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INTRODUCTION: LANGUAGES OF POWER AND ELITE LEGITIMISATION ON THE PERIPHERY, POLAND, AND NORWAY, 1000–1300*

Abstract

In this introduction, we argue that the key to understanding the means and dynamics of political order in the peripheral polities during the era of Europeanization (1000–1300) lies in exploring the practices of (self-)legitimisation by the peripheral elites in Poland and Norway. The article proposes a novel agenda-setting theoretical and methodological framework for how medievalists can study elite legitimation and relations between core European and peripheral polities from a comparative perspective. This introduction launches this agenda in five steps. First, it outlines the key conceptual tools for studying the elites and the languages of power they used as means of symbolically legitimising themselves. Second, it re-assesses Robert J. Bartlett's thesis of diffuse Europeanization to argue how

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a comparative focus on the peripheral elites and their languages of power can give a new perspective on this research topic. Third, it lays out the methodological tenets of an experimental comparative framework for elite legitimation on the peripheries. Fourth, it fleshes out these postulations in connection to our two contrasting cases and contexts, Polish and Norwegian. Finally, it presents the specific comparative case studies in this special issue.

Keywords: legitimation, elites, symbolic capital, comparison, peripheries, centres, Poland, Norway

In this special issue of *Acta Poloniae Historica*, we contend that the key to understanding the means and dynamics of the political order in the peripheral polities during the era of Europeanization (1000–1300) lies in exploring how the peripheral elites sought to demonstrate their (own) legitimacy. The studies gathered here comparatively study the languages of power that the elites in two peripheral polities, Poland and Norway, used to show their deservedness to rule both in domestic contexts and in their contact with core European regions. This issue proposes thus a novel agenda-setting theoretical and methodological framework for how medievalists can comparatively study elite legitimation and relations between the core European polities and their peripheral counterparts. This introduction launches this agenda in five steps. First, it outlines the key conceptual tools for studying the elites and the languages of power they used as means to legitimise themselves symbolically. Second, it re-assesses Robert J. Bartlett's thesis of diffuse Europeanization[1] to argue how a comparative focus on the peripheral elites and their languages of power can give a new perspective on this research topic. Third, it lays out the methodological tenets of an experimental comparative framework for elite legitimation on the peripheries. Fourth, it fleshes out these postulations concerning our two contrasting cases and contexts, Polish and Norwegian. Finally, it presents the specific comparative case studies in this special issue.

[1] Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton, 1993).

KEY CONCEPTS: ELITES, LEGITIMISATION, AND LANGUAGES OF POWER

Before we present the comparative framework, a couple of basic conceptual clarifications are necessary. We contend that focusing on religiopolitical elites opens an avenue for understanding the relations between political centres and peripheries and political hierarchies on the outward bounds of High Medieval Europe. Focusing on the elites thus helps to address the research questions explored here in two complementary ways: vertically, where the elites' practices of legitimation are seen as the central factor in the political order in local contexts, and horizontally, where the peripheral elites' contacts and networks are seen as a central factor which mediated relations with European centres, that is, the elites were part and parcel of the process of Europeanization.

For heuristic purposes, we offer a broad focus on the elites (from French *élite*, derived from Latin 'chosen, elected person'). As a modern sociological concept, 'elite' provides a more inclusive perspective to analyse social and symbolic power, which cannot be captured through native medieval categories such as nobility or aristocracy.[2] This conceptual elasticity is particularly useful when studying a period in which, as Timothy Reuter observed, the ruling classes gradually transformed from being defined mainly by the wielding of influence, the exercise of power, and the inheriting of socioeconomic status (aristocracy) into a legally defined, formally privileged, and increasingly closed group (nobility).[3] To avoid such anachronistic distinctions, which are further complicated by both social and linguistic incommensurability of the social categories and nomenclature found in Poland and Norway,[4] we follow the path suggested by Laurent Feller and define the elites simply as those members of a society who hold socially privileged

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[2] Anne J. Duggan, 'Introduction', in Anne J. Duggan (ed.), *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations* (Woodbridge, 2000), 1–4.

[3] Timothy Reuter, 'The Medieval Nobility in Twentieth-Century Historiography', in Michael Bentley (ed.), *Companion to Historiography* (London, 1997), 177–202, here at 167–8; John H. Kautsky, *The Politics of Aristocratic Empires* (Chapel Hill, 1982), 79–98.

[4] 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, here at 11–12.

positions.[5] These positions were obviously related to the elites' wealth, political influence, cultural prestige, social networks, knowledge, or some other relevant assets and were recognised by others as legitimately occupying such a place. In keeping with this comprehensive approach, we do not make strict distinctions between secular or clerical elites either. Instead, we speak broadly of religiopolitical elites of many different sorts, who occupied various positions that were not always clearly ranked and were thus frequently at odds with each other.[6]

The social and political elevation of elite members, their ascension – or maintenance of their position – particularly in comparison to other elite groupings, both domestic and foreign, was the desirable outcome of their efforts.[7] Hence, the crucial questions guiding the studies on this special issue are: What kind of symbolic capital and languages of power did the Polish and Norwegian elites use to elevate themselves above their peers and subjects? How did they assure compliance or recognition of other elite members at home and abroad?[8] Where did the elites derive their symbolic capital from, and how did they formalise it to make their privileged status permanent?[9]

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[5] Laurent Feller, 'Crises et renouvellements des élites au haut Moyen Âge: mutations ou ajustements des structures?', in François Bougard, Laurent Feller, and Régine Le Jan (eds), *Les élites au haut moyen âge. Crises et renouvellements* (Turnhout, 2006), 5–21; Michael Grünbart, *Inszenierung und Repräsentation der byzantinischen Aristokratie vom 10. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert* (Paderborn, 2015), 13–15; Raymond Williams, 'Elite', in his *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford, 2015), 721–74; Walter Scheidel, *The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, 2017), 45–50.

[6] Carole L. Crumley, 'Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies', *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association*, 6 (1995), 11–15; Wojtek Jezierski, 'Introduction: Nordic Elites in Transformation, c. 1051–1250, Volume III: Legitimacy and Glory', 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), 11–35.

[7] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: The Social Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1984), 461–70.

[8] Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London, 2005), 20–9, 38–48, 96–9, 124–34; Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in James D. Faubion (ed.), *Power. Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, iii (London, 2002), 341.

