to obligate this man or that man, need not by a series of individual acts of generosity induce others to support him, for economic leverage over a group was the inherent chiefly due".

¹⁰² *HSH*, i, chap. 115, 277, chap. 121, 283, chap. 132, 293, ii: chap. 235, 64–5, chap. 285, 119, chap. 294, 126–7, chap. 297, 129, chap. 318, 154, chap. 323, 157–8.

¹⁰³ Richard Cole, 'Bureaucracy and Alienation: Some Case Studies from *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*', *Saga-Book*, 43 (2019), 5–36, here at 17–24.

¹⁰⁴ Bagge, *The Political Thought*; David Brégaïnt, 'Kings and Aristocratic Elites: Communicating Power and Status in Medieval Norway', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 46 (2021), 1–20.

¹⁰⁵ Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed. Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense, 1996).

“where the resources came from to keep the whole system working effectively was of secondary importance. A gentleman did not trouble himself about such things: he left them to servants and specialists”, as Timothy Reuter put it.¹⁰⁶

It seems that the elites in these two peripheral polities – or their encomiasts at least – reacted to the impulses from a courtly culture quite differently. In Gallus’s eyes, for the Piasts, nobody’s need was too little to attend to, and no one’s sigh was too faint. The dynasty enjoyed a hegemonic position through its prosperity, feasting, and largesse, but its representatives never became vainglorious or alienated. If we follow Kadłubek, the alienation through courtly culture did occur, but later, and it only affected nobles. Legitimation of rulers through self-aggrandising and hegemonic feasting emerged comparatively later in Norway, it seems. This, however, may just be the drag of the evidence rather than an actual difference. Generally, the visions of extraction and redistribution among the Norse elites were more complex and evidently evolved, which is observable thanks to the abundance of sources. In anachronistic terms, we could say that when it comes to extraction and redistribution the Norse material shows us the full spectrum of the political economy of feasting: its initial sacral idealisation, then its *Realpolitik* and negotiable nature in the service of community- and lordship-building, and its eventual bureaucratic re-enchantment which shrouded the economic extraction in mystery again. The Polish material, whose authors were on constant watch for the elites’ hubris, paints the political economy of the Piasts, particularly in the *Gesta*, as a form of magic absolutism with populist traits.

EXPORTING AND IMPORTING GLORY: FEASTS AS FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC PROPAGANDA

The last category of the politics of feasting employed for the sake of self-legitimation considered here concerns feasts that were used as impression management and a form of propaganda which targeted foreign but also domestic elites. Such feasts also had powerful, politically transformative effects regarding the status of peripheral elites or their institutions (e.g. establishing archepiscopal sees there). Our contention here is that particularly during the early period the Piasts

¹⁰⁶ Reuter, *Medieval Politics*, 454.

used feasts with the elites of the Empire primarily as a way to project their political legitimacy to the outside world. The Norwegian rulers, too – particularly Harald III Hardrada (r. 1046–1066) and Sigurd the Crusader (Jórsalafari, r. 1103–1130) – threw lavish feasts abroad to boost their international recognition, but they mainly used economic capital from abroad as a means of propaganda at home. Simply put: whereas Piasts exported glory to the centre, the Norwegian rulers imported it to the periphery for similar politically transformative purposes. This changed during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. With the consolidation of royal power in Norway and the incorporation of its elites into European politics, their international feasts organised at home became more grandiose and politically consequential.

The most famous feast in Gallus's chronicle is the one that Bolesław I held in Gniezno for Otto III (r. 996–1002) in 1000. The emperor came to Poland with a pilgrimage to the grave of his friend, St Adalbert (d. 997). Describing the ceremonial welcoming of Otto by Bolesław, the chronicler styled the Polish ruler as King Solomon receiving the Queen of Sheba. The Emperor, having noticed Bolesław's incredible wealth and magnificence, which far exceeded anything Otto had heard about Bolesław, crowned the Polish ruler as king by placing his imperial crown on Bolesław's head and giving him the holy lance of St Maurice, which contained a nail from the Holy Cross. In return, Bolesław bestowed on him the arm of St Adalbert. Then, as part of 'the three days of his consecration', the newly crowned king held a three-day feast worthy of the imperial majesty, the description of which, penned by Gallus, purposefully mixes the language of feasting with that of the liturgy.¹⁰⁷ After each day, in a potlatch-like fashion, Bolesław offered the emperor gold and silver dishes in which meals and drinks were served, and the hall was decorated with precious tablecloths and fabrics. The emperor's dignitaries and the imperial servants left Gniezno richly endowed, too. In this way, an exceptional friendship was established between Bolesław I, Otto III, and the whole Empire.¹⁰⁸

