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## SLÍMUSETUR IN EARLY ICELANDIC LAW AND ITS EUROPEAN CONTEXT

### King and Law

Iceland received new law from its king in 1271, *Járnsíða* (Ironsides). Among other novelties, it forbade unwelcome and overbearing guests ‘slimesitting’ at other people’s feasts, *sitja slímusetri*:<sup>1</sup>

Menn þeir er til þess vilja hafa sig að ganga í samkundir manna óboðið af þess hendi er veisluna á, og sitja þar slímusetri, og þó að þeir verði harðlega á brott reknir eða þar nokkuð misþyrmt, þá eru þeir hálfréttismenn og sekir þrim mörkum við konung. Er þetta firi því gjört að margur góður maður hefir fengið skemmdir og vandræði firi þeirra óhlutvendi.

Those men who take it upon themselves to enter the feasts of others without an invitation by its host, and remain there slimesitting, become *hálfvéttismenn* and guilty of a three-mark fine to the king, even if they are harshly driven away or injured somewhat. The reason for this provision is that many a good man has suffered damages and trouble because of their dishonorable behavior.

*Járnsíða* was ratified by *lögrétta* in 1271–73. It was modelled on the recently reformed provincial laws of Norway, which also lay behind much of the *Landslög* (National Law) introduced in Norway in 1274. *Járnsíða* was superseded by *Jónsbók* in 1281, which likewise forbade obnoxious guests ‘slimesitting’ in other people’s home.<sup>2</sup>

1 *Járnsíða og Kristinréttur Árna Þorlákssonar*, ed. Haraldur Bernharðsson, Magnús Lyngdal Magnússon, and Már Jónsson, Smárit Sögufélags (Reykjavík: Sögufélag, 2005), 92.

2 *Jónsbók: Kong Magnus Hakonssons lovbog for Island vedtaget paa Althinget 1281 og réttarbær*

The article heading in *Jónsbók* is *Um boðslottu, hálfvéttismenn* (On intruders, *hálfvéttismenn*), and the fine is an *eyrir*. Otherwise, the article is the same. It entered Icelandic law as part of the legal reform of the Norwegian realm in 1274–76, when the *Landslög* and *Bjarkeyjarréttir* (Town Law) superseded the provincial codes. The article is the same in all four codes, with slight variations of expression between manuscripts.<sup>3</sup> Hence, it was not introduced with Iceland and its local political context specifically in mind but rather Norway and its realm more generally. Its introduction in Icelandic law was a consequence of royal standardization of law within the realm.

Identifying the offender as being a *hálfvéttismaðr* in these circumstances, literally ‘a man of half rights’, recognizes that person’s right to sue for injuries but only up to half the amount they otherwise would be able to demand, that is in circumstances where that person was acting lawfully and without malice. The article thus instructs that whoever forces hospitality on another and refuses to leave may indeed sue for injuries incurred while being resisted or thrown out, a legal action that may or may not secure reduced compensation. At the same time, however, the intruder becomes guilty by the act alone of breaking the king’s peace and cannot escape paying him a fine for his offence. The king’s right is firm, whereas the intruder’s position is at best ambiguous.

*Hálfvéttismaðr* is an infrequent term in the legal corpus, referring to the reduced legal status of an adult or that of a minor or youth before entering adulthood by carrying weapons.<sup>4</sup> *Hálfvétti* is more common, meaning half-spoken or ambiguous slander worth half compensation (*vis-à-vis fullvétti*, an explicit and unambiguous slander or defamation worth full compensation).<sup>5</sup> What is noticeable about the half-rights of the slimesit-

*de for Island givne retterbøder af 1294, 1305 og 1314*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson (Copenhagen: S. L. Møller, 1904), 92.

- 3 *Norges gamle love indtil 1387* [NGL], ed. Rudolf Keyser, Peter Andreas Munch, and Ebbe Hertzberg, 5 vols. (Christiania: C. Gröndahl, 1846–95), 2: 225–26 (*Bjarkeyjarréttir inn nýi*); *Kong Magnus Hákonsson Lagabøtes landslov: Norrøn tekst med fullstendig variantapparat*. ed. Magnus Rindal and Bjørg Dale Spørck, 2 vols., *Norrøne tekster*, vol. 9 (Oslo: Arkivverket: 2018), 1: 421–22.
- 4 NGL, 1: 69 (*Gulapingslög*), 169 (*Frostapingslög*), 314 (*Bjarkeyjarréttir*), 2: 207 (*Bjarkeyjarréttir inn nýi*); *Kong Magnus Hákonsson Lagabøtes landslov*, 266.
- 5 *Grágás: Islændernes Lovbog i Fristatens Tid, udgivet efter det kongelige Bibliotheks Haandskrift* [Ia–Ib], edited by Vilhjálmur Finsen, *Nordiske Oldskrifter*, vols. 11, 17, 21,

ting intruder is the legal thought that a criminal against the king does not forfeit all his legal rights while in the act of committing the crime.

Was this an issue? Were strong-armed men imposing themselves on others as unwelcome guests? Why had this become the king's concern? The commonwealth law *Grágás* provides nothing on the issue. In Norwegian provincial law, the concept *slímusetur* is known but in a different context. The older *Gulapingslög* (Older Law of Gulapíng) stipulates that if a wife feeds her convicted husband in their home for more than five days, she becomes guilty of aiding a criminal, unless the man's continued stay is against her will, in other words he is 'slimesitting'.<sup>6</sup> This is a different subject, however, from the *slímusetur* of *Járnsiða* and *Jónsbók* and that of *Landslög*. The above questions remain.

To understand the king's newly acquired interest in legislating against *slímusetur*, it is necessary to appreciate both the local context of legal reform and the European context of political language. Many things that had not been the concern of the king now became so. My present argument is that law forbidding people from imposing themselves on others by enforced hospitality must be understood in its European context and in comparison with similar legal provisions made elsewhere during the high Middle Ages. The two contexts, local and European, are but different viewpoints; however, they are useful in separating the specific and contextual from that which is general. The local context of legal reform in the Norwegian realm in the second half of the thirteenth century is principally a variant on a European theme that rang loud in the central Middle Ages. Essentially, it was a part of a larger, European process of state building.