[9] Bernhard Jussen, 'Introduction', in Bernhard Jussen (ed.), *Ordering Medieval Society: Perspectives on Intellectual and Practical Modes of Shaping Social Relations*, trans. P. Selwyn (Philadelphia, 2001), 1–12, here at 7–10; Pierre Bourdieu, *Language*

For our purposes, we define legitimacy simply as "the idea of a ruling class [or person] that does not just rule but deserves to do so", as Franco Moretti suggested.[10] In this sense, legitimacy constitutes an immaterial resource of conviction or belief [*Legitimationsglaube*], as Max Weber put it, in the legitimacy of claims of certain groups or individuals.[11] Why was inspiring such a belief necessary? Even during the High Middle Ages, when resorting to pure physical violence to support one's claims of superiority was much more acceptable, mobilising such resources to achieve others' compliance was costly in material, social, and moral terms. Elites were thus rarely content to exert power in its naked form. Instead, they wished "to see their positions transformed from purely factual power relations into a cosmos of acquired rights, and to know that they are thus sanctified".[12]

Elite legitimacy hinges on public manifestations and languages of power used for articulating such claims. Consequently, we turn our analytical attention to the symbolic capital and symbolic resources of (self-)representation that the members of such groups employed to demonstrate that they deserved to rule and that prompted others to recognise their right to rule.[13] In this respect, we follow Pierre Bourdieu and define symbolic capital as both material and immaterial resources available to individuals or groups through which they could project their prestige, honour and the offices they held on their peers

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& Symbolic Power, ed. by John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, 1991), 117–26; Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory*, 38–43.

[10] Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (London, 2013), 20; Fabienne Peter, 'Political Legitimacy', in Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/legitimacy/ [Accessed: 25 April 2024]; Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. by Hans Gerth, C. Wright Mills (Oxford, 1946), 157, 271; Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, 2020), 1–12, 65–77.

[11] Max Weber, *Economy & Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, ed. by Guenther Roth, Claus Wittich (Berkeley, 1978), i, 31–8, 213–16, 247–54.

[12] Weber, *From Max Weber*, 157.

[13] Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in John E. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, trans. Richard Nice (Westport, 1986), 241–58; Angelika Epple, Walter Erhart, and Johannes Grave (eds), *Practices of Comparing: Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice* (Bielefeld, 2020); Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*.

and others for the sake of recognition.[14] This also concerns those occasions in which some elite members, in their quest for symbolic (self-)elevation, did not just compare themselves with the rest of the elite but went as far as to actively undermine and de-legitimise their rivals.[15] In this special issue, we look at the competing ideologies that underpinned royal power, pre-Christian dynastic mythologies, elite feasting and political economy, and episcopal saints, though there were obviously a variety of elite languages of power, modes of competition and forms of symbolic capital or arenas for its display in both local and Europe-wide contexts.

CENTRE-PERIPHERY PERSPECTIVE: PROBLEMATIC BUT INDISPENSABLE

The central research paradigm, we use the above conceptual tools to take stock of concerns about the 'Europeanisation of Europe' through which Robert J. Bartlett framed the relationship between core European regions and peripheries during the period under discussion. To simplify its main tenet: it is a vision of unilateral and asymmetrical exports of Western cultural models to peripheral and undeveloped areas

[14] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1977), 171–83; *id.*, *Distinction,* 251–5; *id.*, *Language & Symbolic Power*; Gerhard Göhler, Rudolf Speth, 'Symbolische Macht. Zur institutionentheoretischen Bedeutung von Pierre Bourdieu', in Bernhard Jussen and Reinhard Blänkner (eds), *Institutionen und Ereignis: Über historische Praktiken und Vorstellungen gesellschaftlichen Ordnens* (Göttingen, 1998), 17–48; Loïc Wacquant, Aksu Akçaoğlu, 'Practice and Symbolic Power in Bourdieu: The View from Berkeley', *The Journal of Classical Sociology*, 17 (2017), 55–69; Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp, Elke Stein-Hölkeskamp, 'Ethos – Ehre – Exzellenz. Antike Eliten im Vergleich', in *eidem*, *Ethos – Ehre – Exzellenz* (Göttingen, 2018), 29–102.

[15] Isabel Alfonso, Julio Escalona, 'Introduction', in Isabel Alfonso, Hugh Kennedy, and Julio Escalona (eds), *Building Legitimacy: Political Discourses and Forms of Legitimacy in Medieval Societies* (Leiden, 2004), ix–xxiii, here at xi–xii: "Far from being a static attribute of power, legitimacy has to be dynamically maintained, competed for, and denied to rivals, and this is valid not only in cases of open conflict, or when rulership is at stake, but also as a continuous process of competition for social power. It is the processual character of those phenomena that the term legitimation highlights, and, in doing so, it paves way for exploring how legitimacy is constructed in specific contexts, and how its contents and parameters are debated, agreed upon or rejected within processes of social competition and/or conflict".

in the form of ecclesiastical structures, saints' cults and liturgy, Roman law, coinage, royal administration and statehood, political culture effected through knighthood, military technology etc. and the relatively passive – and belated – reception and adoption of such influences in these frontier regions. During the thirty years that have elapsed since *The Making of Europe* appeared, Bartlett's thesis has been the most influential agenda-setting framework for medievalists working on or in peripheral contexts, particularly in northeastern Europe. However, this perspective has not just spawned a wave of research beyond any comprehensive overview. It has also been heavily polemicised.

For the purposes of this essay, let us set aside Len Scales's recent and very substantial multilayered critique of Bartlett's idea. Scales rightly points to the fact that during the High Middle Ages, that is, the period when the Europeanization of Europe occurred, there was actually very little political, economic, and cultural homogeneity and unity in Western European centres to begin with, which fundamentally undermines the central idea of unidirectional cultural export and asymmetric diffusion.[16] The main bone of contention of scholars working in these contexts was this diffusionist perspective's failure to address the question of how autochthonic political cultures creatively and originally engaged with exports from the centre, often hybridising and transforming these impulses in their adaptation to local purposes. Bartlett's perspective has had crucial implications for how medievalists came to view and explore comparatively how peripheral elites symbolically demonstrated their legitimation and sociopolitical elevation. After all, it is only by exploring the peripheral elites and how their networks reached the European centres and acted as powerful intermediaries of the impulses coming from there during the High Middle Ages that we can demonstrate how the process of Europeanization of peripheries occurred at all.[17] However, as it has been shown

[16] Len Scales, 'Ever Closer Union? Unification, Difference, and the "Making of Europe", c. 950 – c. 1350', *English Historical Review*, 137 (2022), 321–61.