The political implications of the Gniezno summit – its role in conferring the royal title on Bolesław and the founding of the archepiscopal

¹⁰⁷ Gallus, *GPP*, book I, chap. 6, 38–9: "cum tribus sue coronacionis [vel: consecracionis] diebus convivium regaliter et imperialiter celebravit".

¹⁰⁸ Gallus, *GPP*, book I, chap. 6, 36–41; Monclair, *Lederskapsideologi*, 75–8.

see in Gniezno – are an intricate problem with a rich literature.¹⁰⁹ What is undeniable is that the summit, the exchange of sublime gifts, and the use of the feast as a platform for this symbolic exchange had an immediate impact amongst the European elites, which shows how deftly the little-known peripheral elite converted its crucial symbolic capital – St Adalbert’s corpse – into a projection of its own status outside and for networking with the centre for the sake of image management.¹¹⁰ Within a few years, the echoes of the summit and Bolesław’s hospitality were found in works by Bruno of Querfurt, Thietmar of Merseburg, Petrus Damiani, Ademar de Chabannes etc.¹¹¹ Within the domestic context, the summit and feast helped Bolesław I’s and his offspring’s hegemony over the rest of the Polish elite. The projection of symbolic capital through the Gniezno feast and the redistribution of gifts was aimed at those beyond Poland’s borders, but it was also converted into social capital at home.¹¹² Finally, through the stories of Gallus and Kadłubek as well as the story’s inclusion into the late thirteenth-century hagiographies of St Adalbert produced in Gniezno, the meeting was turned into an enduring myth which bolstered dynastic legitimacy and was further propagated through the cult of the polity’s patron saint.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Roman Michałowski, *The Gniezno Summit: The Religious Premises of the Founding of the Archbishopric of Gniezno*, trans. Anna Kijak (Leiden, 2016).

¹¹⁰ Gallus, *GPP*, book I, chap. 6, 36–9: “cuius gloriam et potentiam et divitas imperator considerans [...] quod imperator tanta munera pro miraculo reputavit.”; Banaszkiewicz, ‘Giecz na Gallowej liście’, 279–87.

¹¹¹ Knut Görich, ‘Otto III. öffnet das Karlsgrab in Aachen. Überlegungen zu Heiligenverehrung, Heiligspredung und Traditionsbildung’, in Gerd Althoff and Ernst Schubert (eds), *Herrschaftsrepräsentation im ottonischen Sachsen* (Sigmaringen, 1998), 381–430; Levi Roach, ‘Emperor Otto III and the End of Time’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 23 (2013), 75–102, at 92–93; Miłosz Sosnowski, ‘Bolesław Chrobry i Karol Wielki – Legitymizacja między kultem a imitacją’, *Historia Slavorum Occidentis*, 11 (2016), 122–148.

¹¹² Grischa Vercamer, ‘Der Akt von Gnesen – ein misslungenes Ritual oder höchste Machtdemonstration Bolesław I. Chrobry’s um 1000?’, in Aleksander Paroń, Sébastien Rossignol, Bartłomiej Sz. Szmoniewski and Grischa Vercamer (eds), *Potestas et communitas. Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zu Wesen und Darstellung von Herrschaftsverhältnissen im Mittelalter östlich der Elbe* (Wrocław, 2010), 89–110.

¹¹³ Vincentius, *CP*, book II, chap. 10, 39–40; Michałowski, *The Gniezno Summit*; Wojtek Jezierski, ‘St Adalbertus domesticus: Patterns of Missioning and Episcopal Power in Poland and Scandinavia in the Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries’, *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 119 (2019), 209–60, at 257; Weiler, *Paths to Kingship*, 80–4.