After nearly a century of civil war, King Hákon *gamli* (r. 1217–63) and his son King Magnús *lagabætir* (r. 1263–80) set out to consolidate the kingdom of Norway and transform it from a realm into a state.<sup>7</sup> At the center of their program was legal reform that entailed continued codifying of the

22 (Copenhagen: Det Nordiske Literatur-Samfund, 1852), Ia: 135, 190; *Grágás efter det Arnemagneanske Haandskrift Nr. 334 fol., Stáðarhólsbók* [II], edited by Vilhjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1879), 395–96.

6 NGL, 1: 72.

7 Two syntheses are Knut Helle, *Norge blir en stat 1130–1319*, *Handbok i Norges historie*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964) and Sverre Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway, c. 900–1350* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010).

customary law of the four legal provinces of the kingdom, which were reformed and standardized.<sup>8</sup> By so doing, the king became more directly involved in local law than previously. The codification of customary law and its subsequent reform by royal initiative meant that the framework of the law changed fundamentally. It transported the *locus* of the law from orality and living memory to the media of literacy and the written word. Law was becoming increasingly bookish and more securely situated within the sphere of king and clerics. Reformed codes were introduced for Gulaping in 1267 and for Eiðsifaping and Borgarþing the following year. Frostaping accepted a reformed code in 1269 without Christian Law owing to opposition from church authorities, who believed the king was overriding its legislative independence by reforming Christian Law. King and archbishop were still working towards a settlement on ecclesiastical jurisdiction and administrative freedom of the church when the former introduced a new and unified code of secular law for the entire kingdom in 1274, the *Landslög*.<sup>9</sup>

The introduction of unified law for the entire kingdom, legislated by royal authority from above by God's grace, was made under strong influence from contemporary European measures. The reintroduction of Roman law in the high Middle Ages allowed kings to better consolidate and centralize their power through legislative reforms, through which customary law increasingly gave way to centralized legislative authority from above.<sup>10</sup> In 1231, the Wonder of the World, King Frederick II of Sicily (r. 1198–1250) and Holy Roman Emperor (r. 1220–50), became the first monarch of the age to introduce unified law for his kingdom. In terms

- 8 Most likely, regional law was originally codified in the late eleventh or the early twelfth century. What may survive of it, however, became part of younger and reformed redactions. See Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold*, 179–82 and Knut Helle, *Gulatinget og gulatingsslova* (Leikanger: Skald, 2001), 20–23.
- 9 Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold*, 179–227; Arnved Nedkvitne, *The Social Consequences of Literacy in Medieval Scandinavia*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, vol. 11 (Brepols: Turnhout, 2004), 67–105.
- 10 See, e.g., Antony Black, *Political Thought in Europe 1250–1450*, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. 14–41, 136–69, 186–91; K. Pennington, “Law, Legislative Authority and Theories of Government, 1150–1300,” J. P. Canning, “Law, Sovereignty and Corporation theory, 1300–1450,” Jean Dunbabin, “Government,” and Jeannine Quillet, “Community, Council and Representation,” all in J. H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350–c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

of centralized bureaucracy and state apparatuses, the kingdom of Sicily was at that time probably the most advanced of all Western states.<sup>11</sup> King Magnús's *Landslög* of 1274 put Norway among those at the forefront of progressive, state-wide legislation inspired by Roman law.<sup>12</sup> The inspiration came not least from Castile, where major reforms were made on the basis of Roman law principles in the mid-thirteenth century (resulting in *Les Siete Partidas*, 'Code in Seven Parts', finished around 1265).<sup>13</sup> In 1258, Princess Kristín, daughter of King Hákon, was married to Prince Philip of Castile, the half-brother of King Alfonso X (r. 1254–84). A large entourage of Norwegian courtiers visited the Castilian court on this occasion and must have learned firsthand about the legal reforms then in full progress. The legal reforms in Norway followed immediately thereafter.<sup>14</sup>

The novelty of legislating against *slímuasetur* can be understood up to a point within the local context of these reforms. The emergence of a central legislative authority, through which the king appeared as a human legislator, brought with it a new understanding of the nature and origins of law. Nonetheless, law codes continued to focus primarily on criminal law and only secondarily on constitutional law. One way that the king sought to increase his power was by taking control of areas of society where his authority was previously either absent or limited and dispensing justice there. Peace increasingly became the *king's peace*, a 'public' peace. This became evident in, for example, what Max Weber famously called the 'monopoly of violence' by state authority, when the king sought to eliminate feuds and 'private justice' of any kind among his subjects. Aside from regional and chronological variations, it remains open to debate how successful premodern state authorities were in their quest for such a monopoly.<sup>15</sup> Identifying

11 For chief characteristics, see Hiroshi Takayama, "Law and Monarchy in the South," in David Abulafia, ed., *Italy in the Central Middle Ages, 1000–1300*, The Short Oxford History of Italy (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), and David Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 202–25.

12 When exactly the *Landslög* were introduced, in 1274 or even as early as 1267, is open to debate, cf. Anna Catharina Horn's survey of early scholarship on the legal reforms of the 1260s and 1270s: "Lovrevisjonene til Magnus Hákonsson Lagabøte – en historiografisk gjennomgang," *Maal og Mimne* (2018, no. 2).

13 Thoroughly treated in Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X, the Justinian of His Age: Law and Justice in Thirteenth-Century Castile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

14 *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, ed. Þorleifur Hauksson, Sverrir Jakobsson, and Tor Ulset, 2 vols., Íslensk fornrit, vols. 31–32 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2013), 2: 197–200, 202–03.

15 The continued practice of feuding by the nobility in late medieval and early modern so-

slimesitting guests as a threat to the king's peace and as in breach of the law belongs to this saga. It may be compared with other novelties of the Norwegian king's law that likewise sought to expand his jurisdiction and field of interest. However, we turn now to the broader European background, against which the introduction of this law must be read.