[17] For research overviews and critical reassessments of Bartlett's thesis in northeastern European context, see Per Ingesman, Thomas Lindkvist, 'Norden och Europa under medeltiden: Europeisering eller självеuropeisering?', in Per Ingesman and Thomas Lindkvist (eds), *Rapporter til Det 24. Nordiske Historikermøde, Århus 9.–13. august 2001*, i: *Norden og Europa i middelalderen* (Århus, 2001), 7–21; Nils Blomkvist, *The Discovery of the Baltic: The Reception of a Catholic World-System*

repeatedly, these transfers were very much reciprocal and had a much more negotiated character than has usually been assumed.[18] So far, only a limited set of such phenomena, usually trans-local by their very nature, has been studied comparatively between the two peripheral regions of interest here – East Central Europe and Scandinavia – such as Christianization, saints' cults, monastic networks, crusades, imagined communities.[19]

We contend that one way to modify and de-centralize Bartlett's view from Western Europe is to explore affinities and differences between very distinct peripheries comparatively. This idea is not new. It dates back at least to Jerzy Kłoczowski's concept of 'Younger Europe' from the late 1990s, which in turn resembles Chris Wickham's more recent notion of 'Outer Europe' applied to non-Carolingian peripheries and

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in the European North (AD 1075–1225) (Leiden, 2005); Barbara Bombi, 'The Debate on the Baltic Crusades and the Making of Europe', *History Compass*, 11 (2013), 751–64; Nora Berend, Przemysław Urbańczyk, and Przemysław Wiszewski (eds), *Central Europe in the High Middle Ages: Bohemia, Hungary and Poland c. 900 – c. 1300* (Cambridge, 2013); Sverre Bagge, 'The Europeanization of Scandinavia', in John Hudson and Sally Crumplin (eds), *'The Making of Europe': Essays in Honour of Robert Bartlett* (Leiden, 2016), 53–75; John Tolan, 'Constructing Christendom', in Hudson and Crumplin (eds), *'The Making of Europe'*, 277–98; Kurt Villads Jensen, 'Conclusion: Is it Good to be Peripheral?', in Anti Selart and Matthias Thumser (eds), *Livland – eine Region am Ende der Welt? Forschungen zum Verhältnis zwischen Zentrum und Peripherie im späten Mittelalter / Livonia – a Region at the End of the World? Studies on the Relations between Centre and Periphery in the Later Middle Ages* (Cologne, 2017), 483–94; Roman Michałowski, Grzegorz Pac, 'Wprowadzenie', in *eidem* (eds), *Oryginalność czy wtórność? Studia poświęcone polskiej kulturze politycznej i religijnej (X–XIII wiek)*, (Warszawa, 2020), 7–25.

[18] Arnoud-Jan A. Bijsterveld, Kim Esmark, Hans Jacob Orning, 'Elites and Social Bonds – How Nordic Were the Nordic Medieval Elites?', in Kim Esmark, Lars Hermanson, and Hans Jacob Orning (eds), *Nordic Elites in Transformation, c. 1050–1250*, ii: *Social Networks* (New York, 2020), 325–45, here at 332–8.

[19] Lars Boje Mortensen (ed.), *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)* (Copenhagen, 2006); Nora Berend (ed.), *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900–1200* (Cambridge, 2007); Haki Antonsson and Ildar H. Garipzanov (eds), *Saints and Their Lives on the Periphery: Veneration of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe (c. 1000–1200)* (Turnhout, 2010); Wojtek Jezierski and Lars Hermanson (eds), *Imagined Communities on the Baltic Rim, From the Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries* (Amsterdam, 2016); Radosław Kotecki, Carsten Selch Jensen, and Stephen Bennett (eds), *Christianity and War in Medieval East-Central Europe and Scandinavia: The Church at War, Religion in War, and Perceptions of War* (Amsterdam, 2021).

with which he framed the period just before the year 1000.[20] Although Kłoczowski's research focused primarily on East Central Europe, he argued that the term applies also to "areas of the Byzantine-Slavic and Scandinavian civilisations, which in fact took a civilisation path similar to us [i.e. Poland]". For him, it was precisely the exact moment of joining the *Christianitas* that made areas "between the Adriatic and the Baltic sea on the one hand […], and of all of Scandinavia to Iceland on the other" comparable.[21] Furthermore, Kłoczowski argued that cultural models that were brought to 'Younger Europe' converged with local traditions and languages. As a result, "the processes of Occidentalisation […] gave specific, often original results".[22] In contrast to the idea of 'Europeanisation', those 'Younger Europe' and 'Outer Europe' approaches are less concerned with demonstrating processes of asymmetric acculturation. Instead, they focus more on the comparative exploration of structural affinities, similarities, and differences between how the local elites who were concurrently involved in similar processes responded to similar challenges or impulses. This comparative approach is analogous to that recently postulated by George Molyneaux in relation to Anglo-Saxon England.[23]

Revising Bartlett's concept leads to two ramifications: quantitative and qualitative. These particularly concern how we can comparatively study peripheral polities in a more holistic manner. First, quantitively, it forces us to measure the speed of the diffusion of the same impulses from the centre to different peripheries and to study where they were accepted earlier or later. This includes entertaining the possibility that, in some circumstances, such changes even occurred simultaneously at the centre and on the periphery, which collapses this distinction altogether. Second, qualitatively, it compels us to measure the degree to which the same impulses from the centre were implemented on the peripheries through diffusion and passive adoption or through transformation and active adaptation. In the latter case,

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[20] Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000* (New York, 2009), 472–507.

[21] Jerzy A. Kłoczowski, *Młodsza Europa. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w kręgu cywilizacji chrześcijańskiej średniowiecza* (Warszawa, 1998), 12.

[22] *Ibid.*, 13.

[23] George Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), 234–46.

this involves considering whether a given local adaptation or even complete c r e o l i s a t i o n, as Bernard Gowers would say, of the central and peripheral cultural forms reached such a stage of alterity that it makes little sense to compare it to the original model[24] or even if it was instead the periphery that affected the shape of the centre.

To put some historical and anthropological flesh on these two points. As argued by several scholars, rather than remaining passive recipients of relayed impulses from European centres, peripheries and frontier regions often turned out to be politically, religiously, or artistically experimental or even avant-gardist. Sometimes, it was not just that they managed to anticipate specific changes in the core regions, but they actually directly inspired them.[25] For instance, Ittai Weinryb has demonstrated how the monumental bronze sculptures in eleventh-century Hildesheim emerged in the context of technological, artistic, and ideological innovation triggered by the multicultural character of the frontier elites, who wanted to project imperial hegemony on pagan Slavs in a novel way.[26] Similarly, Grzegorz Pac has pointed to the astonishing speed and eagerness with which the Bohemian clerical elites and institutions, long before their peers in the West, embraced the idea and practice of a papal monopoly on canonisations in the early twelfth century.[27] Similarly, the first example of papal canonisation in Poland occurred as early as the beginning of the eleventh century, right after the introduction of this phenomenon.[28] This suggests that "the newly Christianised dominion of the Piasts immediately was in the centre of lively spiritual and intellectual ferment".[29]

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[24] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York, 2004), 52–6, 121–31; Bernard Gowers, 'Creolization and Medieval Latin Europe', *Medieval Worlds*, 16 (2022), 263–83.