Historically, the Gniezno summit was a wondrous exception of the centre visiting the periphery, however. The next time such consequential feast organised by the Polish elites was attended by an emperor – Charles IV – and other prominent rulers was the summit in Kraków that called for an anti-Turkish crusade in September of 1364. In between, the Polish elites mostly imported social and symbolic capital directly from the Empire by attending the feasts and summits of the imperial elites to boost their own standing at home. For instance, in August of 1135, Emperor Lothair III (r. 1133–1137) invited Bolesław III to Merseburg, where the Polish duke served as sword-bearer [*lictor imperatoris*] for the emperor. The context of this meeting were the peace negotiations between Bolesław III and Duke Soběslav I of Bohemia (r. 1125–1140) and the latter’s Hungarian allies at which Lothair III acted as a mediator. The Bohemian elites and authors were quick to frame the honorary service rendered by the Polish duke as a token of his symbolic and political subordination to Lothair, though it seems the emperor ceremonially elevated the Piast duke to safeguard the independence of the Gniezno archbishopric, thus frustrating the ambitions of his Bohemian vassals, i.e. Bolesław III’s competitors.¹¹⁴ Throughout the High Middle Ages, a great deal of the symbolic capital of the peripheral elites in this region was mediated through and measured by the relations with the Empire.

By comparison, at the turn of the millennium, the Norwegian rulers did not need recognition from elites from the Empire or Western Europe to the same degree. The context of the international feasts involving rulers of other polities was mostly peripheral. For example, such was the case with the renowned feast in Konungahella (north of Gothenburg in present-day Sweden) in the summer of 1101 when Magnus III Barelegs of Norway (r. 1093–1103) met with Inge the Elder [Stenkilsson] of Sweden and Eric I the Good [Ejegod] of Denmark at which they allegedly recognised each other’s dominions agreeing that ‘each of them was to have the area of rule that their fathers had had previously’.¹¹⁵ There were other feasts which occasionally

¹¹⁴ Zbigniew Dalewski, ‘*Lictor imperatoris*. Kaiser Lothar III., Soběslav I. von Böhmen und Bolesław III. von Polen auf dem Hoftag in Merseburg im Jahre 1135’, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 50 (2001), 317–36.

¹¹⁵ ‘Magnúss saga berfœtts’, in *HSK*, iii, chap. 15, 228–9: “Skyldi hverr þeira hafa þat ríki, sem áðr höfðu haft feðr þeira”, trans. Finlay, Faulkes, 138–9.

involved the Anglo-Saxon elites or, more importantly, the rulers of the Kyivan Rus' (e.g. Vladimir the Great, Yaroslav the Wise) since this polity served as an alternative power base from which kings like Olaf Tryggvason and St Olaf reconquered Norway.¹¹⁶

Against this revolving attitude towards different centres, two examples of eleventh- and twelfth-century rulers stand out, who imported symbolic and economic capital to Norway directly from the Byzantine Empire: Harald Hardrada and Sigurd the Crusader. And they did so not just by amassing spoils and fame from military achievements, like Harald, who rose to the rank of the leader of the imperial guard of the Varangians,¹¹⁷ but like Sigurd, by being invited to or organising lavish feasts for the emperor in Constantinople. The example of Harald can be seen as an older form of post-Viking relations where a petty member of the elite used his contacts with the Byzantine centre and raw economic capital gained from it to improve his position at home. Sigurd, however, engaged with the elites of Byzantium, the Holy Land, and Norman Sicily on a more equal footing during his pilgrimage-cum-crusade *Jórsalaferð* (1108–1111). Sigurd did this both for the sake of wider recognition – his journey was noticed by William of Malmesbury, for instance – and for a self-conscious projection of symbolic capital inspired by crusader and courtly cultures.¹¹⁸

Sigurd's ambitions are evident in three elements during his visit to Constantinople: his *adventus* through Constantinople's Golden Gate; the games organised for him at the Hippodrome; and above all his duelling feasts with Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118).¹¹⁹ According to *Morkinskinna*, the emperor extended the invitation to a feast first. Sigurd, however, explicitly instructed his retinue not to take any interest in the gifts, "pay no attention to any

¹¹⁶ John H. Lind, 'Nordic and Eastern Elites. Contacts Across the Baltic Sea: An Exiled Clan', in Kim Esmark, Lars Hermanson, and Hans Jacob Orning (eds), *Nordic Elites in Transformation, c. 1050–1250*, ii: *Social Networks* (New York, 2020), 104–24, here at 109–15.

