

The project focuses on the forms and means of symbolic power the members of the political elites in the two peripheral areas of Europe (Norway and Poland) employed to manifest their privilege right to rule to their peers and subjects. These claims to rule of the elites, their ideological justification and legitimacy in the eyes of others, were the crucial problem in face-to-face societies inhabiting medieval Europe deprived of formal institutions and lasting state structures. What symbolic means did these elites manifest their entitlement to rule? How did they compete with other members of the elite? How did they assure their dominance over time?

Chronologically, this project focuses on the period 1000-1300, that is, the era between both Poland and Norway formally became Christian polities and the moment both were united as stable monarchies after long periods of civil wars and feudal partitions. Thematically, the project comparatively investigates e.g. dynastic ideologies, cults and venerations of national saints, ruler ideologies, elite graves and symbolic expressions on coins, legitimation of episcopal and abbatial power, ceremonies of coronation and rituals of conviviality, narrations about the past etc. The project takes a broad view on the elites which include kings/dukes, members of the aristocracy, ecclesiastical elites etc. who continuously cooperated as well as competed for power with each other.

The project treats Poland and Norway in comparative fashion, as two parallel examples of elites in two peripheral polities similarly and differently dealing with the same type of problems: securing dominance and creating political order within their borders and using their contacts with European centers to boost their standing at home. Norway and Poland are thus seen as examples and representatives of two peripheral regions of Younger Europe, Scandinavia and East-Central Europe that have not been considered on a par so far. Norway and Poland, however, constitute very interesting examples that can help better understand the challenges that faced elites of (proto-)states in different regions of Europe. On the one hand, Norway was for long periods a formally united polity that was nonetheless continuously torn by civil wars; on the other hand, Poland, for large periods formally partitioned yet characterized by a relatively low level of internal conflicts. These and other differences and similarities between the two countries as well as the fact that their political elites did not have direct contacts with each other during this period make for a particularly useful comparative study of the means of political structuring during the high Middle Ages on the European peripheries.

The project is based on a close cooperation between the Polish and Norwegian medievalists. The team consists of historians, archeologists, and numismatists coordinated by researchers with good experience of working on the two peripheral regions. The results of the project will be presented as co-written articles prepared for special issues of high profile journals and an edited volume on the topic.