[25] Jensen, 'Conclusion: Is it Good to be Peripheral?', 483–94; Scales, 'Ever Closer Union?', 335.

[26] Ittai Weinryb, 'Hildesheim Avant-Garde: Bronze, Columns, and Colonialism', *Speculum*, 93 (2018), 728–82.

[27] Grzegorz Pac, 'The Papal Monopoly of the Canonisation and Translation of Saints on the Peripheries of Latin Christendom: The Case of Bohemia before c. 1150', *Journal of Medieval History*, 48 (2022), 457–77.

[28] Grzegorz Pac, 'Papieska kanonizacja Pięciu Braci – przejaw naśladownictwa czy nowatorstwa? Wokół przemian kultu świętych na peryferiach chrześcijaństwa łacińskiego w X–XII wieku', in *Oryginalność czy wtórność?*, 378–446.

[29] Krzysztof Skwierczyński, 'Intellektuelle Kontakte Polens mit dem Ausland', in Dariusz Adamczyk and Norbert Kersken (eds), *Fernhändler, Dynasten, Kleriker.*

These and similar examples, such as the extraordinary religious radicalism and harsh Lent policies in Bolesław I the Brave's (Chrobry's) Poland or the persistent seasonality and duality of kingship in the territorially fragmented high-medieval Norway,[30] go with recent suggestions by anthropologists that it would be valuable to look at the early sociopolitical formations on the fringes of dominant civilisations to have a new perspective on the centre. David Graeber, David Wengrow, and Marshall Sahlins have suggested that such peripheral sociopolitical formations should be treated as real-life experiments of political organisation and economy, ritualistic dimensions of kingship, religious forms, or societal life cycles.[31] Such an approach also offers an alternative to the usual focus on the origins and teleology of state organisation, which underpinned Bartlett's model. Traditional approaches to the peripheral elites were framed by this focus and were centred around what might be termed methodological nationalism, i.e. they sought measure w h e n Norway or Poland became a state.[32] Instead, we examine the high medieval Polish and Norwegian elites as if they are two peripheral laboratories where diverse forms of religiopolitical legitimisation and various ways of relating to multiple European centres during the long period before E u r o p e and a c e n t r a l i s e d s t a t e came to be seen as inevitable were trialled.[33]

Die piastische Herrschaft in kontinentalen Beziehungsgeflechten vom 10. bis zum frühen 13. Jahrhundert (Wiesbaden, 2015), 263–79, here at 269.

[30] Roman Michałowski, 'The Nine-Week Lent in Boleslaus the Brave's Poland. A Study of the First Piasts' Religious Policy', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 89 (2004), 5–50; Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence*.

[31] David Graeber, David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London, 2021), 107, 113, 117, 276–7, 500, 502, 516; David Graeber, Marshall Sahlins, *On Kings* (Chicago, 2017), 246–8, 345–76; James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (New Haven, 2017), 128–34; Niklas Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, trans. Rhodes Barrett, vols 1–2 (Stanford, 2012), ii, 32.

[32] Gerard Labuda, *Studia nad początkami państwa polskiego*, vols 1–2 (Poznań, 1987–1988 [1st edn 1946]); Przemysław Urbańczyk, *Trudne początki Polski* (Wrocław, 2008); Knut Mykland and Knut Helle (eds), *Handbok i Norges historie*, Bd. 1, D. 3: *Norge blir en stat: 1130–1319* (Bergen, 1964); Sverre Bagge, Michael H. Gelting, Frode Hervik, Thomas Lindkvist, and Bjørn Poulsen (eds), *Statsutvikling i Skandinavia i middelalderen* (Oslo, 2012); Knut Helle, 'Norway in the High Middle Ages: Recent Views on the Structure of Society', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 6 (1981), 161–89.

[33] Hans Jacob Orning, 'Norsk middelalder i et antropologisk perspektiv. Svar til Knut Helle', *Historisk tidsskrift* (N), 89 (2010), 249–262; Scales, 'Ever Closer Union?', 321–61.

METHOD: COMPARING EXPERIMENTS AND EXPERIMENTS IN COMPARISON

We propose to take the revisions of Bartlett's model and the ideas from anthropologists a step further by combining them with recent ideas of medievalists about how to approach certain sociopolitical formations as historical experiments. Thus far, the premise that the focal point of medievalists' research might be treated as an experiment has only been undertaken concerning small-scale phenomena, e.g. monastic life, innovations in administration, elite family relations, or urban or rural communities.[34] Only recently have scholars suggested broadly treating entire early or high medieval polities and elite formations as experimental in the ways they shaped their political cultures and languages of power and legitimation. Characteristically, this suggestion was made about central regions and isolated examples, particularly the Carolingian Empire, again implying that Western Europe was where political innovation proliferated.[35]

Drawing from these studies, the comparative approach implemented in this special issue tries to break new ground. This is not just because it switches attention away from the core European regions; instead, it searches for innovation and sociopolitical experiments that took place on the periphery. It is also because it brings us beyond single cases methodologically and enables us to look comparatively at such experiments. As John Breuilly pointed out, "comparative history is the

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[34] Albrecht Diem, *Das monastische Experiment: die Rolle der Keuschheit bei der Entstehung des westlichen Klosterwesens* (Münster, 2005), 2–3; Albrecht Diem, Claudia Rapp, 'The Monastic Laboratory: Perspectives of Research in Late Antique and Early Medieval Monasticism', in Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin (eds), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West* (Cambridge, 2020), i, 19–39; John Watts, *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300–1500* (Cambridge, 2009); Walter Pohl, 'Introduction: Strategies of Distinction', in Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (eds), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of the Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden, 1998), 1–15, here at 8–9; Matthew Bryan Gillis (ed.), *Carolingian Experiments* (Turnhout, 2022), Wojtek Jezierski, *Risk, Emotions, and Hospitality in the Christianization of the Baltic Rim, 1000–1300* (Turnhout, 2022), 25–9.