¹¹⁷ Sverre Bagge, 'Harald Hardråde i Bysants. To fortelling, to kulturer', in Øivind Andersen and Tomas Hägg (eds), *Hellas og Norge: Kontakt, komparasjon, kontrast* (Bergen, 1990), 169–92; Bjørn Bandlien, 'When Worldviews Collide? The Travel Narratives of Haraldr Sigurðarson of Norway', in Christian Raffensperger (ed.), *Authorship, Worldview, and Identity in Medieval Europe* (New York, 2022), 38–59.

¹¹⁸ Ármann Jakobsson, 'Image is Everything', 121–40.

¹¹⁹ MSK, ii, chap. 68–70, 95–8.

novelties” [ok láta sér lítit finnask urn alla nýbreytni], nor to convey any words of acknowledgement, even when the imperial couple showered them with gold and elevated the king in his seating at the feast.¹²⁰ When Sigurd’s turn came to extend the invitation, the empress tested him by blocking the flow of firewood into the city. The cunning king made his servants use expensive walnuts for cooking instead and he outdid the emperor with a “great display of hospitality”. Not all forms of courtly potlatch were deplorable then, it seems. This one forced the empress to admit how impressed she was instead: “this king is certainly prodigal and lets nothing stand in the way for honour”.¹²¹

Just how significant his honour was is conveyed in the story of a diacritical feast at Count Roger II’s court in Sicily (r. 1105–1130 as count, r. 1130–1154 as king), where Sigurd is presented as superior to his host who served him at the table like a retainer. In return for the favour, the Norwegian king confers the royal title on Roger and enthrones him on the feast’s seventh day.¹²² Sigurd thus does not just receive the centre’s recognition of his royal elevation, but allots it himself to one of the centre’s rulers by elevating him. The final great feast is that with King Baldwin of Jerusalem (r. 1100–1118), at which Sigurd’s “distinction, wealth [...] and kingly honor” are tested. As a reward, Sigurd receives a splinter from the Holy Cross to be used as the founding relic for the archbishopric in Norway.¹²³

The story of Sigurd’s armed pilgrimage in *Morkinskinna*, Ármann Jakobsson argues, is a fantasy about how a poor periphery triumphs over the rich centre through acts of military prowess, by being tried at a series of spectacular feasts, and by not admitting to being the least impressed.¹²⁴ In this way, the peripheral king elevates the status of his kingdom and adds a historically retrofitted promise of an archepiscopal see in Nidaros. Notwithstanding the falsehoods (e.g. Roger became king in 1130) and blatant exaggerations – no meaner than Gallus’s

¹²⁰ MSK, ii, chap. 68–69, 95–6.

¹²¹ MSK, ii, chap. 70, 98: “ok er þar margfaldligr sómi, ok veitir hann konungliga [...] ‘Víst er sjá konungr stóryndr ok mun fátt til spara síns sóma”, trans. Andersson, 325.

¹²² MSK, ii, chap. 65, 85–6; Ármann Jakobsson, ‘Image is Everything’, 133–4.

¹²³ MSK, ii, chap. 66, 89–90.

¹²⁴ Ármann Jakobsson, ‘Image is Everything’, 121–40; Weiler, *Paths to Kingship*, 100–2.

about the Gniezno summit to be sure¹²⁵ – what is crucial here is that Sigurd, like Harald, imported both material wealth and symbolic capital from the centre, which he directly funnelled into elite feasts at home where he converted them into social capital and power.¹²⁶ Upon their returns, both organised lavish banquets at which they explicitly compared themselves through *mannjafnaðr* with the current incumbents – Harald with Magnus the Good and Sigurd with his brother, King Eystein I Magnusson – and eventually triumphed over their competitors.¹²⁷ To advertise this, Harald and Sigurd used the skalds, “the most efficient technology of reputation-enhancement” of the day, to advertise their charismatic legitimation among the Norwegian elites.¹²⁸ This perhaps had an even greater, more instantaneous impact than what the Piasts could achieve through their chroniclers.

