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THE PRINCE AND THE *PRANDIUM*: THE MOTIF OF THE PRE-BATTLE LUNCH IN THE MONK OF SÁZAVA'S ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF CHLUMEC (1126)

Abstract: This article delves into the Monk of Sázava's narrative, a late twelfth-century continuation of Cosmas of Prague's chronicle, which recounts the preparations of Prince Soběslav I of Bohemia for the battle of Chlumec against King Lothar III of Germany on 18 February 1126. In particular, the analysis centres on the motif of the lunch (*prandium*) that the Bohemian ruler is said to have shared with his men shortly before the battle. Through comparative examination and analysis, the article unveils a contrasting perspective. Unlike numerous narratives that castigate rulers for engaging in a meal prior to battle, the chronicler strategically employed this motif to elevate the character of the prince. This elevation was achieved by infusing the lunch with religious overtones.
Keywords: Battle of Chlumec, Monk of Sázava, pre-battle meal, religion and war, Soběslav I of Bohemia, princely feast, medieval historiography.

The Battle of Chlumec,[1] which was fought 18 February 1126, held a unique place in the collective memory of medieval Bohemians. It was not merely seen as a chapter in the ongoing conflict between the Přemyslid rulers, but rather as an extraordinary moment in the history of Bohemian-German relations. It is true that the German King Lothar (III) of Supplinburg, who supported Otto the Black, was defeated in the battle, but there was a more important reason for the formation of such a memory. Downplayed in mutual

[1] For the battle, see esp. Wojciech Iwańczak, 'The Pretended Miracle or the Battle of Chlumec in 1126', *Acta Archaeologica Lodziensia*, 47, 2001, pp. 12–18; Vratislav Vaníček, *Soběslav I. Přemyslovci v kontextu evropských dějin v letech 1092–1140*, Prague and Litomyšl, 2007, pp. 165–97; Joanna Sobiesiak, 'Znaczenie bitwy pod Chlumcem (1126) dla relacji politycznych między władcą niemieckim Lotarem III a czeskim księciem Sobiesławem I', *Res Historica*, 38, 2015, pp. 43–59, where further literature is cited.

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relations,[2] Soběslav I's victory offered weighty potential to strengthen the position of the prince within Bohemia as a saviour against external aggression. This is clearly demonstrated by the omission of the fratricidal aspect of the conflict in historical sources. Instead, the victory was portrayed as a triumph in a just and defensive war, achieved by the joint efforts of the Prague ruler and all Bohemians, with the aid of God and the holy patrons of the country.[3]

Undoubtedly, the promotion of this particular image of the battle was championed by the victor, Soběslav I. However, an equally crucial role was played by the clergy, who had close ties to Soběslav and provided significant ideological backing to the ruler, even during the heat of the battle.[4] This ecclesiastical milieu produced the so-called Canon of Vyšehrad, which shaped for good the image of the clash as an event that united the community of Bohemians around the youngest son of King Vratislav I.[5] A strong bias in favour of Soběslav, though less clearly motivated, can also be found in accounts independent of this narrative: that is in the *Annals of Hradiště-Opatovice*, written in Moravia in the second half of the twelfth

[2] Jan Zelenka, 'Vazal nebo přítel? Význam rituálu homagia ve vztahu mezi českým knížetem Soběslavem I. a císařem Lotharem III.', in *Drugie polsko-czeskie forum młodych mediewistów*, ed. Józef Dobosz, Jakub Kujawiński and Marzena Matla, Poznań, 2009, pp. 61–71.

[3] Compare with Dušan Třeštík, *Kosmova kronika: Studie k počátkům českého dějepisectví a politického myšlení*, Prague, 1968, pp. 200–04; František Graus, 'Der Heilige als Schlachtenhelfer — Zur Nationalisierung einer Wundererzählung in der mittelalterlichen Chronistik', in *Festschrift für Helmut Beumann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Kurt-Ulrich Jäschke and Reinhard Wenskus, Sigmaringen, 1977, pp. 330–48 (pp. 342 f.); Anežka Merhautová, 'Výtvarný medailónek bitvy u Chlumce', in *Na předělu věků: Sborník k poctě PhDr. Jaroslava Pešiny, DrSc.*, ed. Jiří Kropáček, Prague, 1994, pp. 55–58; Stefanie Rüther, 'Heilige im Krieg — Zur Sakralisierung von Kriegsschauplätzen im Mittelalter', in *Heilige, Liturgie, Raum*, ed. Dieter R. Bauer et al., Wiesbaden and Stuttgart, 2010, pp. 247–68 (p. 257); and Christine Grieb, *Schlachtenschilderungen in Historiographie und Literatur (1150–1230)*, Paderborn, 2015, p. 267.

[4] Josef Žemlička, 'Svatý Václav jako věčný kníže "Čechů"', in *Svatý Václav: Na památku 1100. výročí narození knížete Václava Svatého*, ed. Petr Kubín, Prague, 2010, pp. 211–20 (p. 212).

[5] *Canonici Wissegradensis continuatio Cosmae*, in *Fontes rerum Bohemicarum*, 8 vols, Prague, 1873–1932, vol. 2, ed. Josef Emler, 1874, pp. 201–37 (p. 204). Compare with Robert Antonín, *The Ideal Ruler in Medieval Bohemia*, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2017, pp. 114 f., 132 f.; idem, 'Pre-, Intra-, and Postbellum Rites in High and Late Medieval Bohemia', in *Religious Rites of War beyond the Medieval West*, 2 vols, ed. Radosław Kotecki, Jacek Maciejewski and Gregory Leighton, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2023, vol. 2: *Central and Eastern Europe*, pp. 140–66 (p. 165), where later renditions of the story are indicated. For a more in-depth analysis of the Canon's narrative, see Radosław Kotecki, 'Bohemian Experiences with Military Religion in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, or How to Secure the Intercession of the Patron Saint', in *Religious Rites of War beyond the Medieval West*, vol. 2, pp. 77–139 (esp. pp. 89–112).

century;[6] as well as a slightly later account by an anonymous Benedictine chronicler from the Sázava monastery. This article investigates the message of the latter account.[7]

Though no less positively disposed towards Soběslav, the so-called Monk of Sázava presents a picture of events that is highly original by comparison. Unlike the Canon of Vyšehrad, he does not pay much attention to the course of the battle and, although he is certain that the prince was supported by God as well as St Wenceslaus and St Adalbert, he makes no mention of the miracles which allegedly took place during the battle. Instead, he is more interested in the figures of the antagonists. He devotes much attention to Otto's visit to the court of Lothar III and the request he made at the time for help in removing Soběslav, and then to the circumstances in which the dispute was settled after the battle. Particularly intriguing, however, is the information he gives about the Soběslav's preparations to repel the German invasion, which is not reflected in other accounts: information about ruler's pious and stoic attitude upon hearing of the German king's intentions, and the supplicatory prayers in Bohemian churches (*monasteria*). Although historians have traditionally regarded this information with confidence, often using it to complement the account of the Canon of Vyšehrad, it is essential to first scrutinize the chronicler's interpretation of these events to grasp their meaning. To illustrate the value of such an approach, we can examine a pivotal scene in the narrative: Soběslav's decision to eat lunch, seemingly ignoring the imminent threat of a hostile attack. The chronicler describes this episode as follows:

> Therefore, it was reported to Prince Soběslav that King Lothar was threatening the Bohemians, preparing for war, and intending to devastate the kingdom unless, as soon as possible after Soběslav's expulsion, they agreed to enthrone Otto as their prince. But Prince Soběslav, completely unaffected by these rumours, responded briefly in a composed voice: 'I trust in God's mercy and in the merits of the holy martyrs of Christ, Wenceslaus and Adalbert, that our land will not be handed over to foreigners'. From then on, the most prudent prince directed all his thoughts towards the Lord, visited all churches [*monasteria*], imploring that divine defence be his support during adverse events. And when he learned that King Lothar had approached the Bohemian border with

[6] *Annales Gradicenses-Opatovicenses*, in *Fontes rerum Bohemicarum*, vol. 2, pp. 386–406 (p. 393).

[7] For more on the chronicle, see Jan Zelenka, 'Kosmas, Mnich sázavský, Jarloch a 70. léta 12. Století', in *Vladislav II., druhý král z Přemyslova rodu*, ed. Michal Mašek, Petr Sommer and Josef Žemlička, Prague, 2009, pp. 50–68, where further scholarship is provided.

> a strong Saxon army, he hurried to block his path at the stronghold called Chlumec. On the next day, while Prince Soběslav was having lunch with his companions, there came people who said: 'Oh best of princes! You indulge in the pleasures of food and act carelessly, for unless you go out to meet them quickly, behold, the swords of the enemies will dominate over our necks'. Soon, clamour arose in the camp, so that everyone would be prepared. In the meantime, Duke Soběslav sent envoys [...] to the king.[8]

Reading the above passage literally, we can understand the message as follows. Soběslav arrives in Chlumec with the clear military objective of halting Lothar's advance into Bohemia. However, in what appears to be a contradiction to this purpose, instead of immediately addressing the imminent threat, Prince Soběslav calmly sits down to eat lunch (*ad prandendum*). This attitude seems so at odds with the pressing needs of the moment that some of his subjects take a stand and urge the prince to forsake the 'pleasures of food' and take decisive action. The argument they make is simple: unless the prince ceases eating promptly and prioritizes the country's welfare over his own enjoyment, the Bohemians will find no salvation.