[35] Edward James, *The Origins of France: From Clovis to the Capetians, 500–1000* (London, 1982), 157–69; Chris Wickham, *Medieval Europe* (New Haven, 2016), 61–70; Matthew Bryan Gillis, 'Introducing Carolingian Experiments', in Matthew Bryan Gillis (ed.), *Carolingian Experiments* (Turnhout, 2022), 9–24; Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English*, 235–8.

nearest equivalent that the historian has to experimental method".[36] There are at least three advantages to the comparative experiment proposed here. First, it can correct for blind spots – including those embedded in national research traditions – and the absence of certain factors in individual cases. Second, it can help to interrogate particular ways in which individual regions developed that may, without further analysis, be regarded as normal or even normative. Third, it enables us to test explanations or hypotheses about certain phenomena from one context against another. As Lee Ann Fujii observed, choosing diverse settings for paired comparisons "can illuminate different pathways, thereby helping to sharpen theoretical claims".[37]

This last suggestion means, in our case, not just that we can develop general ideas about the specific peripheral sociopolitical phenomena like the notions of deep history and pre-Christian dynastic myths, the mechanisms and causes of civil wars, paths to success and patterns of canonisations of holy bishops, or types of political economy embedded in elite feasting. It also means that by consistently adopting a comparative approach to two or more peripheral political cultures, we can reconsider Bartlett's diffusionist model of cultural change. Only through consistent comparisons of concrete cases can we notice similarities and differences between seemingly identical or synchronous phenomena or processes; observe what is typical, what is idiosyncratic, and what is an outlier; what counts as radical and innovative versus what conformed to core European models; which changes appeared earlier where and which regions lagged in terms of the same developments; and which regions hybridised their local traditions with impulses from the centre and which accepted the latter as ready-made.[38] As Scales insists, "the dialectical aspects of the

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[36] John Breuilly, *Labour and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Essays in Comparative History* (Manchester, 1994), 3.

[37] Lee Ann Fujii, '"Talk of the Town": Explaining Pathways to Participation in Violent Display', *Journal of Peace Research*, 54 (2017), 661–73, here at 664; Mala Htun, Francesca R. Jensenius, 'Comparative Analysis for Theory Development', in Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith (eds), *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry* (Cambridge, 2021), 190–208; John Boswell, Jack Corbett, and R. A. W. Rhodes, *The Art and Craft of Comparison* (Cambridge, 2019), 28–31.

[38] Jürgen Kocka, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, 'Comparison and Beyond: Traditions, Scope, and Perspectives of Comparative History', in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (eds), *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches*

relationship between culture and power, between the general and the particular, during the central Middle Ages have hitherto attracted little systematic reflection".[39] A comparative perspective is a way of providing exactly such a reflection.

Two methodological caveats are necessary. First, comparative studies are often accused of abstraction, simplification, and "radically selective treatment of particular cases to ensure common treatment".[40] This, however, is unavoidable to some extent if one is to deliver on the experimental promise and "show that apparently different events can be related to similar conditions (which means that those conditions cannot explain the difference in events [or processes]) or that apparently similar events can be related to different conditions".[41] Second, the inductive manner of the contrast-of-contexts approach can be skewed towards self-confirmation. As the empirical examples have already been chosen based on comparable phenomena, the presence or absence of specific important but unstudied variables in one of the examples may be overlooked.[42] This potential problem can be rectified by using the other comparative method, that is, through parallel demonstration of a theory or specific hypothesis, whose tenets are set out below as well as in the individual contributions.[43] The proposed conceptual frame helps to account for the absence or presence of certain salient sociopolitical phenomena, types of legitimacy, or forms of symbolic capital in either polity. In this frame, the presence or absence of any such phenomena (e.g. the lack of a holy king in Poland or the lack of holy bishops in Norway)[44] still retains explanatory value and is worth exploring.

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and New Perspectives (New York, 2010), 1–30, here at 3–5; Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again*, trans. Steven Sampson (Cambridge, 2001), 77–81.

[39] Scales, 'Ever Closer Union?', 334.

[40] Breuilly, *Labour and Liberalism*, 3; Leidulf Melve, 'Komparativ historie: ei utfordring for historiefaget?', *Historisk tidsskrift* (N), 88 (2009), 61–8, here at 66–7, 72–5.

[41] Breuilly, *Labour and Liberalism*, 3; Kocka, Haupt, 'Comparison and Beyond', 3–5.

[42] Skocpol, Somers, 'The Uses of Comparative History', 174–97; Hoyer, Manning, 'Empirical Regularities', 160–90; Melve, 'Komparativ historie', 67; Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter*, 81–4.

[43] William H. Sewell, Jr, 'Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History', *History and Theory*, 6 (1967), 208–18, here at 217.

[44] Wojtek Jezierski, 'St Adalbert as a Stranger-King: The Heroization and Estrangement of a Holy Man in the Middle Ages', *History & Anthropology* (2023),

FROM EAST CENTRAL EUROPE AND SCANDINAVIA TO POLAND AND NORWAY: PARALLEL LIVES ON THE PERIPHERY, 1000–1300

Although the topic of the legitimation of the northeastern elites was tackled in a couple of recent volumes,[45] which relied on earlier studies of elite legitimation in the core European regions,[46] the comparisons characteristically treated the East Central European (Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary) and Scandinavian (Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Iceland) cases separately. The tradition of limiting the scope of comparative studies to these two regions is only partially attributable to the weakness of comparative research traditions and the lack of linguistic ability among medievalists to cross such boundaries. The disconnect relates primarily to the conventional belief about the idiosyncratic character of each peripheral region, which rests on a silent assumption that geographical proximity is an explanation in itself. East Central Europe and Scandinavia tend to be seen as distinct examples of peripheral regions featuring unique social structures, peculiar economic organisation, or local indigenous culture, which had no parallels elsewhere and informed their divergent *Sonderwege* during Europeanisation.[47] What we still lack are interregional comparisons that cross these traditional

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1–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2023.2275786. For the lack of episcopal saints in Norway, see the contribution by Steffen Hope and Grzegorz Pac in this special issue.

[45] Grischa Vercamer and Ewa Wółkiewicz (eds), *Legitimation von Fürstendynastien in Polen und dem Reich: Identitätsbildung im Spiegel schriftlicher Quellen (12.–15. Jahrhundert)* (Wiesbaden, 2016); Jezierski, Esmark, Orning, and Viðar Sigurðsson (eds), *Nordic Elites in Transformation*, iii; Grischa Vercamer and Dušan Zupka (eds), *Rulership in Medieval East Central Europe: Power, Rituals and Legitimacy in Bohemia, Hungary and Poland* (Leiden, 2022).

[46] Isabel Alfonso, Hugh Kennedy, and Julio Escalona (eds), *Building Legitimacy: Political Discourses and Forms of Legitimacy in Medieval Societies* (Leiden, 2004); Ildar H. Garipzanov, *Graphic Signs of Authority in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 300–900* (Oxford, 2018); *id.*, *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c. 751–877)* (Leiden, 2008); Michael Grünbart, *Inszenierung und Repräsentation*.