## King and Hospitality

Feasting (*convivium*, *veizla*) was a common expression in the political language of premodern society. Aside from friendship-making through feasts and gifts among peers or near-peers, which was common among the political elite or aristocracy, formal hospitality was exacted on a wide scale by political superiors. Itinerant kingship, which was emblematic of early and high medieval rulership, focused fiscal, social, and political ties on the ritualistic exaction of feasts. Outwardly portrayed as a free and voluntary action, the reception of one's political superiors was usually anything but that. It highlighted and cemented the unequal social and political standing among the partakers and was contextualized by larger frameworks of power, both in its application and perception. The degree of compulsion would vary along a scale from voluntary feasting among peers (*Gastfreundschaft*) to the obligatory reception of political superiors (*Herrschaftsgastung*).<sup>16</sup>

The big players on the scene, itinerant kings, perambulated their domains as regularly and systematically as they could, but even they faced real limits in the theater of power. Their access to local resources for upkeep was regulated by custom, which was subject to constant negotiation with the aristocracy and landed elite. The royal fisc, a set of properties and assets earmarked for the upkeep of the king and his court, emerged over time out of such circumstances. The king might be its owner in name, yet his

ciety is treated in, e.g., Hillyay Zmora, *The Feud in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). The non-monopoly of violence by medieval public authorities and the sustained practice of 'private justice' throughout the medieval era is well illustrated in Warren C. Brown, *Violence in Medieval Europe*, *The Medieval World* (London: Routledge, 2011), esp. 165ff.

<sup>16</sup> A large body of scholarship is dedicated to itinerant kingship and the political and social implications and uses of hospitality in premodern Europe. For extensive references and discussion of main themes, see Viðar Pálsson, *Language of Power: Feasting and Gift-Giving in Medieval Iceland and Its Sagas*, *Islandica* 60 (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 2017), esp. 57–62, 77–82, 96–103, 109–10.

access to it was uneven and often quite restricted. Such rights and limits were understood as norms and expressed as custom (*consuetudines*). In Old Icelandic sagas, where the itinerant kingship of the Norwegian king, and occasionally that of others, repeatedly comes to the forefront, the king's movement and upkeep is bound by *lög*, *venja*, *siðvenja*, *vandi*, and the like. In fact, much energy is spent in the kings' sagas on the adjudicative process between king and aristocracy of setting these limits and how the king must share power with those who back him up.<sup>17</sup>

Exacting hospitality was practiced or claimed by various lords and political potentates high and low, both secular and ecclesiastical. Sometimes it was regular, sometimes spasmodic and ad hoc. It was often disputed and led not infrequently to confrontation and conflict. Enforcing hospitality and imposing oneself on others is, in any case, a form of political violence, even when negotiated and channeled. Importantly, it was not simply a matter of finances but mainly a matter of political display, a visual verification of power relations acted out before witnesses.

The story of how and why the curbing of enforced hospitality became a legislative theme among high medieval legislators belongs to the larger story of Western Europe's societal transformation during that period, which was characterized not least by growing institutionalization and centralization of power.<sup>18</sup> The earliest steps in this direction had already been taken in the political climate of mid- and late-tenth-century Italy but were soon made north of the Alps too. Initially, kings would attempt to shut the door on forceful members of the political elite via charters of protection for those suffering their visits, principally cities. Once kings assumed the role of active legislators, however, as the king of Norway did in the later thirteenth century, they sought to establish more general rules to this effect through law, linking this agenda to public peace and order.

Coming into the eleventh century in France, so-called banal lords or castellans with their bands of *militēs* imposed their political will on local societies, using force when necessary. Their belligerent behavior and arbitrary use of violence thrived not least because of the relative weakness of

17 See Viðar Pálsson, *Language of Power*, 58–122 for references to sagas and secondary sources regarding the development of the royal fisc in Norway and the regulated royal itinerary bound by it.

18 See, e.g., R. I. Moore, *The First European Revolution, c. 970–1215, The Making of Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).



royal government. They imposed their own jurisdiction on their neighbors and forced them, often with brute force, to submit to dues and obligations of various sorts, including hospitality. These were quickly styled as 'bad customs', *mala* or *pravae consuetudines*.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in the course of the high Middle Ages a fast-rising population left many aristocratic younger sons without hope for landed inheritance and traditional establishment. Many of them had few career choices but to enter the universities in the cities and become clerics and courtiers in the rising bureaucracies of secular and ecclesiastical lords. Others chose to try their luck as knights in the service of lords high and low. Especially before many of them were channeled into crusades outside Europe from the close of the eleventh century onwards, their local presence did anything but promote social and political stability or reduce violence. At the same time, nobles, higher lords, and other political superiors continued to practice conventional means of displaying their power and mobilizing resources in their favor by exacting hospitality and upkeep in various forms.

Already in the late tenth century and the early eleventh, popular and ecclesiastical peace movements began to spread all over Western Europe. The Peace and Truce of God, *pax et treuga dei*, sought to limit and regulate the use of violence and armed forces and turned against the arbitrary use of political power against non-belligerents and common people. It promoted public peace.<sup>20</sup> However, these popular movements, initially spreading from southern France and reaching the Empire, soon fed into royal and princely initiatives for administering criminal justice and protecting public order. Quite prominently, curbing violence in the form of forced hospitality became part of royal and princely legislative agendas. In the Empire, for example, it became part of the *Landfrieden* movement (*constitutio pacis* or *pax jurata*), which likewise sought to circumscribe feuds and promote

19 These topics have featured prominently in the continued debates on or relating to the 'feudal revolution/mutation'. Its scholarship is enormous. For a relatively recent synthesis of much of it, see Charles West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution: Political and Social Transformation Between Marne and Moselle, c. 800–c. 1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

20 See Geoffrey Koziol, *The Peace of God, Past Imperfect* (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2018), and Thomas Head and Richard Landes, eds., *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).



public courts for dispute resolutions.<sup>21</sup> Protection of the politically weak from forced entry into their homes and involuntary hospitality for political superiors was addressed as early as in Carolingian capitularies, but since the late tenth and early eleventh century, towns and cities had increasingly sought royal or princely protection from the forced entry and hospitality of powerful nobles and political potentates. For example, King Berengar II of Italy (r. 950–66) issued privileges for Genoa in 958 which expressly forbade neighboring counts, margraves, and other nobles from forcing themselves into the city and exacting hospitality. Thereafter, numerous other cities secured comparable privileges, such as Mantua and Savona in 1018 from Emperor Henry II (r. 1014–24), Pisa in 1081 from Emperor Henry III (r. 1084–1106 but as king from 1056), and Cremona in 1114 from Emperor Henry V (r. 1111–25). Various Spanish cities and towns secured early privileges too.