The story seems to compel us to treat this theme in terms of literary fiction. It becomes apparent that the motif of the meal carries a unique and profound significance within the story. After all, it is the dining scene that encapsulates the dramatic tension arising from the prince's behaviour — actions that, at first glance, seem ill-suited to the gravity of the situation but, paradoxically, ultimately prove advantageous for the Bohemians. This prompts immediate inquiries into the underlying motivations behind this portrayal. Instead of offering a straightforward answer, the text presents readers with contradictory clues, casting

[8] For the Latin text, see *Monachi Sazaviensis continuatio Cosmae*, in *Fontes rerum Bohemicarum*, vol. 2, pp. 238–69 (p. 255): 'Relatum est igitur duci Sobezlao, regem Lotharium minari Boemiis, bella parare, regni devastationem machinari, nisi citius Sobezlao depulso Ottonem sibi ducem intronizari consentiant. Sed dux Sobezlaus nichil penitus his motus rumoribus modificata voce breviter respondit: Spero in dei misericordia et in meritis sanctorum martyrum Christi Wencezlai atque Adalberti, quia non tradetur terra nostra in manus alienigenarum. Ex hinc ergo prudentissimus dux iactans totum cogitatum suum in domino, circuivit omnia monasteria, divina implorans in adversis eventibus sibi adminiculari praesidia. Postquam autem cognovit regem Lotharium cum valida Saxonum manu Boemicis appropinquare terminis, festinavit ei occurrere ad castrum, quod Hlumec dicitur. Sequenti die consedente duce Sobezlao cum suis ad prandendum, venerunt, qui dicerent: "Optime dux, tu deliciis ciborum intendis et minus caute agis, quia iam ecce, nisi ocius obvies eis, hostium enses cervicibus nostris dominabuntur". Mox ergo fit clamor in castris, ut sit unusquisque paratus. Praemittit interim dux Sobezlaus legatos [...] suis ad regem'.

doubt and causing hesitation when evaluating Soběslav's behaviour. Such uncertainty is deepened by the fact that it is the prince's subjects who express reservations about his actions. This aspect holds particular significance since, in literary narratives, dissent against the monarch's decisions often serves as a channel for a higher rationale.

However, it appears that contemporary readers of the chronicle fail to notice these nuances. Vratislav Vaníček, the author of a biography of Soběslav, states in his extensive reflections on the Battle of Chlumec that following the admonition by his subjects, the ruler hurriedly finished his lunch in order to set up the army's formation and launch an attack.[9] However, this assertion not only diverges from the source's literal text but also skews its message by disregarding the profound ideological implications tied to the act of gathering around a table to share a meal. Anita Guerreau-Jalabert and Maria Fiano have previously highlighted the rich symbolic connotations intertwined with these practices. They also underscore the exceptional significance of depictions of feasts hosted by rulers, which serve as a means to convey a carefully constructed vision of the ideal societal structure, hierarchy and cultural norms.[10] For medieval authors a table with food was regarded as a visible sign of the host's power.[11] This interpretation gains further support from the work of Jacek Banaszkiewicz, who has traced numerous literary works in which the theme of seizing control of the table serves as a narrative device for depicting the attaining of power. In tales where the legitimate ruler regains his throne by ousting an usurper, a recurring

[9] Vaníček, *Soběslav I.*, p. 191.

[10] Anita Guerreau-Jalabert, 'Aliments symboliques et symbolique de la table dans les romans arthuriens (XII^{e}–XIII^{e} siècles)', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 47, 1992, 3, pp. 561–94 (pp. 577–80); Maria Fiano, 'Il banchetto regio nelle fonti altomedioevali: Tra scrittura ed interpretazione', *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome: Moyen-Âge*, 115, 2003, 2, pp. 637–82.

[11] For the perspective of the East Central European sources, see esp. Jacek Banaszkiewicz, 'Trzy razy uczta', in *Społeczeństwo Polski średniowiecznej*, vol. 5, ed. Stefan Krzysztof Kuczyński, Warsaw, 1992, pp. 95–108; idem, *Podanie o Piaście i Popielu: Studium porównawcze nad wczesnośredniowiecznymi tradycjami dynastycznymi*, 2nd edn, Warsaw, 2010, pp. 60–103; Marian Dygo, 'Uczty Bolesława Chrobrego', *KH*, 112, 2005, 3, pp. 41–54; Przemysław Wiszewski, *'Domus Bolezlai': Values and Social Identity in Dynastic Traditions of Medieval Poland (c. 966–1138)*, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2010, p. 209; Joanna Sobiesiak, 'Książę Wacław na uczcie — książę Wacław gospodarz', in *'Persona, gestus habitusque, insignium': Zachowania i atrybuty jako wyznaczniki tożsamości społecznej jednostki w średniowieczu*, ed. Jacek Banaszkiewicz, Jacek Maciejewski and Joanna Sobiesiak, Lublin, 2009, pp. 47–56; Beth Rogers, 'Feast, Famine and Eating "Every Nauseous Thing": Portrayals of Food in the Russian Primary Chronicle', *Ruthenica*, 14, 2017, pp. 26–33 (pp. 28 f.); Michał Machalski, '(Un)faithful Subjects of (Un)faithful Rulers', *Historical Studies on Central Europe*, 1, 2021, 1, pp. 44–67 (pp. 50–51).

theme involves stumbling upon a table meticulously set by the enemy for a feast that never had the chance to commence. This discovery is then followed by the symbolic act of claiming dominion, exemplified by the rightful lord sitting at the table and sharing a meal with his loyal followers[12]. While the specific motif of seizing control of the table is not explicitly present in the Monk of Sázava's narrative, it cannot be excluded that echoes of this concept are still discernible within the story's ideological framework. Soběslav emerges as the rightful ruler of the Bohemian domain, likely due to the fact that his table remains untouched by Lothar's pretensions. As Soběslav calmly partakes in lunch with his men in the border stronghold, his confidence in his rightful position is unmistakable.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the portrayal of the princely meal, distinguished by specific attributes, diverges substantially from the imagery found in depictions that use the motif of 'feasts of reckoning'. It is true that thanks to the reference to the meal, the account seems to position Soběslav in the role of the rightful lord of the domain, but the justification for such a representation in the Monk of Sázava's account is not secular content, which usually dominates the narratives analysed by Banaszkiewicz, but a religious one. The narrative authored by the Sázava chronicler centres primarily on the theme of subjects admonishing their ruler and urging him to forgo a meal. Consequently, the pivotal aspect of interpreting this narrative lies in comprehending the reasons behind the ruler's 'need' for admonition and the manner in which he chooses to respond to it. At this point we should note that the chronicler does not say that the prince interrupted his lunch as a result of the criticism of his conduct. We learn only that he sent envoys to Lothar's camp with a message threatening the king that if he did not abandon his intentions, he would be defeated by the hand of God — for the Bohemians were ready to die for justice.[13] Thus, the battle does not

[12] For Banaszkiewicz's works, see n. 11 above as well as Jacek Banaszkiewicz, 'Uczta rozrachunku (Quentin Tarantino, Wincenty Kadłubek, Bruno z Kwerfurtu, Richer z Reims): Krótko o pewnym schemacie narracyjnym racjonalizującym przedstawianą rzeczywistość', in *Świat średniowiecza: Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Henrykowi Samsonowiczowi*, ed. Agnieszka Bartoszewicz et al., Warsaw, 2010, pp. 634–46; idem, *Na Akwizgran! Na Paryż! — i z powrotem w roku 978: Król Franków Lotar i cesarz Otto II w konflikcie kulturowo-militarnym*, Cracow, 2022, pp. 254–64. See also Wojciech Michalski, *Robert Bruce i jego kompania w eposie pióra Johna Barboura: 'The Bruce' około 1376 roku*, Lublin, 2020, pp. 157–64.

[13] *Monachi Sazaviensis continuatio Cosmae*, pp. 255 f.: 'Scias, nos nullatenus ad id consentire magisque pro iustitia pie velle occumbere, quam iniustis decretis cedere, et revera, nisi ab hac molitione desistas, in proximo est, omnipotentis dei iudicium inter nos inposterum memorabile seculis ostendat prodigium'. For just cause as a condition for being granted victory in the battle by God, see Hans-Werner Goetz, *Gott und*

take place as a result of the subjects' intervention at the prince's table, but only after Lothar's stance has been ascertained. Such an approach, considering the validity of the antagonists' attitudes also from the point of view of religion, is characteristic.

At this point let us note a fundamental fact that requires special attention. The activity that the prince engages in does not, at the basic level of meaning, match the message of the narrative: that Soběslav's actions are right and that he wins God's favour before the battle. This is because eating food before an armed confrontation is almost always viewed in a negative light in writings from the period. There are essentially two reasons behind such a view, each of which carries important implications for the interpretation of the story in question.

First, the accounts classify the consumption of food before battle as an activity that contradicts the belief that only people who are humble and reject worldly pleasures deserve God's favour. This ideal is primarily derived from narratives where the main characters are depicted as adhering to it, receiving praise for purifying their souls through devout practices and by renouncing food, extravagance and secular enjoyments.[14] Nevertheless, there are accounts that portray this particular ideal in a negative manner. They suggest that eating before battle was treated as improper and sinful. How the matter was understood is best demonstrated by Aelred of Rievaulx, who in his comparison of the English and the Scots preparing to fight at Northallerton in 1138 states that the former arrived on the battlefield full of humility, nourished only by Holy Communion; while the arrogant Gaels stuffed their stomachs with food pillaged along the way.[15] Equally significant is the

die Welt: Religiöse Vorstellungen des frühen und hohen Mittelalters, Berlin, 2011– , part 1, vol. 1: *Das Gottesbild*, pp. 110–19; Grieb, *Schlachtenschilderungen*, pp. 272–74; Gerd Althoff, *Gott belohnt, Gott straft: Religiöse Kategorien der Geschichtsdeutung im Frühen und Hohen Mittelalter*, Darmstadt, 2022.

[14] A wealth of information regarding fasting and participation in religious rituals prior to battles is provided in David S. Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War, c. 300–1215*, Woodbridge, 2003. See also Walter Pohl, 'Liturgie di guerra nei regni altomedievali', *Rivista di storia del cristianesimo*, 5, 2008, pp. 29–44; Jan Ptak, 'Zanim wyruszyli na wroga... Religijne przygotowanie do walki zbrojnej w średniowiecznej Polsce', *Teka Komisji Historycznej: Oddział Lubelski PAN*, 11, 2014, pp. 20–45; M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, *Invisible Weapons: Liturgy and the Making of Crusade Ideology*, Ithaca, NY, 2017, pp. 42, 111 f., 115, 211. More recently, compare the chapters gathered in an extensive two-volume collection, *Religious Rites of War beyond the Medieval West* (*Volume 1: Northern Europe and the Baltic*; *Volume 2: Central and Eastern Europe*), ed. Radosław Kotecki, Jacek Maciejewski and Gregory Leighton, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2023, according to the thematic indices.