[47] For criticism, see Christian Lübke, 'Die Prägung im Mittelalter. Frühe ostmitteleuropäische Gemeinsamkeiten', *Comparativ. Leipziger Beiträge zur Universalgeschichte und vergleichenden Gesellschaftsforschung*, 8 (1998), 14–24; Eduard Mühle, 'Uwagi o ograniczonej przydatności pojęcia 'Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia' ('Ostmitteleuropa') w badaniach mediewistycznych', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, cxx, 4 (2013), 865–70.

boundaries,[48] which could help to transcend Bartlett's asymmetric vision and help to re-frame his centrifugal perspective. Only from the outside looking in and by observing the same phenomena from two distinct viewpoints can we tell how *sonder-* the purported peripheral *Sonderwege* really were.

The fact that Poland and Norway belonged to two distinct and different European peripheries makes the juxtapositional comparison between these two polities heuristically stimulating.[49] In the High Middle Ages, the relations or connections between Poland and Norway were minimal, almost non-existent in fact. This radical disconnect offers a methodological advantage for a comparative study of two examples of languages of power and how the elites sought to claim, achieve, and contest their legitimacy to rule.[50] It also helps circumnavigate the problem of possible mutual influences or interferences, which could otherwise obfuscate observation of parallel processes of adopting or adapting models from the core regions, which often become confused when Poland and Norway are traditionally considered in their immediate peripheral settings.

Moreover, the two polities occupied roughly similar semi-peripheral positions in their respective peripheral clusters in North-Eastern Europe. Both emerged to some degree in the backwaters of politically and ecclesiastically stronger centres: Norway in England's shadow and Poland in the Empire's. Both were situated within wider regions where there were intense cross-border communication and power struggles. Poland had close connections to Bohemia and Hungary, whereas Norway had strong ties to Denmark and Sweden. Bohemia and Denmark often exerted pressure on Poland and Norway, benefiting from their closer connections with cultural centres, especially the Empire, as well as a more favourable allocation of material resources

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[48] For notable exceptions, see Kurt Villads Jensen, *Crusading at the Edges of Europe: Denmark and Portugal c. 1000 – c. 1250* (New York, 2016); Jana Fantysová-Matejková, Kurt Villads Jensen, 'Creating Cohesion in Dynastic Conglomerates. Identities in Comparison: Medieval Bohemia and Denmark', in Nils Holger Petersen *et al.* (eds), *The Historical Evolution of Regionalizing Identities in Europe* (Bern, 2020), 63–121.

[49] Frederic Charles Schaffer, 'Two Ways to Compare', in Erica S. Simmons and Nicholas Rush Smith (eds), *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry* (Cambridge, 2021), 47–63.

[50] Jürgen Kocka, 'Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The Case of the German *Sonderweg*', *History and Theory*, 38 (1999), 40–50, here at 49.

and economic networks. This pressure varied over time, and the relationships sometimes changed radically because of coincidental factors such as succession crises.

In terms of territorial and geographical scope, we use these two shorthand designations, Poland and Norway, despite their embedded anachronisms. Throughout the period studied here, Poland remains roughly synonymous with the expanding and contracting region ruled by the Piast dynasty (e.g. intermittently including Pomerania). Medieval Norway was larger than present-day Norway, as parts of today's Sweden belonged to this realm, as did several islands in the North Atlantic, most notably Iceland and Greenland in the 1260s. From 1152/53, these areas belonged to the Nidaros (Trondheim) Church Province.

The High Middle Ages was an era of rapid social and political expansion in East Central and North European peripheries, Poland, and Norway. In both realms, a twin process of Christianization and state formation occurred around the turn of the millennium. Poland was officially converted in c. 966, Norway in c. 1024, and each polity was quick to appoint its patron saint, whose veneration had begun in the early stages of the Christianization, around whom national cults and local churches crystallised: St Adalbert (d. 997) in Poland and St Olaf (d. 1030) in Norway. However, the history of ecclesiastical organisations in Poland and Norway differed significantly. While in both realms, the first bishoprics were established shortly after the conversion, Poland was fairly quickly granted an archepiscopal see – based at Gniezno – in 1000. The Norwegian bishoprics, on the other hand, were long subordinated to foreign archbishops: first Hamburg-Bremen and, from 1104, Lund, while their ecclesiastical province of Nidaros was not established until 1152/53, almost a century and a half after the conversion. The two ecclesiastical provinces, moreover, were somewhat different in character. While the Gniezno Church Province in the High Middle Ages covered a compact territory under the control of the Piasts, Nidaros had its suffragan dioceses not only in mainland Norway but also far away in the North Atlantic Ocean: in the Orkneys, the Faroe Islands, the Hebrides and the Isle of Man, Iceland, and Greenland, and thus in areas that were not always under the control of Norway's rulers. Notwithstanding these differences, however, the two ecclesiastical provinces remained undivided, regardless of the two polities' internal struggles or divisions.

Regarding the emergence of royal dynasties in the two realms, the Piasts and the Ynglings rose to power locally in the first half of the tenth century and came to dominate the territories of their future polities, respectively. After the conversion, both dynasties utilised the new religion to bolster their authority and claims. In both countries these dynasties also surrounded themselves with an aura of political prehistory developed in sources from the High Middle Ages – an issue which makes the separation of fact and myth a vexed one. Not long after the establishment of each dynasty's political dominance, their representatives suffered internal strife. In both Poland and Norway, the 1130s marked the start of increased dynastic division and infighting. In Poland, the end of a period of political fragmentation is traditionally dated to 1320. In Norway, it had already ended in 1240. Henceforward, both realms entered a consolidation phase, which eventually paved the way for dynastic unions – in Poland from 1370 and 1385 and in Norway from 1319.

It seems, therefore, that parallel processes took place in Scandinavia and East Central Europe. This cannot be explained by their similarity or closeness during the pre-conversion era but rather by the peripheral position that both regions shared at the same moment of joining Latin Christendom. That makes the focus on this adaptation and the means of legitimising the elites in East Central Europe and Scandinavia especially suitable for such a comparison.