The development was similar in England and France, especially from the twelfth century onwards. King Henry I (r. 1100–35) granted privileges to London in 1132 that limited its customary obligations to host notable visitors, and these restrictions were tightened even further with renewed privileges in 1155 by King Henry II (r. 1154–89). As the grip was tightened, enforced hospitality eventually became a capital crime, like housebreaking. The gradual criminalization of involuntary hospitality in the high Middle Ages went in tandem with the consolidation of royal power and public judicial authority. In the Empire in 1186, Frederick Barbarossa (r. 1155–90) legislated against arson and various household violations and injuries, including forced hospitality (*hospitari violenter*). It was only to be punished, however, if it evidently caused damage. Such qualifications gradually disappeared, and forced entry of any kind (*domum invadere*) came to be considered a serious crime against public peace and order.<sup>22</sup>

21 Benjamin Arnold, *Medieval Germany 500–1300: A Political Interpretation* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 151–57.

22 The examples given in this and the previous paragraph, and many more, are reviewed in Robert von Keller, *Freiheitsgarantien für Personen und Eigentum im Mittelalter: Eine Studie zur Vorgeschichte moderner Verfassungsgrundrechte*, *Deutschrechtliche Beiträge*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1933), cf. Hans Conrad Peyer, *Von der Gastfreundschaft zum Gasthaus: Studien zur Gastlichkeit im Mittelalter*, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Schriften*, vol. 31 (Hanover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1987), 192–99.

## Local Icelandic Context

Late-commonwealth Icelanders knew this language of power well. Obligatory hospitality lay at the heart of itinerant kingship in Norway, as elsewhere, and Icelandic authors describe its social, political, and economic mechanisms at length in the kings' sagas, dating from the early thirteenth century. In the world of the kings' sagas, well prior to royal legislation against enforced hospitality (by others), the king is but one among those who exact hospitality as an exercise of authority. Petty kings routinely sought to establish their local authority by formal reception, *veizla*, and often met with great resistance. The sagas' description of how the Eiríkssynir sought establishment in Norway after their stay in England is emblematic, for example. The last of them, Guðrøðr, arrived in Víkin, "tók hann at herja ok brjóta undir sik landsfólk, en beiddi sér viðtöku" (proceeded to harry and subjugate the people, and demanded acclamation for himself). The farmers chose to host him at feasts (*veizlur*) rather than paying for his and his army's upkeep with an outright payment. They got rid of him soon, however, when two of King Óláfr Tryggvason's kinsmen "koma á einni nótt með liði sínu þar, sem Guðrøðr konungur var á veizlu, veita þar atgöngu með eldi ok vápnum. Fell þar Guðrøðr konungur ok flestallt liðit hans" (arrived one night together with their force where King Guðrøðr was attending a *veizla*, and attacked with fire and weapons. King Guðrøðr fell there and almost all of his men).<sup>23</sup> His brother, King Erlingr, had suffered the same fate in Þrándheimr when the farmers themselves recruited "lið mikit, stefna síðan at Erlingi konungi, þar sem hann var á veizlu, ok halda við hann orrustu. Fell Erlingr konungur þar ok mikil sveit manna með honum" (a great force, then headed for where King Erlingr was attending a *veizla* and confronted him in battle. King Erlingr fell there and a mighty host of men with him).<sup>24</sup> Involuntary hospitality became especially burdensome for the local farmers when rival claimants for authority surveyed the same region simultaneously, demanding *veizlur* as

23 *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3 vols., Íslenzk fornrit, vols. 26–28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1941–51), 1: 334–35, cf. *Flateyjarbók: En samling of norske kongesagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler*, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C. R. Unger, 3 vols. (Christiania: P. T. Mallings forlagsboghandel, 1860–68), 1: 432–33, and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar eptir Odd munk Snorrason*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, Íslenzk fornrit, vol. 25 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2006), 286–88.

24 *Heimskringla*, 1: 220–21.

well as other forms of taxation. Thus, following King Ólafr Tryggvason's death at Svöldur in 1000, both Earl Eiríkr and magnate Erlingr Skjálǫgsson believed themselves to be rightful overlords of Rogaland, and each proceeded to demand *veizlur* and other payments in full from the local farmers, who had no choice but to pay double.<sup>25</sup> We may doubt the historicity of the narrative, but the political culture it describes is typically premodern.

The kings' sagas focus principally on the king and his mobilization of resources rather than that of other major players, who appear more randomly in the narratives. There can be no doubt, however, that before royal authority increased and became consolidated in the thirteenth century, the aristocratic practice of articulating political and social status through demands of formal upkeep and reception from inferiors must have been common among the politically strong, as it indeed was in premodern Europe. Before asking if the same was true for commonwealth Iceland, two things regarding the king's own practice of exacting feasts should be underlined. Firstly, that Norway's framework of itinerant kingship developed over a long period of time, and its limits were expressed through custom.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the practice of enforced hospitality, whether by the king or anyone else believing he was entitled to it, becomes visible to us almost exclusively through medieval narratives, not law. For Western Europe generally, the subject became a matter of law only when kings started to legislate against this practice by others, forbidding them to *slimesit* (or, prior to this, when they issued privileges for specific cities and towns in the form of charters). Political superiors would be accompanied by a retinue, *lið* or *hirð*, when they paid formal visits, and the law of the Norwegian court, *Hirðskrá*, gives valuable insight into the composition of the royal retinue. *Hirðskrá* is a late legal document, however, dating from the second half of the thirteenth century, and thus it postdates the formative period of itinerant kingship. To what extent it reflects earlier law of the court (and if it does, how far back) is a matter of debate.<sup>27</sup>

25 *Heimskringla*, 2: 28–29, cf. *Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga: Den store saga om Olav den hellige efter pergamenthåndskrift i Kungliga biblioteket i Stockholm nr. 2 4to med varianter fra andre håndskrifter*, ed. Oscar Albert Johansen and Jón Helgason, 2 bks. (Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1941), 59–60, and *Flateyjarbók*, 1: 537.