[15] *The 'Relatio de Standardo' of St. Aelred, Abbot of Rievaulx*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of*

perspective offered by the author of the *Lanercost Chronicle* who, in recounting the Battle of Lewes (1264), attributes to the parties a similar set of behaviours. In his narrative, Edward I's adversaries are depicted as wholly virtuous, with Simon de Montfort, their commander, portrayed as a devout leader, who on the eve of the battle urges his troops to maintain a prayerful vigil, seeks confession, receives the Eucharist and entrusts himself to the Lord.[16] Conversely, the *regales* are described as sacrilegious and morally reprehensible, thus showing little concern for their souls. They opt for merriment and indulgence, engaging in activities such as singing, debauchery and revelry. The chronicler's use of the term *potationes* to describe these festivities underscores its broader connotation, encompassing not just drinking but also feasting and eating. This contrast becomes most apparent when juxtaposed with Simon's active involvement in the Eucharistic sacrifice, highlighting the stark disparity in their conduct and spiritual priorities.[17] Thus, as in Aelred's work, in this text too Holy Communion received by the party acting righteously finds an antithesis in the Scots' consumption — an action typical of a wicked and nefarious enemy.

Within medieval historiography, the belief that indulging in feasts and going into battle with a satiated stomach leads to defeat is a recurring theme. From a religious perspective, this line of thinking aligns with the natural order, as the Bible itself prophesies the transformation of feasts and revelry into moments of sorrow and lamentation because of the spiritual separation from God.[18] This is likely the primary explanation for why medieval authors frequently expressed criticism toward the consumption

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Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I, ed. Richard Howlett, vol. 3, Cambridge, 1886, pp. 181–201 (p. 189). The portrayal of the Scots here conforms to the topos of the barbarians as uncivilized gluttons. See Paul Tuffin and Meaghan McEvoy, 'Steak à la Hun: Food, Drink, and Dietary Habits in Ammianus Marcellinus', in *Feast, Fast or Famine: Food and Drink in Byzantium*, ed. Wendy Mayer and Silke Trzcionka, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2017, pp. 78–84.

[16] *Chronicon de Lanercost, 1201–1336*, ed. Joseph Stevenson, Edinburgh, 1839, p. 74. Compare with Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War*, pp. 12–15, 18, 58, 79, 84 f., 95, 136 f.

[17] Gaffiot translates *potatio* not only as *bauverie*, but also as *débauché*; Georges has 'prandium aut potatio aut cena'. Félix Gaffiot, *Dictionnaire illustré latin-français*, Paris, 1934, p. 1208; Karl Ernst Georges, *Ausführliches lateinisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch*, 2 vols, Hannover and Leipzig, 1913–18, vol. 2, 1918, col. 1810.

[18] Amos 8:10: 'convertam festivitates vestras in luctum, et omnia cantica vestra in planctum'. According to the biographer of David IV, this King of Georgia eradicated from the army all '[d]evilish songs, music, and festivities, and insults that offend God': 'History of David, King of Kings', in *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptations of the Georgian Chronicles*, ed. and transl. Robert W. Thomson, Oxford, 1996, pp. 309–53 (p. 343).

of food before or during military engagements, setting them apart from their ancient counterparts who often praised their commanders for their awareness of the positive impact of a food on the army's morale.[19] This observation does not seem to be contradicted by the example given by Cosmas, well-known to the Sázava chronicler, who recounts the victory of the Bohemians over the Lučané achieved following a feast. This is because the whole story takes place in ancient and pagan times, in the reality of a world turned upside down, when Bohemia was governed by rulers 'given over to gorging', to whom 'the body was a source of pleasure, the soul a burden'.[20] It is also significant that although Cosmas rejoices with his countrymen at their transformation during the feast into valiant warriors, he calls this act *vanum sacrum* and *nimia inercia*.[21]

In Cosmas's commentary, it is possible to discern a perspective on the role of food consumption and feasting that aligns with the interpretation of moralists like Aelred. Given the author's monastic profession, we might expect to come across a similar viewpoint in the work of Cosmas's continuator. Meanwhile, on the literal level the Sázava chronicler depicts a situation that blatantly contradicts this ideal. In his account, Soběslav, despite displaying care for his relationship with the Creator and the country's patron saints — as is evidenced by the prince's visits to churches, prayers and spoken words — does not abstain from food during the final stage of the preparations for battle. Moreover, he indulges in an activity which is described by his critics as *deliciae ciborum*, on the literal level categorizing the prince's lunch as one that satisfies not only the stomach but also the palate. Thus, the author even appears to encourage the reader to view this meal not as a modest camp refreshment or xerophagy but rather as a full-fledged monarchical feast.

The inclusion of eating within a narrative concerning a military conflict was also met with disapproval due to the cultural opposition of war and feasting. This contrast had been already recognized by ancient

[19] Tuffin and McEvoy, 'Steak à la Hun', pp. 69–73. The description of the feast ('abundans prandium') held by William the Conqueror during the invasion of England in the work of William of Poitiers — is exceptional, yet it finds justification in both the ancient model and religious allusion. *The 'Gesta Guillelmi' of William of Poitiers*, ed. and transl. R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford and New York, 1998, p. 112 (Book II, Chapter 7).

[20] *Cosmae Pragensis Chronica Bohemorum*, ed. János M. Bak and Pavlína Rychterová, transl. Petra Mutlová, Martyn C. Rady and Libor Švanda, Budapest and New York, 2020, p. 42 (Latin), 43 (English) (Book I, Chapter 9).

[21] *Cosmae Pragensis Chronica Bohemorum*, pp. 48, 50 (Book I, Chapter 11); compare with Paweł Żmudzki, *Władca i wojownicy: Narracje o wodzach, drużynie i wojnach w najdawniejszej historiografii Polski i Rusi*, Wrocław, 2009, pp. 343 f.

writers who viewed consumption, especially when excessive, as a factor contributing to the erosion of martial strength.[22] In later centuries it was no different. For instance, Gallus Anonymus repeatedly commends Polish rulers who prioritize the challenges of warfare over participating in feasts, while elucidating the contrast between these two activities in thinking about the monarchical duties.[23]

This incompatibility of war and food consumption was also reflected in narratives that depicted characters eating during military campaigns. Mark Hagger has acknowledged this aspect, drawing the conclusion that food consumed during wartime tends to bestow upon the protagonists qualities that are typically unsuitable for the circumstances and thus disqualifying. The examples he cited indicates that rulers or knights partaking in a meal during a war (usually termed a *prandium*) are portrayed as complacent and overconfident in their own strength or position.[24] For instance, Master Wace, while narrating the events of 1054, recounts that prior to the battle against the Normans, the French had secured comfortable lodgings in Mortemer. They felt secure enough to indulge in a feast during the night. Nevertheless, the following morning, the Normans launched an attack and swiftly overcame the French, as many of them were still in the arms of Morpheus. Similarly, a chronicle written by Jordan Fantosme depicts the King of Scots William the Lion seeking to seize Northumbria (1173). Having failed to gain a complete advantage, the ruler nevertheless thought he was in control of the situation. And since the warriors began to suffer from the heat, he allowed the lords to break their fast and ordered them to prepare a meal. Yet as the Scots busied themselves at Alnwick Castle preparing the meal, the English emerged from the mist and surprised the invaders. The Scots were easily defeated and their king taken captive.[25]

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[22] Tuffin and McEvoy, 'Steak à la Hun', pp. 69–73; Eoghan Ahern, 'Abundance, "Luxuria", and Sin in Late Antique Historiography', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 25, 2017, 4, pp. 605–31.

[23] The problem was noted by Żmudzki, *Władca i wojownicy*, pp. 113, 119 f., 124, 126, 143, 310, 346 f.

[24] Mark Hagger, 'Lordship and Lunching: Interpretations of Eating and Food in the Anglo-Norman World, 1050–1200, with Reference to the Bayeux Tapestry', in *The English and Their Legacy, 900–1200: Essays in Honour of Ann Williams*, ed. David Roffe, Woodbridge, 2012, pp. 229–44 (pp. 238–41). Compare with another telling example discussed in Wojciech Michalski, *Robert Bruce i jego kompania w eposie pióra Johna Barboura: 'The Bruce' około 1376 roku*, Lublin, 2020, pp. 158 f.

[25] *The History of the Norman People: Wace's 'Roman de Rou'*, transl. Glynn S. Burgess, Woodbridge, 2004, p. 145; *Jordan Fantosme's Chronicle*, ed. Ronald C. Johnston, Oxford, 1981, p. 131; Hagger, 'Lordship and Lunching', p. 240.

Such stories are typical not only of English historiographers. Similar narrative pattern can be find in Thietmar's account of Henry II's invasion of Bohemia, occupied by Bolesław the Brave (1004). Here the news of the armed expedition finds the Polish prince at dinner (*cenante*). This was a good scene to ironically emphasize the surprise of the disliked ruler and his panic-stricken reaction, expressed in the words: 'If they could leap like frogs, they could be here now'.[26] Interestingly, unlike the authors cited above, the chronicler imbues his narrative here with a religious dimension, aligning with the characteristic logic of Aelred of Rievaulx. This results in a moral disparity between the adversaries in the account. Henry is a pious ruler who humbly visits Mainz Cathedral before his expedition. Bolesław, on the other hand, is not only a proud, arrogant and self-confident man, but also a *leo rugiens* and *serpens venenosus* — a figure symbolizing the forces of malevolence and evil.[27] It is precisely this contrast in the dispositions of the adversaries that ultimately shapes the outcome of the confrontation within the narrative.[28]

In the quest to uncover the ideological sources of the scene with Soběslav lunching before the battle, it is crucial to give consideration to Cosmas's work, which serves as a foundational text for the Monk of Sázava. While in the story of the Bohemians' battle against the Lučané Cosmas only expresses his general attitude towards feasting,[29] two other accounts come close to those cited by Hagger. The first deals with the military operations that brought back to Bohemia the future victor of

[26] *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon*, ed. Robert Holtzmann, Berlin, 1935 (MGH SrG n.s., vol. 9), p. 286 (Book VI, Chapter 10): 'Si reperent ut ranae, iam possent huc advenisse'.