Even if Poland and Norway exhibit similar developments, they were also very different in many respects. There are at least five areas, paths, and processes in which we find considerable differences that have had a significant impact on how the political trajectories and political cultures of each polity developed. One of the most obvious is geography: in mountainous Norway, fast seaborne connections were crucial for the political networks and power bases of the elites, whereas in flat Poland, they remained strictly land-based. It is worth keeping in mind such basic, almost banal, material differences between peripheries as they often underpinned why certain novelties or phenomena from the centre did not or could not be adopted on the peripheries. For instance, the heavy horse, the central attribute of knighthood, made little sense in Norway but was readily accepted in Poland. Two, Poland and Norway were both situated on the periphery of Christian Europe, but these positions seem to have had different ramifications. On the one hand, Poland was in close proximity to its neighbours and

also to the major political player in the region – the Empire, which expanded eastward in this period. On the other hand, Norway was relatively separated from England, a central neighbour that increasingly oriented its political interests away from Scandinavia over time. Three, the abovementioned political disintegration and fragmentation played out in diverse ways in each polity. In Poland, this was related to the formal division of the realm, whereas in Norway, a formally united realm suffered a period of domestic wars. Four, related to this, are the problems of royal succession and the ideas and practices of monarchy vis-à-vis shared kingship, which evolved very differently in the two polities, resulting in distinct political trajectories. However, the question remains: how much of such differences can be attributed to structural versus coincidental factors? Five, the fact that we find pretty different types of sources and historiographical traditions certainly makes comparison challenging.[51] Crucially, we do not find sagas or any kind of vernacular sources in Poland, which offer very different insights into the past and were often pegged quite differently within the sociopolitical structure of the Norse elite than the Latin historiography was in the Polish political culture – which, in turn, requires us to be cautious and not overstress specific differences as they may be more source-related rather than grounded in reality.[52]

As this overview of similarities and differences shows, we opt for contrast-of-contexts comparative research.[53] Such an approach postulates selecting two or more examples gathered around a research theme – here: languages of power and symbolic capital in the service

[51] Melve, 'Komparativ historie', 72–75; Marc Bloch, 'Toward a Comparative History of European Societies', in Jelle C. Lane, Frederic C. Riemersma (eds), *Enterprise and Secular Change. Readings in Economic History* (London, 1953), 494–521, here at 518.

[52] Walter Pohl, 'Mapping Historiography: An Essay in Comparison', in Walter Pohl and Daniel Mahoney (eds), *Historiography and Identity IV: Writing History across Medieval Eurasia* (Turnhout, 2021), 307–68, here at 343–57; Lars Boje Mortensen, 'Comparing and Connecting: The Rise of Fast Historiography in Latin and Vernacular (12th–13th Cent.)', *Medieval Worlds*, 1 (2015), 25–39.

[53] Theda Skocpol, Margaret Somers, 'The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (1980), 174–97; Daniel Hoyer, Joe G. Manning, 'Empirical Regularities Across Time, Space, and Culture: A Critical Review of Comparative Methods in Ancient Historical Research', *Historia*, 67 (2018), 160–90; Walter Pohl, 'Comparing Communities. The Limits of Typology', *History & Anthropology*, 26 (2015), 18–35.

of elite legitimation – which can be c a s e d for the purposes of a comparative study of the similarities and differences through several salient sociopolitical phenomena found in both contexts.[54] In that sense, the proposed research design comes thus very close to what Bruce Lincoln dubbed a w e a k c o m p a r i s o n, which is "one that focuses sustained attention on a small number of examples and entertains the possibility that they share the features they have in common, not because of a historic connection involving diffusion, influence, or genetic descent, but because these features are the product of similar forces and conditions".[55]

Significantly, our problem-oriented research agenda goes beyond simple comparative descriptions of two cases. The ambition is to offer new, generalisable insights into the nature of those sociopolitical phenomena in question without compromising their regional specificities.

THE FOUR COMPARATIVE EXPERIMENTS IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

In this special issue, we propose two general types of comparison through contrasting cases. Type A focuses on centre-periphery relations. By comparing Poland and Norway as two cases of peripheral polities and elites exposed to the same type of impulses from European centres, we can observe the directions, timing, and strengths of such impulses, the ways these two peripheral political cultures reacted and the degree to which they transformed such impulses locally. Type B focuses on peripheral means of elite legitimation in Poland and Norway. By comparatively exploring similar locally-bound sociopolitical mechanisms and challenges that medieval elites everywhere dealt with, e.g. dispute settlement, political economy, royal power, etc., which occasionally might have been influenced by relations with the centres. Taken together, these two types offer a new way of investigating: w h a t it meant to be peripheral during this period, w h a t different ways of being a periphery can be identified, and h o w the elites ruling these

[54] Joe Soss, 'On Casing a Study versus Studying a Case', in Erica S. Simmons, Nicholas Rush Smith (eds), *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry* (Cambridge, 2021), 84–106, here at 84–93.

[55] Bruce Lincoln, *Apples and Oranges: Explorations In, On, and With Comparison* (Chicago, 2018), 40, see also 25–7, 109, 153.

peripheries dealt with different local challenges and predicaments, and, ultimately, when the centre-periphery distinction is no longer viable.[56]

This set of questions is explored comparatively in this special issue, which consists of four case studies and a commentary article by Nora Berend. The case studies were chosen to showcase the different aspects of the analytical framework outlined above and reconnoitre its full scope. They focus on the material, symbolic, and ideological means of legitimation in both internal peripheral contexts as well as those concerning relations between the core and peripheries. These studies explore both the speed and the degree of the transformation of impulses from the centre, the success and failure to implement them, and the refusal to accept such influences. In terms of method, these articles experiment with very different types of comparisons. Berend's afterword summarises the broader findings and the comparative lessons that can be drawn regarding elite legitimisation and centre-periphery relations based on the conceptual and methodological framework advanced here and its empirical implementation.

The first article, by Ben Allport (University of Oslo) and Rafał Rutkowski (University of Warsaw), implements the type B comparison. It explores the ideological means in the form of indigenous foundation myths and political legends, which were used locally to illustrate succession practices and frame dynastic histories. The article focuses mainly on the curiously close – though not directly related – literary motifs of the accession of the founding rulers of the Norwegian and Polish dynasties, Harald Fairhair and Siemowit, the son of Piast. Narrative episodes about both told stories about the founder having a haircut and food vanishing from the table of a previous ruler and being placed before the new one. In each tradition, however, these nearly identical haircutting motifs and the teleporting feasts unfold in entirely different ways. The chroniclers and saga authors promoting those political mythologies – particularly Gallus Anonymus's *Gesta principum Polonorum* (c. 1112–16) and Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (c. 1230) – appear also to have utilised them for almost opposing reasons. Through a close comparison of the different historiographical strands and the contexts in which these texts emerged and contributed to an ongoing debate on the principles and pitfalls of dynastic politics, Allport and Rutkowski show how the two strikingly similar visions of deep

[56] Jensen, 'Is It Good to Be Peripheral?', 483–94.

history were produced and used as strikingly different languages for the symbolic legitimisation of the ruling elites. In the distinct political developments of twelfth-century Poland and thirteenth-century Norway, the analogous stories of heroic haircuts effectively represented contrasting succession models. In the first case, it was a way of censoring and eliminating contenders to rulership in times of dynastic crisis. In contrast, it was used as a means of advocating for a more inclusive and pluralistic vision of the patrilineal dynasty in Norway at the point at which it was becoming increasingly politically centralised.