As mentioned, during Hakon IV’s long reign, glory-exporting feasts, like this in Gniezno, were organised in Bergen, where the court settled in the thirteenth century. For instance, when the papal legate, Cardinal Wilhelm of Sabina, was to visit Norway in 1247 to assist in the coronation of Hakon, some Englishmen advised him not to travel to this remote country. People there were hostile and nothing decent to eat was served. *The Saga of King Hakon Hakonsson*, which narrates this visit and its accompanying series of feasts, shows the cardinal’s growing enchantment with the country and its people. Sturla used this external spectator – just like *Morkinskinna* utilised Empress Irene Doukaina or the *Gesta* employed Emperor Otto III – as a device through which the Norse elites symbolically elevated their rulers and persuaded themselves of their own distinction, despite their peripheral location.¹²⁹ It should be noted that this was not the first

¹²⁵ Gerd Althoff, ‘Spielregeln und Ironie im Gallus Anonymus’, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 43 (2009), 407–15.

¹²⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’, in *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by John E. Richardson (Westport, 1986), 241–58.

¹²⁷ MSK, i, chap. 16, 125–8, ii, chap. 78, 131–4; Sahlins, ‘Poor Man, Rich Man’, 289: “The Melanesian big-man seems so thoroughly bourgeois, so reminiscent of the free enterprising rugged individual of our own heritage. He combines with an ostensible interest in the general welfare a more profound measure of self-interested cunning and economic calculation. [...] His every public action is designed to make a competitive and invidious comparison with others, to show a standing above the masses that is product of his own personal manufacture”.

¹²⁸ Orning, ‘Festive Governance’, 193; Wanner, ‘Kings, Gods, Poets’, 84–8.

¹²⁹ HSH, ii, chap. 290–303, 123–39.

occasion the Norwegian elites had sought to impress a papal legate. Jarl Erling Skakki (r. 1161–1184) had used the visit of the papal legate Stephanus in 1163/1164 to get Archbishop Eystein to crown his eight-year-old son Magnus Erlingsson – the first coronation of any Scandinavian monarch – and there had also been a glory-exporting feast. “And on the day that the consecration took place, the king and Erlingr had as their guests the archbishop and the legate and all the bishops, and this banquet was the most glorious”.¹³⁰ Curiously, in Snorri’s account, Stephanus did not perform Magnus’s royal consecration [*konungsvígslu*], despite his obvious seniority over Eystein (he assisted the archbishop in *The Saga of King Sverrir’s* version).¹³¹ Just like William, the legate’s main role in the sagas and in the elite’s fantasy was to act as a sanctifying witness from the centre.

CONCLUSION

What do these three comparisons of the languages of power as expressed through elite feasting in Poland and Norway tell us about the peripheral elites’ means of legitimation? What were the similarities and differences, and how can we explain them?

First, if we look at the mythological aspects of feasting and ruler prosperity, the Norwegian and Polish traditions, despite the disconnect between them and the different cultural repertoires from which they drew inspiration, operated with strikingly similar motifs and forms of symbolic capital that was magically transferred to charismatically demonstrate the legitimacy of the elites or the ruling families and to elevate them above all other contenders. The contrast between serial, dynastically inheritable prosperity vis-à-vis the rulers’ individual responsibility for its reproduction does mark a curious difference between these two sets of political mythologies and forms of leadership, however.¹³² The motifs of peace and prosperity as a cornerstone of ideal

¹³⁰ ‘Magnúss saga Erlingssonar’, in *HSK*, iii, chap. 22, 398: “Ok þann dag, er vígslan var, hafði konungr ok Erlingr í boði sínu erkibyskup ok légátann ok alla byskupa, ok var sú veizla in vega-samligsta”, trans. Finlay, Faulkes, 249.

¹³¹ Kevin J. Wanner, ‘At smyrja konung till veldis: Royal Legitimation in Snorri Sturluson’s *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar*’, *Saga-Book*, 30 (2006), 5–38, at 11.