[27] For more on the diabolization of the figure of Bolesław in the passage in question, see Dirk Jäckel, *Der Herrscher als Löwe: Ursprung und Gebrauch eines politischen Symbols im Früh- und Hochmittelalter*, Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 2006, pp. 118–20; Stanisław Rosik and Joanna Rosik, '"Leo rugiens" — motyw lwa w najdawniejszych kronikarskich charakterystykach polskich Bolesławów', in *Totius mundi philohistor: Studia Georgio Strzelczyk octuagenario oblata*, ed. Małgorzata Delimata-Proch, Adam Krawiec and Jakub Kujawiński, Poznań, 2021, pp. 619–31. Also see Andrzej Pleszczyński, *The Birth of a Stereotype: Polish Rulers and their Country in German Writings c. 1000 A.D.*, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2011, pp. 165 f., where, however, the account is misinterpreted as describing a situation in which Bolesław the Brave indulges in feasting while his men are forced to shed blood in battle; this is the meaning of another story, *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon*, pp. 369 f. (Book VI, Chapter 80).

[28] *Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi Chronicon*, p. 370 (Book VI, Chapter 80).

[29] For more on Cosmas's somewhat reserved attitude towards feasting, see Petr Kopal, 'Státnost a rituály v Kosmově kronice', in *Stát, státnost a rituály přemyslovského věku: Problémy, názory, otázky*, ed. Martin Wihoda and Demeter Malaťák, Brno, 2006, pp. 155–95 (pp. 164 f., 183 f., 186).

Chlumec, that is the expedition led by Bolesław the Wrymouth against Vladislav I that took place in 1110.[30] According to this narrative, the lord of Prague at the time was informed of the attack on the day on which the Feast of St Wenceslaus was celebrated (28 September). The celebrations at Prague Castle were suddenly interrupted by a messenger who informed the ruler of the looming attack. At the same time he called on the prince to act, even ordering him to immediately close the pantry, abandon the tables and proceed to repel the enemy. The appeal to give up feasting befits the context at hand, as not only this one source mentions the convivial celebrations in Bohemia of the day of the country's patron saint that combined with feasting and consumption of alcohol.[31] While the context raises no immediate concerns, the prince's actions following the event appear ambivalent, even if on the surface they seem faultless — the prince, upon hearing of the threat, rises from the table, quickly gathers his troops and sets off to face the attackers. However, despite vigorously mounting a defence, Vladislav fails. The Polish ruler deceives him and emerges victorious in the clash at Trutina, an encounter the chronicler describes as a slaughter (*straga*) of the Bohemians.

In order to properly understand the reasons behind Vladislav's defeat, it is essential to understand what was wrong with his conduct. Upon closer examination of the account, bearing in mind the pattern observed previously, it becomes apparent that what casts a negative light on the prince is his failure to anticipate the Polish incursion. He neglected to maintain vigilance at the realm's borders and instead engaged in feasting within his capital. As a consequence of this oversight, similar to the French at Mortemer, William the Lion, and Bolesław the Brave, Vladislav too finds himself caught off guard by a hostile assault. Indeed, a ruler with a brother in exile in a neighbouring country should have been prepared for the possibility of a threat, especially during a period when a Polish invasion was ongoing. It is evident from numerous instances that attacks launched on state holidays were a recognized tactic for taking the enemy by surprise.[32]

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[30] *Cosmae Pragensis Chronica Bohemorum*, pp. 370–76 (Book III, Chapters 35 f.).

[31] Marcin R. Pauk, 'The Coin in the Political Culture of the Middle Ages: On the Iconography of the Bohemian Deniers in the First Half of the Twelfth Century', *KH*, 121, 2014, Special Issue, pp. 7–48 (pp. 19–21), where further scholarship on the subject is cited.

[32] Five years earlier, also around the Feast of St Wenceslaus, Prince Svatopluk of Moravia set out against Bohemia. For an interpretation of the timing of both expeditions, see Ludmila Luňáková, 'Násilí mezi přemyslovskými knížaty', *Časopis Matice moravské*, 136, 2017, 2, pp. 209–34 (pp. 217 f.).

When Vladislav receives the news of the invasion, his conduct is by no means ideal either. The prince is characterized by an unthinking submission to the will of the messenger, as well as by an impulsiveness conducive to rash decisions. Besides, it is important not to lose sight of the religious context woven into these events. As we observe, the ruler, rushing to repel the hostile attack, interrupts his veneration of St Wenceslaus. Although he is acting in defence of his domain, by neglecting his patron saint and failing to compensate him for the insult, he forgets upon whose intercession the success in war depends. Consequently, he does not secure supernatural support. The absence of assistance from St Wenceslaus is all the more striking in the narrative given that the Polish invasion comes at a time that is sacred to the Bohemians. Around his feast day, Wenceslaus should have been particularly efficacious in safeguarding his imperilled community.[33]

In some respects, the Monk of Sázava's narrative aligns more closely with the tale woven by Cosmas into his account of Vratislav II's expedition to Meissen in 1087. The central figure of this story is another brother of Soběslav, Břetislav (II). It is during this expedition that he is entrusted with a mission bearing the weight of an avenging injustice done to his father. Despite the task's profound connection to familial honour, the prince fails to wholeheartedly commit to its fulfilment. We learn that, wearied by the sweltering sun, he resolves to interrupt his march and give himself and his men a brief respite in the waters of the Vltava River all while partaking in a midday lunch (*prandium*). This decision, however, is nothing short of imprudent, a fact not lost on his companion, the old *comes* of his father, Alexius, who tries to dissuade the prince from this perilous course. Yet, as this voice of reason is summarily disregarded, it becomes abundantly clear

[33] Regarding military interventions by saints on days dedicated to them, see Thomas Scharff, 'Die Heiligen im Kampf gegen die Normannen', in *Die Militarisierung der Heiligen in Vormoderne und Moderne*, ed. Liliya Berezhnaya, Berlin, 2020, pp. 101–26 (pp. 110 f., 122). Furthermore, it was customary to attribute victories to the saints associated with the days on which battles took place as was choosing the date of a battle to invoke the favour of the patron saint of that particular day. See ibid., p. 347 and especially Hans M. Schaller, 'Der heilige Tag als Termin mittelalterlicher Staatsakte', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 30, 1974, pp. 1–24 (pp. 15–18). According to Luňáková, there were no traces of such a customs in Bohemia of the princely era. As a people devoted to St Wenceslaus, the Bohemians sought to make sure that they would be granted their patron's protection regardless of the timing of the battles. See Ludmila Luňáková, 'Sváteční dny v knížecích Čechách aneb K úloze církevních svátků při veřejných událostech', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Masarykova univerzita v Brně, 2021, pp. 368–70. In later sources, however, such a connection can be found. See Graus, 'Der Heilige', pp. 343 f.; Antonín, 'Pre-, Intra-, and Postbellum Rites', pp. 146 f.

that the narrative is poised for an ominous and ill-fated turn. And so it unfolds, following a narrative that echoes the script familiar from Fantosme's account. Just like the Scots at Alnwick Castle, so too the Bohemians are now taken by surprise while camping. At this critical juncture, the prince makes yet another misguided decision. Instead of gathering and organizing his ranks, Břetislav impulsively charges forward to engage in combat, with his men following in disarray. This triggers a fierce battle, in which the Bohemians eventually prevail, albeit at the cost of a significant number of casualties, earning it the grim designation of a *straga*. Many Bohemian nobles fall to German swords, and Břetislav himself narrowly escapes losing his hand in the fray.[34]

To delve deeper into the discussed theme, let's turn out to another narrative found in the fourteenth-century *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*. This narrative details a pivotal battle that took place in 1146 during the civil war involving the Polish Piast dukes — Władysław II the Exile and his younger half-brothers, Bolesław and Mieszko. Here, the act of consuming food discredits the prince and is linked to the hubris that ensnares Władysław. His belief that the besieged brothers in Poznań are doomed leads him down a path of overconfidence, which ultimately proves to be his downfall. Because of their commander's self-belief, Władysław's men quickly engage in a feast. However, this conduct — as the chronicler reveals while citing the viewpoint of a righteous knight among Władysław's men — was also a manifestation of carelessness leading directly to indolence. So here too eating characterizes the wrongful attitude of one of the warring parties and, at the same time, seals that party's fate.[35] When the starved (*ieiuni*) rush in against those feasting (*epulantes*), it is too late for Władysław. His numerous troops, in which he placed his hopes for victory, suffer defeat, and his only recourse is to flee.[36]

The above overview suggests that the inappropriateness of the act of consuming food during wartime has a deeper meaning than observed by Hagger. Of course, hubris and excessive self-confidence leading to carelessness typically go hand in hand with a decision to partake in a meal or hold a feast. Let us note, however, that at a more fundamental level the meal consumed during an armed action becomes an act that signifies a willingness to prioritize bodily needs over higher

[34] *Cosmae Pragensis Chronica Bohemorum*, pp. 256–60 (Book II, Chapter 39); see also Żmudzki, *Władca i wojownicy*, pp. 122 f.

[35] *Chronica Poloniae Maioris*, ed. Brygida Kürbis, Warsaw, 1970 (MPH s.n., vol. 8), p. 51 (Chapter 32).