The second article, by Hans Jacob Orning (University of Oslo) and Zbigniew Dalewski (University of Warsaw), predominantly uses the type A comparison to trace the similarities and differences in the paths which the introduction of the Christian model of rulership took in the two peripheries of the Latin World. Poland and Norway began to be integrated into European culture around the turn of the first millennium, marked by the introduction of Christianity and the establishment of a rudimentary kingdom. In the two realms, however, the import and the repercussions of adopting the ideology of Christian rulership were substantially different. A central hypothesis in the first part of the article is that the ideology of Christian rulership gained acceptance and a foothold in Poland much earlier than in Norway. This partially depended on the external causes relating to influence from abroad and close neighbours and partially on the internal factors concerned with the initial power position of the royal dynasties and with the 'indigenous' royal ideologies. In the second part of the article, the authors explore the ramifications of establishing the new ideology of Christian rulership, which led to increased political tensions in both polities, but how these tensions played out differed substantially. In Poland, the new ideology acquired a distinctly non-royal dimension, which permitted many members of the Piast dynasty to partake in the sphere of power and led to Poland's division into several smaller entities. In Norway, by contrast, the new ideology appears to have been pegged on the level of monarchically defined kingship, resulting in an escalation of conflict into a civil war since the possibility of sharing power was effectively blocked. In the long run, however, in both cases, the ideology of Christian rulership led to consolidated kingdoms, albeit earlier in Norway (1240) than in Poland (1320).

The third article, by Wojtek Jezierski (University of Oslo) and Paweł Żmudzki (University of Warsaw), explores the symbolic and material

means and challenges of producing political legitimacy of elites through feasting in high-medieval Poland and Norway as two cases of peripheral languages of power. They take a comparative perspective to look at how the political and moral economy of feasts and their use as a means of propaganda and recognition were presented in contemporary historiography, particularly the sagas and the Latin chronicles that cover the period from the tenth until the end of the thirteenth century. Political feasting, the authors argue, was located at an intersection of the localised, structural phenomenon of elite legitimisation and a form of centre-periphery relations. It, therefore, is appropriate to utilise both type A and type B comparative approaches. Three aspects of aristocratic feasts are compared: first, the question of the supernatural charisma of the rulers and ruling dynasties demonstrated through their – both mythologically and historically framed – ability to ensure economic prosperity for their people and followers is considered. Second, they examine the rulers' social and political ability to extract material resources from the rest of the elites and their elites, how such resources might be redistributed, and what forms of symbolic capital these resources yielded for the elites. The third section focuses on high-status feasts with the foreign elites from European centres for the sake of peripheral elites' international recognition and as a way of attaining fame and institutional benefits such as coronations, archepiscopal titles, etc. The article also assesses – in the form of an unbound comparison – the ways and the extent to which the very distinct depictions of elite feasting in medieval Polish and Norwegian historiography and their near-incompatible treatment in modern scholarship in these two contexts can illuminate each other.[57]

The fourth article, by Steffen Hope (University of Oslo) and Grzegorz Pac (University of Warsaw), explores two thirteenth-century cases of attempted canonisations of holy bishops – one successful and one failed, a fascinating point of comparison in itself – on the peripheries of Latin Christendom: Eystein Erlendsson of Nidaros (d. 1188) and Stanislaus (Stanisław) of Kraków (d. 1079). The article implements type A comparison, studying how two ecclesiastical

[57] Nick Cheesman, 'Unbound Comparison', in Erica S. Simmons, Nicholas Rush Smith (eds), *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry* (Cambridge, 2021), 64–83, here at 69–76.

centres – the metropolitan see of the Nidaros Church province and the episcopal see of Kraków – sought to attain papal acknowledgement for the veneration of a holy episcopal predecessor and how these two simultaneous yet unconnected bids can be seen as two different peripheral responses to a general trend of ecclesiastical politics developing in the Latin Church at that time. The cases of Eystein's and Stanislaus's canonisation processes are thus explored in the light of the influential paradigm of the holy episcopal champion fighting for the freedom of the Church, which appeared with the canonisation of Thomas of Canterbury in 1173. Due to the growing popularity of this type of sainthood emanating from and implemented at the centre, an episcopal champion effectively became an entirely novel form of symbolic capital on the periphery, too. The Roman connection conferred greater prestige and power onto the local saints, their cult centres, and their guardians – the peripheral clergy. The authors compare how the Polish and Norwegian ecclesiastical and secular agents strategically linked with central trends to strengthen their local legitimisation of power, both within their respective polities and within Latin Christendom in general.

The last section in this special issue consists of Nora Berend's (University of Cambridge) concluding remarks. On the methodological level, she stresses the heuristic and explanatory promise of unconventional comparisons, which "break out of the straight jacket of supposed geographical constraints". Medievalists easily fall victim to regional thinking, which naturalises the historical teleology and trajectories of 'Western Europe', 'Scandinavia', or 'East Central Europe', forgetting that those regions and the implicitly accepted similarities of their components are simply creations of historians, which tend to obfuscate the intra-regional diversities. Comparative approaches like the one proposed here, which depart from similarities in socio-political conditions of the *comparanda*, rather than simply from their traditional geographical destinies, provide an important corrective impulse not only for a better understanding of the peripheral regions but of European diversity tout court. She further emphasises the very different source bases available for the two cases, which, however, is an issue counterbalanced by the unique role of 'internal outsiders' – Gallus Anonymous and Snorri Sturluson – whose 'doubled' peripheral projections of central viewpoints mattered so much to the local elites and upon which the comparative approaches presented here so heavily depend.

Berend also pulls together several empirical strands which connect the contributions. She stresses that the Polish and Norwegian cases illustrate well the local elites' agency vis-à-vis cultural and political impulses and demands projected from the centre. She particularly highlights the salient role of kingship as the prime engine for generating religiopolitical order and complexity both in the local and international spheres and its thirst for symbolic capital to complement the material and military basis of rulership. The political thrust provided by kings and dynasties appears to have affected all the phenomena explored in this issue to some extent, including the episcopal canonisations. Even in situations when the rulers undermined or openly countered the political entitlement of other elite groups or institutions and even during periods of weakened or divided rulership, the pressure from rulers seems to have worked as a somewhat paradoxical force when it comes to the forms of legitimisation. Depending on where kings positioned themselves on a given issue, their relative standing incentivised the rest of the elite, who either had to fall back on old types of symbolic capital, leap forward and experiment with novel ones, or emulate the ideals coming from the top, it seems. In that sense, for a long time, rulers seemed to exert transformative effects on how both secular and ecclesiastical members of the elite thought of and displayed their own right to rule.

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