26 Expressed in the sagas with (*for*) *lög*, *vandi* or *venja*, *siðvenja*, *siðr*, and the like; see, e.g., *Heimskringla*, 2: 49 (*siðvenja*), 100 (*siðr*), 102 (*lög*), 191 (*siðvenja*), 297 (*lög*, *vandi*), cf. *Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga*, 81, 146, 148 and *Flateyjarbók*, 2: 64; *Heimskringla*, 3: 207 (*for* *lög*).

27 See the introduction to *Hirðskræen: Hirdloven til Norges konge og hans håndgangne menn etter*

Secondly, the number of retainers or followers a political superior would have brought with him when exacting hospitality was more moderate than many modern people would assume. In cases of systematic exploitation of hospitality, such as that of the king, both the frequency of visits and the number of men to be accommodated were rigorously contested and restricted. According to the kings' sagas, the royal *hirð* was originally sixty men. Supposedly, it was doubled twice in the eleventh century, initially to one hundred and twenty by King Haraldr *harðráði* and then again by his son King Óláfr *kyrri*, bringing it to two hundred and forty men. *Fagrskinna*, *Morkinskinna*, and *Heimskringla* all contain lengthy passages on these changes and how they were met with reluctance and suspicion by the aristocracy, unwilling as it was to allow the king to go beyond customary limits of size when exacting feasts.<sup>28</sup> Judging by the evidence of the sagas, the itinerant court of Norwegian kings, accompanying him as he *fór á veizlur*, would on average have numbered either in the tens or, at most, somewhere over one hundred.<sup>29</sup> This may be compared to early and high medieval Carolingian and German kings, whose traveling court usually numbered in the hundreds, sometimes even as low as three hundred; and French, English, Sicilian, and Aragonese kings, whose retinue appears on average to have amounted to between three and five hundred. Princes and various lesser political heads exacting hospitality in early and high medieval Europe, secular and ecclesiastical, made do with much smaller numbers, a few tens of men.<sup>30</sup>

*AM 322 fol*, ed. Steinar Imsen (Oslo: Riksarkivet, 2000), esp. 24ff., and Didrik Arup Seip, "Hirdskrá," in *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingtid til reformationstid* [KLNLM], 22 vols. (Reykjavík: Bókaverslun Ísafoldar, 1976), 6: 580–82.

- 28 *Morkinskinna*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, 2 vols., Íslenzk fornrit, vols. 23–24 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2011), 2: 9; *Fagrskinna — Nóregs konunga tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, Íslenzk fornrit, vol. 29 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1985, 65, 301; *Heimskringla*, 3: 207. See also *Heimskringla*, 2: 72–73, cf. *Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga*, 103–4 and *Flateyjarbók*, 2: 48.
- 29 The size of feasts and the royal retinue is studied in Viðar Pálsson, *Language of Power*, 89–96.
- 30 Carlrichard Brühl, *Fodrum, gistum, servitium regis: Studien zu den wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen des Königtums im Frankenreich und den fränkischen Nachfolgestaaten Deutschland, Frankreich und Italien vom 6. bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, 2 bks. (Köln: Böhlau, 1968), 168–71; John W. Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany, c. 936–1075*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Fourth Series, vol. 21 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 58; Peyer, *Gastfreundschaft zum Gasthaus*, 156–57.

Turning to commonwealth Iceland, we may anticipate two things given what we know about Norway and Europe. Firstly, that if enforced hospitality was practiced, commonwealth law, *Grágás*, is unlikely to contain any regulations about it, neither the obligation nor its limits. It would have been dictated by unwritten custom, social norms. Secondly, that if enforced hospitality was practiced, its practitioner would have brought with him only a small band of men, perhaps just a handful. Clearly, *Grágás* contains articles that address obligatory hospitality, but these are unrelated to *slímuasetur* and the issue of enforced hospitality as an expression of power or social status. Thus, according to Christian law, it is a communal responsibility to take a newborn child to baptism without delay if a priest is not nearby and the child has to be taken to him. Its parents, or another person responsible for the child, must travel with it, but others are prohibited from hindering or delaying their travel in any way—they must offer food and shelter if needed (in exchange for payment in certain cases), assist with boats or ferries if waters must be crossed, make horses available if necessary, and so on.<sup>31</sup>

The visitation of Icelandic bishops and their demands for hospitality when surveying their dioceses is, I would argue, a closely related yet separate issue from that of enforced hospitality by political superiors and *slímesitting*. Rather, it was an internal matter of church administration, and only within that framework did it revolve around the political superiority of the bishop. Certainly, legal prohibitions against enforced hospitality in high medieval Europe were directed against all kinds of political heads exacting hospitality from political inferiors, including ecclesiastical leaders such as bishops. However, unlike many of their European colleagues, such as in France and the Empire, the Icelandic bishops were not concurrently secular administrators. On the contrary, their office was in every respect separate from secular political leadership (which did not deny them influence in the secular sphere). We should also remember that episcopal visitations were regulated by church law and that the new codes of the Norwegian realm prohibiting *slímuasetur*—*Járnsíða*, *Jónsbók*, *Landslög*—

31 *Grágás*, Ia: 4–7; II, 1–7; *Grágás* [III]: *Stykkur, som findes i det Arnamagnæanske Haandskrift Nr. 351 fol. Skálholtsbók og en Række andre Haandskrifter*, ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1883), 1–6; *Járnsíða*, 145–46. There are other special circumstances too, cf. *Grágás*, Ia: 24, 27, *Grágás*, II: 26, 29, 35–36, 74, 119, 169, 211, 252, 333, *Grágás*, III: 30, 77, 123, 173, 214, 256–57, 339.

were secular law. Church law was to be reformed and issued as an independent body of law alongside these secular codes, including regulations of episcopal administration and visitations. The location of the article on slimesitting within secular law therefore reinforces the understanding that it was principally meant to regulate secular political culture. It is easy to imagine, nonetheless, that in practice there may not always have been a straightforward separation in people's minds when they felt bishops to be overbearing or costly during their visitations.