[36] Ibid., p. 52.

matters — both earthly and transcendent — the awareness of which distinguishes a good leader and ruler. Disorientation and loss of control over the situation are a consequence of preferring comfort at the expense of maintaining a clear mind and, by extension, the safety of the people and the country which depended on it.[37] In turn, the failure to secure supernatural support in battle is a consequence of prioritizing one's own comfort over a relationship with God that demands sacrifice. By recognizing these two dimensions through which one can assess the behaviour of the protagonists, we come to understand that the act of consuming food invariably raises doubts about the commander's character, regardless of their intentions. Those who decide to eat a meal are, at best, portrayed as inept figures making ill-advised decisions that jeopardize their people, as exemplified in Cosmas's work. In the worst case scenario, dining or feasting reveals the moral corruption of the protagonist, highlighted in the portrayal of Władysław the Exile.

Beneath this second layer of meaning, there lies a particularly perilous vice,[38] an inclination toward *luxuria*,[39] understood within the military context through the lens of Roman morality and Christian ethics.[40]

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[37] Thes views of such behaviour in large part support Żmudzki's interpretation his analysis of literary portraits of rulers engaged in fishing. See Paweł Żmudzki, 'Wędka króla Rusinów (Gall Anonim, ks. 1, rozdz. 7)', *St. Źr.*, 55, 2017, pp. 27–50. Interestingly, in light of his research, protagonists who engage in rod-fishing are typically uncommonly wealthy and are often associated with gold. This brings to mind Regino of Prüm's characterization of Louis the German. According to the chronicler, Louis was a ruler who was the most victorious in war and more attached to battle equipment than to the splendour of feasts. The tools of war were his greatest treasures, and he valued the hardness of iron more than the brilliance of gold. It appears, therefore, that a penchant for feasting or the predilection for fishing and the love of gold were all part of a shared concept concerning rulers preferring a comfortable and non-martial lifestyle. *Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, Hannover, 1890 (MGH SrG, vol. 50), p. 110; on Regino's opinion — see Fiano, 'Il banchetto regio', pp. 639 f.

[38] Mary Frances Zambreno, 'The Moral Ambiguity of the Medieval Feast', *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*, 13, 1988, pp. 18–27 (esp. pp. 23 f.).

[39] While the example cited in the previous footnote seems to link the propensity for feasting primarily to greed, symbolized by gold, Mary Frances Zambreno, who studies the meaning of feasting in medieval romance, observes that the same vice is often regarded in various texts as an expression of excess (*luxuria*). Zambreno, 'The Moral Ambiguity', pp. 23–24. On the conceptual similarity between *avaritia* and *luxuria* — see Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Mediaeval Art from Early Christian Times to the Thirteenth Century*, New York, 1963, pp. 2, 58, 67.

[40] Compare with Álvaro Sánchez-Ostiz, 'The Literary Function of Ammianus' Criticisms of Military "luxuria"', in *Ammianus Marcellinus from Soldier to Author*, ed. Michael Hanaghan and David Woods, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2022, pp. 262–86; Francesca R. Berno, *Roman 'luxuria': A Literary and Cultural History*, Oxford and New York, 2023.

For the purpose of the present considerations, however, it should be emphasized that while *luxuria* encompassed a broad spectrum of behaviours, it was strongly associated with the pleasure of eating and drinking. These associations are particularly abundant in works of imaginative literature,[41] but also can be find in illuminated manuscripts, such as the eleventh-century manuscript from Saint-Amand featuring Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, in which Luxuria is seen reclining behind a table, reaching for victuals and accepting drink (fig. 1). This is an image based on the text of an influential poem, in which we meet the Luxuria weakened after a night of revelry:

> Her hair was full
> of oil, and she had roving eyes and slurred speech. She had lost her
> sex appeal, having only lived for pleasure: to be soft, to cling to sensual
> temptation, and to undo an already broken mind. On this occasion too,
> withered, she belched the late-night meal. By chance, just before dawn, as
> she reclined by the food trays, she heard the growling trumpets
> and right there left her tepid drink, her feet sloshing through wine
> and perfume. Drunk she goes to war, squashing flowers on her way.[42]

Upon reading the passage above, a clear parallel emerges between the defeat that afflicts those who dine before entering armed conflict and the outcome in Prudentius's poem where Luxuria is vanquished in a battle of her own. She succumbs to Sobrietas (Sobriety-Moderation), her own opposite. Ultimately, the lyrical subject can also reproach Luxuria's servants for their lack of moderation and their contentment with plain sustenance. They ought to recall the lessons of the ancient Israelites who were satisfied with ordinary water drawn from the rock by Moses and heavenly sent manna — humble yet spiritually redemptive as prefigurations of the Eucharist:[43]

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[41] Zambreno, 'The Moral Ambiguity'.

[42] *Prudentius' 'Psychomachia'*, transl. Marc Mastrangelo, Abingdon and New York, 2022, p. 40. Latin text: Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, in *Prudentius*, 2 vols, ed. and transl. H. J. Thomson, London and Cambridge, MA, 1969 (hereafter *Prudentius*), vol. 1, pp. 274–343 (p. 300, vv. 312–20).

[43] Another notable element in the passage quoted above is the timing of Luxuria's dawn departure for war, a time when Christian soldiers, partaking in Holy Communion, advanced in formation with discipline toward the battlefield. Prudentius (d. ca. 413) appears to allude to a military tradition here, which finds its earliest evidence a century later in the works of Corippus (d. ca. 535) and in Emperor Maurice's Strategikon (r. 582–602). For further exploration of this practice, see Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War*, pp. 15–16.

> Have you forgotten your ancestors'
> thirst in the desert and the rock-sourced spring?! The gushing spring,
> unleashed by a magical wand from the top of a split boulder?!
> Didn't the food of angels in those early days flow into the tents
> of your ancestors—food that comes from the body of Christ[44]

The examples provided thus far, particularly when enriched by the perspective presented in Prudentius's widely acclaimed *Psychomachia*, might be regarded as a model for the motif of protagonists feasting before battles leading to their downfall. However, these examples alone do not fully elucidate why Prince Soběslav could dine before the Battle of Chlumec without suffering adverse consequences himself. Instead, thanks to them we can understand the anxieties of his subjects. The prince's men are clearly aware of the threat brought upon them by what they perceive as sybaritic behaviour on the part of their leader. A ruler focused on the pleasure of eating is an exemplary recipe for military disaster.

Had the events in the Monk of Sázava's narrative followed the usual scenario, Soběslav would have been surprised by Lothar's attack during his meal and forsaken by divine favour, might have suffered defeat or significant losses in the battle. However, this time, the outcome is different. As we know, it was Prince Soběslav who achieved victory over Lothar and his triumph was not only great but also ordained by God's will. Thus, the prince clearly enjoys immunity that allows him to savour the pleasures of the table without the risk of encountering trouble as a consequence.

In the quest to interpret the tale accurately, there is no other option but to look at Soběslav's *prandium* from a perspective other than the view of the princely subjects and assume that the admonishers misjudged their lord's behaviour. Some symptoms of their misjudgement seem to be signalled in the text. After all, Soběslav is not surprised while dining like Bolesław the Brave by Henry II and upon hearing of the approaching enemy he does not rush into battle like Břetislav or Vladislav I, who blindly followed the orders of a messenger. When those who disapprove of the prince's behaviour approach Soběslav, he does not immediately resort to aggression against Lothar. Instead, he opts to send envoys to the king, urging him to abandon his hostile intentions. This response indicates that eaten delicacies did not have an adverse impact on the prince or cloud his judgment. On the contrary, he had an excellent understanding of the circumstances and knew better than his subjects how to act in that situation.

[44] *Prudentius' Psychomachia*, p. 41; Latin text: *Prudentius*, vol. 1, p. 304, vv. 371–76.

The chronicler does not elucidate the reasons behind Soběslav's exceptional clarity of mind, leaving the interpretation to the reader. However, knowing the ideological connections of the motif of food consumption and feasting, it is still possible to infer the associations that might have influenced the author while crafting the story. Since the prince's *prandium* did not result in the usual effects linked to earthly consumption, such as dulling the senses and weakening the body, it is likely that the associations suggested its ideological opposite — the Eucharistic rite.

While such a premise may at first seem too bold, it is worth noting that the interpretation hinting at religious connotations in Soběslav's meal is indirectly supported by the information preceding the scene in question — about the prince being notified of Lothar's preparations for war. Notably, in both instances, the author presents the reader with an image of a devout ruler dedicated to God and prioritizing religious matters over military needs. When learning of Lothar's hostile intentions, the prince could have initiated preparations for defence, yet he deemed something else as more important: visiting churches, praying and showing respect to God and the saints. The situation seems to repeat itself in Chlumec. Instead of preparing for battle, the prince engages in a task that is by no means military — he sits down *ad prandendum*. Given the similarity between these two scenarios, it is reasonable to infer an ideological link between the prince's church prayers and *prandium* as both serving to deepen his connection with Heaven.

Certainly, one might argue that such reasoning appears to diverge from the source's explicit content since it pertains to a meal where the prince revels in the pleasures of eating rather than engaging in the *officium divinum*, *mysterium* or *sacrificium*. Nonetheless, this does not entail challenging the text's literal meaning as much as considering the potential for a metaphorical interpretation. In this context, it is important to recognize that the Eucharist, serving as a commemoration of the Last Supper, has consistently been regarded as an allegory of a feast. As noted by Celia Chazelle, during the early Middle Ages, associating the offering of Bread and Wine with a feast represented one of the most crucial images — both theologically and liturgically — utilized to convey the belief that the Eucharist, much like a feast, fostered and celebrated community.[45] Although such analogies can be seen in many descriptions

[45] Celia Chazelle, 'The Eucharist in Early Medieval Europe', in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian C. Levy, Gary Macy and Kristen van Ausdall, Leiden and Boston, MA, 2012, pp. 205–49 (pp. 228 f.) and passim. At the same time Chazelle

of feasts and meals, it is worth recalling Anita Guerreau-Jalabert's observation that in the Eucharistic spirit held particular sway over regal banquets. This is because the Eucharist model provided the ideological basis not only for the bond between those invited to the feast, but also served as the foundation for the bond between the ruler and the people fed by him, forming a relationship of spiritual kinship — both egalitarian and hierarchical.[46] Acknowledging the intrinsic significance of such connotations and their broad societal resonance,[47] it is not entirely unreasonable to consider the idea of treating the Soběslav's *deliciae ciborum* as an allegory of Eucharistic sustenance.