¹³² Sahlins, ‘Poor Man, Rich Man’, 295; André Iteanu, Ismaël Moya, ‘Mister D. Radical Comparison, Values, and Ethnographic Theory’, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 5 (2015), 113–136, here at 116–117.

rulership, on the other hand, appear as a more durable means of elite legitimation in Norway, where their use stretches across the whole period, than in Poland. Whereas for Poland, the Piast dynastic myth, particularly in Kadłubek's *Chronica Polonorum*, underwent a process of Romanization, which linked Poland's origins to ancient universal history. This, to some extent, disassociated the mythical beginnings from the later history of the Polish rulers and Poles and sidelined prosperity as the unstated principle of dynastic continuity that was so organic for Gallus.¹³³

Second, when it comes to how the political economy of feasting was framed in the Norwegian and Polish historiography, there are clearly very stark differences. Whereas the Norse authors show us the full scope of feasting's political economy – from its early magic idealization, through laying bare its social and economic modes of production, to its later re-enchantment – the Polish material reliably takes a fairytale-like approach to how food and resources were (supposed to be) provided. This difference is perhaps explained by the different source optics of the sagas vis-à-vis clerical chronicles, which in turn stem from the differential distance their authors occupied in relation to feasting cultures. It was not simply that the skalds and saga authors attended elite feasts more than clerics. Many of them, like Snorri or Sturla, were directly involved in organising feasts, both when serving rulers and acting as chieftains in order to manage their own followers in Iceland or Norway. They had intimate know-how about the practical necessities and the political economy of feasting and its costs, social risks, and symbolic gains.¹³⁴ Displaying – or hiding – ruler extraction and redistribution mattered in the sagas because they mattered practically to their authors and audiences as a way of explaining the motivations of the protagonists and showing the political success of leaders or the discontent with them. Furthermore, the relationships of many saga authors and skalds to the rulers were often complicated. They had to balance their patrons' propagandistic

¹³³ Jacek Banaszkiewicz, 'Master Vincent and his Making of the Oldest History of the Lechites-Poles', in David Kalhous and Pavlína Rychterová (eds), *Historiography and Identity VI: Competing Narratives of the Past in Central and Eastern Europe, c. 1200 – c. 1600* (Turnhout, 2021), 87–109.

¹³⁴ Shami Ghosh, *Kings' Sagas and Norwegian History: Problems and Perspectives* (Leiden, 2011), 25–109.

wishes with magnates' or retainers' viewpoints, which led to more polyphonic visions of elite relations.¹³⁵

If Norwegian rulers, mostly during the early period, deserved to extract economic resources because of how skilfully they brokered conflicting interests on which the delivery of resources for feasting depended, this was evidently not the case in Poland. Does it mean that the Piasts were not entitled to extraction or that their legitimacy stood on shakier ground? Not necessarily. Rather, their deservedness to obtain supplies was always already assumed by the chroniclers. Because extraction was such a sensitive issue and because of the very strong association of feasts with unity and peace, which was much stronger than in Norway, this issue was glossed over, preempting controversy even before exploitation emerged as a bone of contention.¹³⁶ The magical provision of supplies and criticising the exploitation of the petty elite members occluded what the chroniclers simply considered an acquired right, a fact of life. The clerical authors of the Norwegian synoptics eschewed the issue of feasting altogether, perhaps for the very same reason. The Polish authors were much more outspoken in this respect, using such occasions to promote fantastically implausible material ideals of rulership, partially to edify their elite audience. Further, agonistic behaviour and material, as well as symbolic comparison during feasts, functioned as a language of power that measured the relative standing of elite members, particularly in the early context of shared kingship, which was also characterised by a balanced relationship between kings, magnates, and retainers in Norway. The situation changed in the mid-thirteenth century with the centralisation of the monarchy under Hakon IV. The incomparability of rulers was a token of their hegemony, a vision that the Polish historiographers promoted much earlier through the sanctifying, quasi-liturgical nimbus of the Piasts' feasts.¹³⁷ In both cases, feasts and their descriptions were two strictly related domains

¹³⁵ Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence*, 34–40, 91–3, 97–100, 112–6, 194–210, 254–6; Miller, *Bloodtaking*, 43–51; Sverre Bagge, 'Ideology and Propaganda in *Sverris saga*', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*, 108 (1993), 1–18.