The Old Christian Law, *Kristinna laga þáttir* in *Grágás*, gives no instructions on the practicalities and logistics of episcopal visitations, aside from the obligation of farmers hosting the bishop to provide horses if necessary. The law simply commands that the bishop of Hólar shall survey his diocese annually and the bishop of Skálholt shall survey his diocese every three years, that is one-third annually.<sup>32</sup> Bishops occasionally appear on a visitation in the bishops' sagas and contemporary sagas (*biskupa sögur* and *samtíðarsögur*). According to *Guðmundar saga dýra* in *Sturlunga saga*, Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson of Hólar (b. 1163–1201) *gisti* every other church farm when he surveyed his diocese. In most cases, however, it remains unclear to the saga audience whether and how the presence of a bishop, such as when he is seen feasting, was in connection with his inspection.<sup>33</sup> King Eiríkr Magnússon (r. 1280–99) and Bishop Árni Þorláksson of Skálholt (b. 1269–98) reached a general agreement on the limits of visitations by the Concordat of Ögvaldsnes in 1297, according to which the bishop should survey (*visitera*) his region evenly and only after the Mass of Peter and Paul on June 29.<sup>34</sup> The bishop of Hólar continued to survey his region annually until at least the early fourteenth century. Regulating episcopal visitations (*yfirfor/yfirferð/yfirsókn*), such as the size of the bishop's retinue and proper notice of its schedule, remained a work in progress in the later Middle Ages, well past the commonwealth era and

32 *Grágás*, Ia: 19, II: 22–23, III: 20–21, 69, 113–14, 163–64, 207, 246–47, 288, 324–25.

33 For example, such as when Bishop Brandur accepted a feast (*boð*) at Helgastaðir or when Bishop Magnús Gizurarson of Skálholt was hosted at a feast (*veizla*) by Órækja Snorrason in Vatnsfjörður in 1233. See *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn, 2 vols. (Reykjavík: Sturlunguútgáfan, 1946), 1: 161–62, 362–63.

34 *Diplomatarium Islandicum: Íslenskt fornbréfasafn, sem hefir inni að halda bréf og gjörninga, dóma og máldaga, og aðrar skrár er snerta Ísland eða íslenska menn*, ed. Jón Sigurðsson, Jón Þorkelsson, Páll Eggert Ólason, and Björn Þorsteinsson, 16 vols. (Copenhagen and Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1857–1972), 2: 325.

King Magnús's legal reforms. At some point, church farmers received the option of paying off the obligation to host the bishop (*úthlutning* or *útlausn*), but the origins and extent of that practice are unclear.<sup>35</sup>

The case of Bishop Guðmundr *góði* of Hólar (b. 1203–37) is atypical, and parts of it may in some sense be understood in terms of slimesitting. Guðmundr's church politics and finances were at odds with traditional ideas upheld by many of the political elite, including powerful chieftains in his diocese. With appeal to humility, Guðmundr took various people under his protection and often traveled with a considerable flock. As is evident from *Guðmundar sögur* and *Sturlunga saga*, local farmers were not too keen on maintaining such a crowd at their own expense, regardless of whether Guðmundr was formally on a visitation or otherwise traveling through the region. For example, the tension is evident in this scene in *Sturlunga*, depicting uneasy circumstances in 1220:<sup>36</sup>

Síðan fóru þeir norðr til Svarfaðardals, ok ætlaði biskup norðr í sýslu sína. En Eyfirðingar vildu eigi taka við biskupi á bæi sína ok flokk hans.

[Guðmundr arrives in Reykjadalur] ... Dreif þá til hans fólk margt. Bergþórr Jónsson var þar með biskupi, ok hafði hann nær tíu tígum manna. Þótti bóndum þungt undir at búa ok þolðu þó um hrið. Ferr biskup í Múla, ok tekr Ívarr við honum liðliga, ok er þar sæmilig veizla, þess er sjá mátti, at engi ástsemð var veitt af Ívari. Skilja þeir þó vel, ok fór biskup á brott ...

They then proceeded north to Svarfaðardalur, the bishop intending to advance north to his see. But the farmers of Eyjafjörður refused to host him and his flock at their farms.

[Guðmundr arrives in Reykjadalur] ... People flocked to him in numbers. Bergþórr Jónsson accompanied the bishop with nearly one hundred men. The farmers felt that the burdens were heavy but

35 See Gunnar F. Guðmundsson, *Íslenskt samfélag og Rómakirkja*, vol. 2 of *Kristni á Íslandi* (Reykjavík: Alþingi, 2000), 110–14, and Magnús Már Lárusson, “Gästning. Island,” in *KLNM*, 6: 18–19. The New Christian Law, Bishop Árni's *Kristinréttir* of 1275, expanded previous provisions on the obligation to provide horses for the bishop and his men upon request when on a visitation, cf. *Járnsíða*, 149.

36 *Sturlunga saga*, 1: 274–75.



nonetheless endured them for a while. The bishop arrived at Múli, and Ívarr hosted him impeccably. There was a respectable *veizla*, which Ívarr clearly offered without affection. They parted on good terms, however, and the bishop went on his way ...

Ívarr quickly gathered men before the bishop returned, this time drawing them up for battle:

En at þeim viðbúningi ríðr biskup í tún.

Spyrja þeir Eyjólf [who was with the bishop], hvat safnaðr þessi skal.

En Ívarr segir, at þeir skuli nú at keyptu komast, áðr þeir fái eign hans, ok segir, at nú skal fara allt saman, karl ok kýr.

The bishop rode into the home-field as the arrangements were being carried out.

They asked Eyjólfur what was up with the crowd.

Ívarr said this time they would have to pay full price before getting hands on his property, it would be over his dead body.

Reluctance to host the bishop under comparable circumstances is widely discernible in *Sturlunga*.<sup>37</sup> In a general sense, this is akin to slimesitting, as violent exaction of hospitality is by nature. However, Guðmundr's intention was hardly to impose his political authority on inferiors by demonstrative action, the kind of which legislators had in mind when prohibiting slimesitting. Rather, he demanded Christian and communal responsibility for the maintenance of their bishop and his flock, which plainly counted many people of humble social and financial standing.