Comparisons between a pre-battle meal and the Eucharist are relatively uncommon in historical accounts, although a more comprehensive investigation would likely uncover additional evidence. Here, for instance, we can recall the words supposedly spoken by Simon de Montfort to his soldiers before the Battle of Evesham in 1265: 'Let us go to die steadfastly, for we have breakfasted here, and in heaven, we shall dine'. The meal alluded to in this utterance clearly pertains to the Eucharist received before the battle, as indicated by the combination of the English commander's prophetic vision with the mention of attending Mass and partaking in Holy Communion.[48] In light of this example, it is worth considering that in the message conveyed to Lothar by the envoys, Prince Soběslav too asserted

highlights that the presence and significance of food in the medieval *officium divinum* were prevalent. Primarily, the practice of offering Communion of bread was widespread, and an integral part of the Mass ceremony was the *offertorium*, which involved presenting food gifts, not limited to bread and wine. Given that Masses were frequently intertwined with banquets, some of the food and beverages offered might have been immediately consumed. Thus, the Eucharistic consecration and Holy Communion could seamlessly blend with the *offertorium*, as well as the consecration, distribution and consumption of food and drink (pp. 214 f.).

[46] Guerreau-Jalabert, 'Aliments symboliques', p. 84. Incidentally, Marian Dygo argued that the Eucharistic stylization of Bolesław the Brave's feasts is evident in Gallus Anonymus' chronicle, see Dygo, 'Uczty Bolesława Chrobrego', pp. 44, 47–49. However, his interpretation faced criticism, notably in Wiszewski, *'Domus Bolezlai'*, pp. 194, 209 n. 348; Jacek Banaszkiewicz, 'Zamach stanu w Gnieźnie', *Rocznik Antropologii Historii*, 2012, 2(3), pp. 239–52 (pp. 242–43).

[47] According to Deptuła, it is appropriate to refer to such concepts as 'the basic teachings of the Church and the basic instructions of the Christian religion', Czesław Deptuła, *Galla Anonima mit genezy Polski: Studium z historiozofii i hermeneutyki symboli dziejopisarstwa średniowiecznego*, Lublin, 2000, p. 244.

[48] *Chronicon de Lanercost*, p. 76: 'Officio et accepto viatico, pridie nonas Augusti, die sancti Justini martyris, his verbis suos animavit, "Eamus mori constanter, quoniam hic jentati fumus, et in coelo manducabimus". Venientes itaque in campum, ita strenue pauci adversum plures proeliati sunt, quod res illo die sicut priori pro voto eis cessisset, nisi essent cunei reservati in latibulis et recentes immissi'.

that the Bohemians were prepared to lay down their lives in battle for the sake of justice ('pro iustitia pie velle occumbere'). This sentiment aligns with the *Lanercost Chronicle*'s portrayal of Simon and his followers' actions as a struggle for justice. Furthermore, the Monk of Sázava contextualizes the Bohemians' willingness to face death as a defence of their homeland, thus approaching the notion of *pro patria mori* developed by many theorists in the high Middle Ages. In this context, it is crucial to recall Ernst Kantorowicz's observation, wherein death in defence of fellow citizens and the homeland was regularly compared to the sacrifice of Christ. Such a belief was based on a definition of the homeland as the *corpus mysticum* of the state, which is 'no less a reality than the *corpus mysticum* of the church'.[49] In this way of thinking a special place was reserved for the prince as the head of this *corpus*, and it was expected that the commander would also be willing to make the supreme sacrifice in the interests of his domain and its people, just like Simon de Montfort. Following this idea, we may wonder whether the lunch eaten before the battle by Soběslav, understood as a religious meal, is not in fact intended to express the prince's willingness to suffer death in defence of the community of the Bohemians, and thus expresses his great determination.

An interesting clue for the current analysis can be found in the banquet scene depicted in the famous Bayeux Tapestry (fig. 2, centre) precisely in a sequence of images preceding the presentation of the Battle of Hastings (1066).[50] Scholars who have examined this image have rather consistently observed that its composition draws inspiration from representations of the Last Supper.[51] In this representation,

[49] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, '"Pro Patria Mori" in Medieval Political Thought', *AHR*, 56, 1951, 3, pp. 472–92 (esp. pp. 486–89, quotation at p. 487).

[50] For studies tackling the banquet scene, see Martha Rampton, 'The Significance of the Banquet Scene in the Bayeux Tapestry', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s., 21, 1994, pp. 33–53; Elisabeth C. Pastan, 'A Feast for the Eyes: Representing Odo at the Banquet in the Bayeux Embroidery', *Haskins Society Journal*, 22, 2010, pp. 83–122; eadem, 'Bishop Odo at the Banquet', in *The Bayeux Tapestry and Its Contexts: A Reassessment*, ed. Elisabeth C. Pastan, Kate Gilbert and Stephen D. White, Woodbridge, 2014, pp. 126–53; Gale R. Owen-Crocker, 'Hunger for England: Ambition and Appetite in the Bayeux Tapestry', *English Studies*, 93, 2012, 5, pp. 539–48; Hagger, 'Lordship and Lunching', esp. pp. 238–44; Xavier Barral i Altet, 'Romanesque Royal Banquets at Bayeux: An Original System of Theological-Political Representations between Self-Celebration and Propaganda', in *Political Theology in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jaume Aurell, Monserrat Herrero and Angela C. Miceli Stout, Turnhout, 2017, pp. 287–311.

[51] See esp. Laura H. Loomis, 'The Table of the Last Supper in Religious and Secular Iconography', *Art Studies*, 5, 1927, pp. 71–88; N. P. Brooks and H. E. Walker, 'The Authority and Interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry', in *The Study of the Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. Richard Gameson, Woodbridge, 1997, pp. 63–92 (pp. 74 f.). For a more recent and plausible reasoning, see Barral i Altet, 'Romanesque Royal Banquets', pp. 298–310.

the nobles gathered at the table, including figures like William and his most prominent men, take the place of the Apostles, while the figure of the bishop — most likely Odo of Bayeux — takes the place of Christ himself. The bishop's significance in the scene is reinforced by the inscription placed above, which reads: 'Et hic episcopus cibu et potu benedicit'.[52] This text explains the bishop's gesture, which turns out to be a gesture of benediction. Therefore, the bishop bestows his blessing upon the food and drink arranged on the table, mirroring the actions of Christ during the Last Supper and, concurrently, resembling a priest during Mass as he consecrates the bread and wine.

Thus, although the scene from the Bayeux Tapestry portrays a banquet held for the prince and his entourage, the religious tropes present in the representation enable us to see in it some features of the Eucharist. These tropes were intentionally incorporated into the scene, on the one hand, to contrast the conduct of the Normans with that of the English, who are depicted partaking in secular dining in Bosham: on the other hand, perhaps to provide a counterpoint to the portrayal of the pre-battle meal consumed by ordinary knights, whose presence in the tapestry remains somewhat enigmatic.[53] It is even conceivable that the designers of this scene, as suggested by its placement, intended it to reference an event mentioned by William of Poitiers in his *Gesta Guillelmi*. This event involves the prince taking part in Mass and receiving 'the body and blood of the Lord' prior to heading into battle.[54]

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[52] On the identification of the figure with Odo, see Barral i Altet, 'Romanesque Royal Banquets', pp. 302–03.

[53] It is essential to remember that the Tapestry was created for public exhibition. On this, see esp. Christopher Norton, 'The Helmet and the Crown: The Bayeux Tapestry, Bishop Odo and William the Conqueror', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 43, 2020, pp. 123–50 (in regard to the banquet scene, pp. 141 f.). Notably, though lacking argumentation, are the considerations put forth by Gale R. Owen-Crocker, who, without refuting the presence of Eucharistic metaphor in the feast scene, entertains the notion that the English creators of the Tapestry may have included a concealed critique of the Normans as avaricious and sinful, with a particular focus on Odo of Bayeux. See Owen-Crocker, 'Hunger for England', pp. 542–45.

[54] *The 'Gesta Guillelmi'*, p. 124 (Book II, Chapter 14). This is suggested by the order in which the scene is placed on the Tapestry, as is discussed in greater detail by Rampton, 'The Significance', p. 42. For polemical view, see Charles R. Dodwell, 'The Bayeux Tapestry and the French Secular Epic', in *The Study of the Bayeux Tapestry*, pp. 47–62; Hagger, 'Lordship and Lunching', p. 241, who are inclined to interpret the scene as a secular banquet. A more resonant conclusion, however, is articulated by Elisabeth C. Pastan, who suggests the necessity of a two-fold understanding. Pastan, 'A Feast for the Eyes', pp. 119 f.; eadem, 'Bishop Odo', p. 151; similarly Barral i Altet ('Romanesque Royal Banquets', p. 310), who eventually conclude: 'The meal of bishop Odo can be simultaneously interpreted as a symbol of wealthiness or as an Eucharistic

When interpreting this scene, it is important to consider that medieval depictions of the Eucharistic feast were not necessarily limited to the image of the Mass in the strictly liturgical sense. As Chazelle stresses: 'The food of Christian-led feasts was customarily blessed; saints' lives recount miraculous multiplications of blessed food and drink as provision for crowds, and the miraculous destruction of drinking vessels causing drunkenness when signed with the cross'. Such episodes, the scholar further argues, must have reminded the listeners of the power attributed to the Mass liturgy, priests and the Eucharist. Some eating and drinking ceremonies, such as agape meals and the monastic *caritas* drinking ceremony, were even more openly liturgical and thus similar to the Mass.[55] This perspective is perhaps valuable both when examining the portrayal of the nobles' banquet in the Bayeux Embroidery and the narrative under consideration.

Although the scene placed on the Bayeux Embroidery and the well-known medieval ideological connection between a feast and the Eucharist seem helpful in understanding the Monk of Sázava's account, it is equally crucial to emphasize the narrative elements that evoke similar associations. Three elements in particular can be considered in this context: the commensal nature of the *prandium*; the stoic nature of the prince's behaviour; and the admonition given by the subjects.