¹³⁶ Jason Glynos, David Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (London, 2007), 121.

¹³⁷ Postoutenko, 'Preliminary Typology', 75–6; David Graeber, David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London, 2021), 415–6.

where the reflection on what it meant to be a legitimate ruler or elite member were implicitly practised or explicitly hashed out.¹³⁸

Finally, third, the patterns of feasting with foreign elites for the sake of self-legitimation reveal some uniform features about the vital role of political geography in how these peripheral polities engaged in different ways with varied centres. The Norse elites' feasting for propaganda purposes was more polycentric and included elites from the Byzantine Empire, England, occasionally the Empire, and papal legates. Until the thirteenth century, it also remained quite peripheral, with strong local means for the production of symbolic capital. Due to their physical isolation, the Norwegian elites for a long time were less dependent on the recognition from the centres (or from lesser centres, such as Denmark), or were able to easily bypass them – via the Mediterranean or via Kiyvan Rus' – than their Polish counterparts. The latter's propagandistic feasting, on the other hand, was more monocentric and oriented towards the Empire. The Piasts used this proximity to the centre and common feasts to faster achieve certain institutional and titular gains, e.g. archepiscopal sees, coronations, etc. Both cases featured exports and imports of glory through feasting, but these processes were unequally distributed across this period. They were related to and conditioned by the overall fluctuations in the political standing of peripheral elites vis-à-vis political centres. In fact, two series of very similar developments unfold as we look at both cases through these spyholes. They seem, however, to progress out of sync with each other or in reverse order sometimes, which reveals that Norway and Poland were quite different peripheries after all. Finally, if we turn to the import and export of glory through feasting, it is, to some extent, a misnomer since these were not unidirectional processes. The striking parallels in how the historiographers framed Bolesław I's and Sigurd's feasts show that the import and export of glory were, in fact, mutual forms of image management, in which the projections of the external perspectives of the centres were used in boomerang fashion for peripheral self-legitimation.

What does the above evidence tell us about the ways these two distinct peripheral elites experimented with feasting as a language of power? In comparison with other novel forms of symbolic legitimation explored in this issue, spawned by the impulses from the

¹³⁸ Weiler, 'Tales of First Kings', 126–7.

centre, feasting – an internal peripheral phenomenon – represented a slow and conservative, but not immutable structure for how the deservedness of elites was demonstrated and competed for. Because feasts constituted a quintessentially local political arena and a means of economic extraction in this period, they accommodated and absorbed changes in the political culture rather than acted as catalysts for transformation. On rare occasions, and despite their formal traditionalism, feasts were filled with radical or disruptive content, however. This includes when they served to ideologically legitimise and practically execute dynastic shifts or religious transformation from paganism to Christianity, when they acted as arenas for comparing and elevating contenders to rulership, or when they were attended by the representatives from the centre, they enabled the promotion of peripheral dukes to kingship or the conferral of new institutional gains upon them. The striking similarities evidenced here suggest that when we compare the peripheral languages of power, it is worth considering their dissimilarities as different, mutually intelligible dialects rather than distinct tongues. The divergent and convergent evolution of the dialects of feasting spoken by the Norwegian and Polish elites depended equal parts on their specific material constraints, impulses and distances from the centre, internal political changes, and local fads.

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Wojtek Jezierski – missionary activity and crusading on the Baltic Rim as well as political cultures and cults of saints in Scandinavia and East Central Europe; professor at the Institute for Archaeology, Conservation and History at the University of Oslo. His latest book is *Risk, Emotions, and Hospitality in the Christianization of the Baltic Rim, 1000–1300* (Turnhout, 2022); e-mail: wojtek.jezierski@gu.se

Paweł Żmudzki – medieval source studies, medieval history and history of medieval historiography; professor at the Department of Medieval History, Faculty of History, at the University of Warsaw. His latest book is *Dux fabulosus. O tradycji historyograficznej osnutej wokół postaci Leszka Czarnego od „Gesta Lestkonis” do dzieł Bartosza Paprockiego* (Warszawa, 2023); e-mail: p.zmudzki@uw.edu.pl