Examination of the political culture that is described in *Sturlunga saga* and other relevant narratives for the commonwealth period quickly reveals that, unlike Norwegian political culture and most other premodern political cultures in Western Europe to which we have referred, it was not characterized by regular or systematic exaction of hospitality by political superiors. On the contrary, such practice is noticeably absent. Feasting and gift-giving remained native expressions of bonding among peers or

37 See, e.g., *Sturlunga saga*, 1: 272–77, 317–18, *passim*.

near-peers in medieval Iceland, and sometimes served to cement bonds between chieftains and their closest followers.<sup>38</sup> But *Herrschaftsgastung* in one form or another was never an element of typical commonwealth leadership, even as it transformed into territorial lordship towards the final stages of the commonwealth era. There are several reasons for this. The Icelandic theater of power was much smaller than that of, for example, Norway, and its actors played on a comparatively small stage. Despite their best efforts, they were in no way comparable to or in the same league as the foremost Norwegian notables (including, of course, the king), let alone major European figures. They operated in a rural economy without cities, and Iceland's population was small. They fought over human and other resources that were poor and limited compared to most other places in Western Europe at the time. Much has been written on the financial basis of commonwealth chieftains that cannot be reviewed here,<sup>39</sup> but it remains clear that they neither needed nor had the capacity to perambulate their domains on a regular basis and exact hospitality as a form of taxation and a display of political dominance. Prior to the formation of territorial domains in the thirteenth century and the consolidation of power into the hands of the few, a chieftain's sphere of power would in any case not have spanned great distances.

Guðmundr *dýri* (d. 1212) is the single chieftain in the corpus of contemporary sagas reported to have imposed regular visits on his kinsmen and *þingmenn*. He was a chieftain in Eyjafjörður, living at Bakki in Öxnadalur. The saga briefly reports:<sup>40</sup>

Guðmundr átti fjölða þingmanna út um Svarfaðardal ok náfrændr, ok fór hann þannig at heimboðum haust ok vár.

Guðmundur had many thingmen and kinsmen in Svarfaðardalur, and went there for *heimboð* in autumn and spring.

One assumes these visits were imposed, yet the reference is too brief and

38 See Viðar Pálsson, "Forming Bonds with Followers in Medieval Iceland: The Cases of Thordr kakali and Thorgils skarði," in *Nordic Elites in Transformation, c. 1050–1250*, ed. by Kim Esmark, Lars Hermanson, and Hans Jacob Orning, vol. 2: *Social Networks*, Routledge Research in Medieval Studies (Routledge: New York, 2020).

39 For an introduction, see Gunnar Karlsson, *Godamenninn: Staða og áhrif goðorðsmanna í þjóðveldi Íslendinga* (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 2004), 166–78, 316–33.

40 *Sturlunga saga*, 1: 176.

general to allow much speculation. The level of obligation is unclear. At this point, the saga author is more interested in Guðmundr's deplorable behavior towards women when out and about than in the exact nature of the hospitality offered by his *þingmenn*.<sup>41</sup>

Neither is enforced hospitality a characteristic of the political culture depicted in the saga world of *Íslendingasögur*. The anomaly is *Ófeigs þátr*, a short thirteenth-century tale associated with *Ljósvetninga saga*. The tale tells of Guðmundr *dýri*'s namesake and great-great-great-grandfather through the direct male line, Guðmundr *ríki* (*dýrr* and *ríkr* both mean 'powerful'). He was likewise a chieftain in Eyjafjörður and it was his routine:<sup>42</sup>

at fara norðr um heruð á várit ok hitta þingmenn sína ok ræða um heraðsstjórn ok skipa málum með mǫnnum. Ok stóð þeim af því hallæri mikit, er hǫfðu lítt áðr skipat til búa sinna. Hann reið opt með þrjá tigu manna ok sat víða sjau nætr ok hafði jafnmarga hesta.

to proceed to the northern districts in the spring, meet with his thingmen, deal with local governance, and arrange matters with people. This placed great financial strain on those who had by that point scarcely made provision for their households. He frequently rode with thirty men, staying seven nights in many places, and bringing as many horses.

However, the tale's protagonist, Ófeigr, leads the farmers' resistance, and new limits are negotiated between the parties. It is evident from the *þátr* that Guðmundr *ríki* had little financial stake in exacting hospitality with force, rather it was about demonstrating a strong hand. Given the relations between the two Guðmundar, and that *Sturlunga* alludes to Guðmundr *dýri* imposing himself on his *þingmenn* in Svarfaðardalur, it is tempting to link the two together. The tale in *Ófeigs þátr* may have originated during the days of Guðmundur *dýri* or shortly thereafter, warning against overbearing behavior among the politically strong.<sup>43</sup>

41 Cf. *Sturlunga saga*, 1: 175–76.

42 *Ófeigs þátr*, ed. Björn Sigfússon, *Íslensk fornrit*, vol. 10 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornrita-félag, 1940), 117.

43 On Guðmundr *ríki*, see Gisli Sigurðsson, "The Immanent Saga of Guðmundur ríki," in Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, eds. *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse*

The strongest chieftains in *Sturlunga* and the ones we get closest to in the narrative, such as Snorri Sturluson and his brothers, are not shown imposing themselves on their political inferiors and demanding to be formally received by them in *veizlur*, neither routinely nor sporadically. The saga never hints that they desired to do so. It is beyond the scope of this article to treat the case of Þorgils *skarði*, a king's man who resorted to violence and threats when his claims for recognition of authority were refuted by local farmers. Some he forced into acceptance through hospitality (*veizlur*), having either threatened them with violence or simply beaten them up. However, the context of his actions was specific and quite different from that of *slímusetur*.<sup>44</sup>

## European Echoes—Concluding Remarks

The introduction to Icelandic law of a prohibition against *slímusetur*, in *Járnsíða* and *Jónsbók*, was not a response to local political conditions. Mainly, it was symptomatic of the fact that Iceland had now joined a new and different political unity, the Norwegian realm. In Norway, its introduction corresponded better to local conditions. Ultimately, however, the legal measures taken against forced hospitality in Scandinavia were echoes of a European development in which kings and princes increasingly policed their territories as legislators, supreme judges, and protectors of public peace and order.<sup>45</sup>

Also in the larger context, it is worth noting that the practice of enforced hospitality, the obligatory reception of a political superior, did not lose its importance within medieval political discourse through these developments (state formation). On the contrary, it underscored the primacy of kings and princes as it was denied to others. In other words, kings increasingly redefined such behavior by others as illegal violence, slimestitting, and breach of public peace, while reserving for themselves

*World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, vol. 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

44 Þorgils *skarði*'s actions are studied, with relevant examples, in Viðar Pálsson, *Language of Power*, 163–65, 175–81.