As previously emphasized, the chronicler asserts that the prince ate his *prandium* not alone but *cum suis*. While this practice of rulers dining with their advisers and nobles is not inherently surprising,[56] a metaphorical interpretation offers in this case a more compelling rationale for this portrayal than a literal one. In particular, it is not clear why the author would emphasize that the prince did not lunch alone, if it was just an ordinary meal. In doing so, he would even weaken the impact of the scene featuring subjects urging the prince to cease eating. The situation takes on a different complexion when Soběslav's *prandium* is considered as a meal of a religious nature or even as a metaphor for the Eucharist, or form of it. In such an interpretation the account could signify that the prince's associates were

banquet'. More detailed information about the preparations leading up to the Battle of Hastings has Master Wace's account from the second half of the twelfth century. In this narrative, pious demeanour is attributed to the Normans, while feasting and revelry are associated with the English. See *The History of the Norman People*, pp. 173 f.

[55] Chazelle, 'The Eucharist', p. 231. She also notes (pp. 231 f.) that a number of sources suggest that laity occasionally organized feasts that intentionally mirrored Mass ceremonies — or at least, that is how these feasts are depicted. See also Fiano, 'Il banchetto regio', p. 671.

[56] Compare with the works cited in note 11 above.

also privy to higher matters, while common warriors remained unaware of the concealed significance of the act.

Significantly, a similar duality in meaning is observed in the Bayeux Tapestry. Religious connotations are apparent solely in the banquet scene involving the nobles. In contrast, the meal of the common warriors is portrayed in a distinct scene (fig. 2, left), where those knights are shown as eating while standing in front of huge almond-shaped shields arranged on trestles, serving as makeshift tables.[57] In this image, we are presented with a meal intended for people who simply want to eat well, which is also indicated by the different kind of food they are partaking in. For while ordinary warriors prefer meat,[58] the nobles' table features only bread and fish, alongside goblets likely containing beverages (water or wine?). The difference is undoubtedly not accidental, given that medieval 'dietary practices were based on the fundamental opposition of meat and fish, as symbols of fat and lean, carnal and spiritual'.[59] Certainly, meat was the domain of knights, a symbol of their earthly status; whereas fish, associated with the clergy and their role in biblical multiplication miracles, held a similar prefigurative significance to the Eucharist as wine and bread.[60] Hence, when

[57] On the coarseness of the non-aristocratic table, see the insights in Guerreau-Jalabert, 'Aliments symboliques', p. 574.

[58] Roasted fowl is clearly identifiable. The meats on the spits, on the other hand, are likely a different type of meat (as suggested by Barral i Altet, 'Romanesque Royal Banquets', p. 300). Nonetheless, the mere presence of birds carries symbolic significance. As Guerreau-Jalabert observes ('Aliments symboliques', p. 571), both larger game and birds 'illustrent la quintessence des valeurs chevaleresques'. Citing Harvey's research, Serjeantson has claimed that in England 'consumption of birds was also linked to religious observance: the meat of birds was permitted where that of four-footed animals was forbidden'. In reality, however, Harvey says nothing of the sort, and the presence of birds in the scene alongside other roasts of meat suggests that the makers made no distinction between the types of meat. Dale Serjeantson, 'Birds: Food and a Mark of Status', in *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition*, ed. Christopher M. Woolgar, Dale Serjeantson and Tony Waldron, Oxford, 2011, pp. 131–47 (p. 131); Barbara F. Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100–1540: The Monastic Experience*, Oxford, 1993, p. 39.

[59] Guerreau-Jalabert, 'Aliments symboliques', p. 572.

[60] Matthew 14:15–21, 15:32–39; Mark 6:35–44, 8:1–10; Luke 9:12–17; John 6:5–13. It is hard to agree with Mark Hagger ('Lordship and Lunching', p. 238), who claims that the presence of a fish on the table in front of the bishop indicates observance of fasting by that dignitary and only by him. Another figure seated at the far right of the table also has a fish before them, and are pointing at it. Simultaneously, someone seated at the opposite end of the table is gesturing towards a loaf of bread. To interpret this scene accurately, it is essential to recognize that, aside from bread and wine, fish frequently appeared in depictions of the Last Supper, as noted by Barral i Altet ('Romanesque Royal Banquets', pp. 303–05). According to Saxon, many artistic representations of feasts featuring fish and bread symbolize the Eucharist by alluding to the miracles

juxtaposed with the warriors' meal, the aristocratic feast emerges as an activity situated within a distinct cultural sphere, one that is inherently more elevated and open to religious symbolism.[61] In this context, it is worth highlighting that while both scenes coexist within the artwork, they do not share a common spatial representation. As astutely observed by Xavier Barral i Altet, a distinct detail serves as a demarcation between these two scenes — a ground line that extends solely across the area featuring the warriors engaged in their repast and abruptly terminates just before the section portraying the feast attended by the prince, bishop and nobles.[62] Incorporating this observation into the considerations outlined earlier, we gain an even clearer understanding of the ideological intentions behind this segment of the Bayeux Tapestry. They aimed to underscore a marked distinction in the significance of the two depicted meals. The feast intended for commoners unfolds outdoors, immersed in the natural world. In contrast, the subsequent scene portrays aristocratic figures situated within an internally structured realm of civilization. This domain is characterized not only by its architectural context, implying an indoor setting, but also by its religious and (quasi-)Eucharistic nature.[63]

In this context, it is worth emphasizing that the dichotomy between the ruler and his nobles and ordinary warriors, is also discernible in written accounts that discuss pre-battle religious preparations. Some sources

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of multiplication. Elizabeth Saxon, 'Art and the Eucharist: Early Christian to ca. 800', in *A Companion to the Eucharist*, pp. 93–159 (pp. 103–06).

[61] Moreover, it is noteworthy that one of the participants in the knightly feast puts a horn to his lips, while the nobles use only chalices (in the bishop's hand) and goblets. As Neuman de Vegvar points out, the presence of horns at feasts symbolizes worldliness and the vanity of earthly wealth; they are often held by morally weak or evil characters. In the eleventh century Tiberius Psalter, the horn symbolizes earthly wealth and is the domain of Satan, while in the illuminated manuscripts of the *Psychomachia* horns are seen among the treasures of Avaritia and Luxuria (see fig. 1). Carol Neuman de Vegvar, 'Dining with Distinction: Drinking Vessels and Difference in the Bayeux Tapestry Feast Scenes', in *The Bayeux Tapestry: New Approaches*, ed. Michael J. Lewis, Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Dan Terkla, Oxford and Oakville, CT, 2011, pp. 112–20; also Owen-Crocker, 'Hunger for England', p. 543. Some scholars argue that the act of eating and gesticulation (the figure of the bearded man) shown in the Tapestry depict the Normans as uncouth. See, however, the depiction of the Naumburg Last Supper and its analysis in Jacqueline E. Jung, 'Peasant Meal or Lord's Feast? The Social Iconography of the Naumburg Last Supper', *Gesta*, 42, 2003, 1, pp. 39–61.

[62] Barral i Altet, 'Romanesque Royal Banquets', p. 300.

[63] In this context, it is noteworthy that the privilege of celebrating Mass outside a church building was typically granted to monarchs, abbots and bishops, especially when they were travelling and the celebration occurred in a tent or another suitable facility arranged for this purpose. See Izabela Skierska, *Obowiązek mszalny w średniowiecznej Polsce*, Warsaw, 2003, pp. 149–50.

even reserve this act exclusively for the ruler and his closest associates. For example, the legend recounting the clash between the Polish prince Casimir the Restorer and the pagans, as found in the Königsberg codex of the Silesian *Chronica Polonorum*, evokes the image of the prince spending the night before the battle praying in a church with his barons (*barones sui*).[64] Similarly, according to *Traska's Annals*, in 1282, during the struggle with the Iatvingians, Prince Leszek the Black received the Body of Christ only 'cum suis baronibus'.[65] Jean Froissart notes an identical situation in the English camp before the Battle of Crécy (1346).[66]

Obviously, it is not the case that simple warriors were deprived of confession and the Eucharist before the fighting. Their preparations, however, were not of the same solemn nature as the ceremonies involving the ruler and his nobles, and were held separately, as demonstrated by Hector Boece's account of the Battle of Bannockburn (1312).[67] This contrast between the preparations of the ruler and his closest entourage, and those of the ordinary knights should be perhaps considered a characteristic feature of institutionalized military religion. Just as only nobles were allowed to be at the monarch's table,[68] so too they

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[64] *Chronica Polonorum*, ed. Ludwik Ćwikliński, in *MPH*, vol. 3, Lviv, 1878, pp. 578–656 (p. 623). According to the source text, Casimir went to the Church of the Virgin Mary in Poznań with the intention of relinquishing his princely dignity in favour of a monk's habit due to his inability to halt the pagan devastation of the country. In this account, the author merged two traditions: one known from other sources about Casimir's monastic life and another of unknown origin about religious preparations for the battle. For further insights into this legend, see remarks in Radosław Kotecki, 'Studying Religious Rites of War on the Eastern and Northern Peripheries of Medieval Latin Europe', in *Religious Rites of War beyond the Medieval West*, vol. 2, pp. 289–356 (pp. 312–18).

[65] *Rocznik Traski*, ed. August Bielowski, in *MPH*, vol. 2, Lviv, 1872, pp. 826–61 (p. 848).

[66] *The Battle of Crécy: A Casebook*, ed. and transl. Michael Livingston and Kelly DeVries, Liverpool, 2015, p. 273. On the morning of the battle day, the king rose early, attended Mass, and partook in Holy Communion. Accompanying him were the Prince of Wales, his son, and 'li plus del host et oïrent tout li seigneur'.

[67] Hector Boethius, *Scotorum Historia*, ed. and transl. Dana F. Sutton, 2010 〈https://philological.cal.bham.ac.uk/boece/〉 [accessed 18 August 2023], (Book XIV, Chapter 36): 'Erat in exercitu abbas insulae Missarum nomine Mauricius, qui ex editiusculo loco tum rem divinam faciebat, is regi eucharistiam ac nobilibus administrabat, inde a reliquis sacerdotibus idem factum caeteris militibus'. Similarly before the Battle of Northallerton — see Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War*, p. 156.