45 Around the same time, stipulations entered Scandinavian law that forbade travelers, powerful and not, from demanding lodging without payment, for which there was often cited customary hospitality of some sort. Evidently, that had become too burdensome. This is a related yet a separate issue. See Jerker Rosén, “Väldgästning,” in *KLNMM*, 20: 280–81.

the right to such political display. The application of enforced hospitality as a realization of political and social relations is deep-seated in Western political culture (and more widely, for that matter) and extends back to antiquity. In imperial Rome, the emperor's power and a city's loyalty and subordination to him were ritually displayed in the *adventus*, a highly ceremonial reception of the ruler into the city.<sup>46</sup> Medieval kings, especially in the late Middle Ages and beyond, practiced similarly lavish and formal entries into key cities and towns to underscore their authority. Such royal entries, as they are collectively called, were often styled as 'ancient tradition' and explicitly referred to the imperial *adventus* in its ceremonial language and symbolism. The reception of a new monarch into a city was often the occasion for renewing rights and privileges, not least the spelling out of the limitations of the ruler's power over the city and its inhabitants. This was especially noticeable for the entries in the Netherlands, known as the 'Joyous Entry' (*Blijde Intrede* in Dutch but commonly referred to in French, *Joyeuse Entrée*), but royal entries were called *Joyeuse Entrée* outside of the Netherlands as well.<sup>47</sup> In both Roman and medieval entries, formal hospitality and feasting lay at the heart of the ritual. In this context, the deed was not defined as slimesitting or violence but a royal or princely prerogative, a spectacle of state.

46 See Björn C. Ewald's and Carlos F. Noreña's introduction to their *The Emperor and Rome: Space, Representation, and Ritual*, Yale Classical Studies, vol. 35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 40–41 with further citations.

47 See Gordon Kipling, *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

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## ÁGRIP

*Slímusetur* í fornislenskum lögum og evrópsku samhengi

**Efnisorð:** *slímusetur, veizlur*, norræn og evrópsk miðaldalög, vaxandi ríkisvald

Ísland fékk ný lög af hendi konungs 1271, *Járnsíðu*. Meðal nýmæla í þeim var bann við því að óvelkominir og yfirgangssamir gestir *sætu slímusetri* í veislum annarra. Sams konar lagagreinar standa í norskum *Landslögum* Magnúsar lagabætis (1274) og *Jónsbók* (1281).

Til þess að skilja nývaknaðan áhuga konungs á því að girða fyrir *slímusetur* er nauðsynlegt að setja hann í samhengi við bæði staðbundnar lagaumbætur og evrópskt tungutak valds. Ýmsir hlutir sem áður höfðu staðið utan valdsviðs konungs voru nú beygðir undir það. Í greininni færi ég rök fyrir því að lög sem settu yfirgangsmönnum stólinn fyrir dyrnar og lögðu bann við því að þeir þröngvúðu sér upp á aðra með kröfu um formlegan viðurgerning (veislu) beri að skilja í evrópsku samhengi og með samanburði við sambærilega lagasetningu annars staðar í Evrópu á hámiðöldum. Þetta tvennt, staðbundið og evrópskt samhengi, er þó að endingu tvö sjónarhorn á sama fyrirbærið, gagnleg til þess að draga fram hið sérstaka og samhengisbundna gagnvart hinu almenna. Lagaumbætur í Noregsveldi á síðari hluta þrettándu aldar voru fyrst og fremst tilbrigði við evrópskt stef sem ómaði hátt og snjallt á hámiðöldum og var leiðarstef í víðtækari samfélagsbyltingu álfunnar, vexti og viðgangi ríkisvalds.

Innleiðing laga gegn *slímusetri*, fyrst í *Járnsíðu* og síðan *Jónsbók*, var ekki víðbragð við staðbundinni valdamenningu á Íslandi. Þvert á móti var hún til merkis um að Ísland væri orðið hluti af nýrri og annars konar valdaheild, Noregsveldi. Lög gegn *slímusetri* áttu mun betur við norska valdamenningu. Framar öllu voru þau, og önnur sambærileg ákvæði á Norðurlöndum, endurómur frá Evrópu, þar sem konungar og aðrir furstar gengu sífellt lengra við stjórn og ögun valdasvæða sinna í hlutverki löggjafa, ædsta dómara og verndara almannafríðar og -reglu.

## SUMMARY

*Slímusetur* in Early Icelandic Law and its European Context

**Keywords:** *slímusetur*, hospitality, medieval Nordic and European law, state formation

Iceland received new law from its king in 1271, *Járnsíða* (Ironsides). Among other novelties, it forbade unwelcome and overbearing guests ‘slimesitting’ at other people’s feasts, *sitja slímusetri*. Analogous articles appear in the Norwegian *Landslög* (National Law, 1274) and *Jónsbók* (1281).

To understand the king’s newly acquired interest in legislating against *slímusetur*, it is necessary to appreciate both the local context of legal reform and the European context of political language. Many things that had not been the concern of the king now became so. My present argument is that law forbidding people from imposing themselves on others by enforced hospitality must be understood in its European context and in comparison with similar legal provisions made elsewhere during the high Middle Ages. The two contexts, local and European, are but different viewpoints; however, they are useful in separating the specific and contextual from that which is general. The local context of legal reform in the Norwegian realm during the second half of the thirteenth century is principally a variant on a European theme that rang loud in the central Middle Ages. Essentially, it was a part of a larger, European process of state building.

The introduction to Icelandic law of a prohibition against *slímusetur*, in *Járnsíða* and then *Jónsbók*, was not a response to local political conditions. Mainly, it was symptomatic of the fact that Iceland had now joined a new and different political unity, the Norwegian realm. In Norway, its introduction corresponded better to local conditions. Ultimately, however, the legal measures taken against forced hospitality in Scandinavia were echoes of a European development in which kings and princes increasingly policed their territories as legislators, supreme judges, and protectors of public peace and order.

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