[68] As pointed out by Jacek Banaszkiewicz, the arrangement of the nobles at the table during peacetime mirrors the battle formation of an army preparing for combat. In both situations, the ruler and those in his immediate circle, who either surround him or oversee formations on his behalf, form the same elite company. Banaszkiewicz, 'Trzy razy uczta', p. 98.

were the only ones to accompany the ruler during wartime services in the monarch's tent or mobile chapel.[69]

Considering the points made thus far, it is worth reevaluating Prince Soběslav's conduct following the presentation of his subjects' petition. As has already been said, there is no indication in the text that the prince immediately abandoned his activities in response to the admonition. On the contrary, the message he sent to Lothar, urging him to retreat, demonstrates that he did not act rashly, but very thoughtfully. However, the question arises: can the source text allow an interpretation of Soběslav's composed demeanour as evidence that the meal he is partaking in is of a religious rather than a secular nature?

As previously noted, the lunch eaten by the prince in Chlumec aligns with the monarch's previously demonstrated attitude to military affairs, one that yielded to the demands of worship and religion. The prince's stoic yet clear-headed reaction upon hearing of the approaching enemy primarily underscores the ruler's confidence in the alliance with supernatural forces concluded during his peregrination to the Bohemian churches. Importantly, this composed and majesty-conveying demeanour simultaneously symbolized the hieraticism and solemnity of those engaged in devout endeavours and sacred rituals.[70]

Once again, the Bayeux Tapestry seems to offer a clue. Following the feast scene, the artwork portrays William alongside his half-brothers, Odo and Robert of Mortain (fig. 2, right). These three commanders of the Norman army are depicted engaged in a discussion, as evidenced by Odo's gesticulation. The discussion undoubtedly revolves around further military steps, as is suggested by the swords in the hands of the other two, poised for action. The swords are accentuated in the tapestry, with William pointing to his weapon, and Robert holding his sword in a distinctive manner. While William's gesture directs attention to his weapon, Robert's sword points the observer's gaze towards the subsequent scene, where a messenger informs the knights of the order to erect fortifications at Hastings. This clearly implies that the conversation pertained to battle plans. The scene

[69] Simpkin's research shows how the royal tents and chapels taken to war served an important function in maintaining the majesty of the ruler and his entourage, ensuring separation from ordinary soldiers. See David Simpkin, 'Keeping Up Appearances: The English Royal Court on Military Campaigns to Scotland, 1296–1336', in *Medieval and Early Modern Representations of Authority in Scotland and the British Isles*, ed. Katherine Buchanan, Lucinda H. S. Dean and Michael A. Penman, Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2016, pp. 37–52.

[70] Jean-Claude Schmitt, *La raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiéval*, Paris, 1990, pp. 29, 110, 120, 149.

featuring the commanders thus tells us that despite participating in the feast, all three men retained their capacity to make crucial decisions for the success of the invasion. It becomes clear that the pious meal did not cloud their minds; rather, it enhanced their prudence.[71] Conversely, the dignified and powerful stances of the brothers indicate that their bodies remain unaffected by the weariness associated with excessive feasting.[72] It also suggests their readiness to accept God's judgment in the impending battle, firmly believing it will favour their cause.[73] There is no doubt about the huge importance of the scene, and thus about its symbolic message. Christopher Norton contends that it stands as the pivotal moment in the series of images leading to the battle scene, because it marks the initial formal appearance of the new regime on English soil, positioned directly opposite the representation of Harold's coronation. These two rival regimes confront each other across the width of the building, with the tripartite composition of the scenes emphasizing the connection. On one side, Harold is seated between the English nobility and Archbishop Stigand, while on the other,

[71] Norton interprets this scene as part of the feast scene ('The Helmet and the Crown', pp. 141 f.), presuming that William and his two half-brothers are still participants in the feast, but sitting at some distance. Such a view has compelled him to assume that the bishop blessing the meal is perhaps Geoffrey of Coutances. Norton entertains the alternative possibility that the bishop in question might be Odo, but he suggests that the scene captures the moment just before Odo assumes his position beside William. However, the first interpretation cannot be accepted, since the depictions of the bishops in both scenes are identical, and the figure on the right of the bishop who is blessing the food bears a striking resemblance to William himself. Meanwhile, the figure seated to the left is pointing towards the embroidered 'Odo Eps' from the adjacent image. Conversely, the scene featuring the brothers can hardly be considered a part of the feast, as it lacks a visible table and includes weaponry, which would be out of place during a meal. Therefore, it is more reasonable to conclude that this scene portrays an event occurring after the feast, as is suggested by Barral i Altet among others: 'Romanesque Royal Banquets', p. 310.

[72] Specifically, the image of the ruler wielding a sword pointing upwards conveys a powerful ideological message, as thoroughly examined by Andrea Torno Ginnasi, 'Il sovrano, l'arcangelo e la spada "nuda": Dialoghi iconografici a difesa di Costantinopoli', *Νέα Ῥώμη*, 14, 2017, pp. 125–63.

[73] Elisabeth Pastan ('A Feast for the Eyes', pp. 119–20) suggests an alternative interpretation to the traditional view of the Normans' celebratory banquet upon their arrival in England. Instead, she posits that it could be viewed as its inverse: a final meal together before the impending, dreadful battle. Drawing parallels with the Last Supper, where Christ foretold his death, this communal meal could signify a similar foreshadowing of the violence and conflict that lay ahead. Notably, the scenes in the Tapestry following this point inexorably lead towards the Battle of Hastings, featuring depictions of deceased bodies, many of them dismembered, spilling over into the borders.

William is flanked by Bishop Odo and Robert of Mortain. In this context, William's half-brothers are not merely depicted in a personal capacity; they symbolize the Norman barons and the leaders of the Norman church who supported the Norman duke. Consequently, the scene also foreshadows the conclusion of the tapestry, where the old regime is supplanted by the new.[74] This opinion can be juxtaposed with that of Barral i Altet, who observed that the designers of the Tapestry used the feast scene to exalt William the Conqueror and his lineage, thereby implying divine favour towards only one of the conflicting parties. According to his view the image consecrates the sacralization of the Norman prince's political and military authority, with a clear purpose: to legitimize the motives behind the invasion, the war and the conquest, by assigning Bishop Odo the role of William's moral support. This positioning of Odo and William's feast is significant, occurring just prior to what is arguably one of the tapestry's central scenes: William in Majesty, flanked by his stepbrothers and closest allies.[75]

Therefore, it can be inferred that the portray of a religious feast consumed just before the battle, patterned after the Eucharistic meal, held significant importance for the designers of the Tapestry. Their intention was to construct an image that exudes the majesty of the victorious party. Applying a similar interpretation to Soběslav's meal before the Battle of Chlumec could probably lead to a clearer understanding of its prominent placement in the Monk of Sázava's narrative. Notably, this narrative too portrays the lunch as one of the key incidents that ultimately lead the prince to achieve victory with divine assistance, a triumph that paves the way for his assumption of complete monarchical power in the entire Bohemian *regnum*.[76]

Let us address the question directly: Does the chronicler's passage concerning the admonition of the prince cast a negative light over

[74] Norton, 'The Helmet and the Crown', p. 142. Harold's representation occupies Scene 30 of the Tapestry: 〈https://www.bayeuxmuseum.com/en/the-bayeux-tapestry/discover-the-bayeux-tapestry/explore-online/〉 [accessed 18 September 2023].

[75] Barral i Altet, 'Romanesque Royal Banquets', p. 310.

[76] The chronicler crowns his account of the battle with an impressive scene in which Lothar III grants Soběslav ruling rights that are henceforth to remain inviolable in the entire country. *Monachi Sazaviensis continuatio Cosmae*, p. 257: 'Annuente ergo et favente deo ducatus honore et solio fruere paterno, mutuae dilectionis et amicitiae vinculum nobis et toti regno conserves inconvulsum. Et haec dicens tradidit ei per manum insigne ducatus vexillum, et ita datis invicem osculis dux Sobezlaus cum maxima gloria et honore suorumque ingenti tripudio ad dulcem suam rediens metropolim annis XVI optato potitus est solio.' For more on the meaning of the scene, see Zelenka, 'Vazal nebo přítel?'.

Soběslav's character, thereby eliminating the possibility of interpreting the meal as a noble banquet resembling the Eucharistic feast? Owing to the lack of a clear presentation of the matter and the limited information about the type of food and drink consumed (such as bread, fish, wine) as well as the absence of details about the prince's companions (did clergy participate?) it is challenging to find definitive evidence pointing to Eucharistic symbolism that would permit a conclusive interpretation. We should also remember that criticism of the ruler by their subjects in historical narratives should be taken seriously, as it often expresses higher reasons.

Without completely prejudging the question, it is essential to emphasize however that in the light of the narrative the expression of doubt about the rationality of the prince's conduct does not ultimately reflect negatively on Soběslav. This also means that the credit for the outcome of the battle is due not to the people articulating the admonition, but to the prince himself, aligning with the chronicler's primary objective of exalting Soběslav. This sets the situation apart from what we encounter in Cosmas's accounts, where admonitions or calls to battle reveal negative traits and images of princes prone to dining at the wrong moment.[77]

Therefore, the examples of employing the admonition motif as found in Cosmas's work, although known to our chronicler, do not seem to have served as the conceptual source for the Soběslav story. Instead, in the chronicle of the Monk of Sázava, the religious context takes on significant prominence, a dimension entirely absent in Břetislav's story. Furthermore, in the account of Vladislav's interrupted feast, the nature of the context differs. Besides, the characters standing before Soběslav are more similar to *comes* Alexius than to the messenger coming to Vladislav I. If the Monk of Sázava had constructed the scene with Soběslav lunching and subsequent admonition solely based on Cosmas's work, he would likely have needed to use both of Cosmas's stories, which could not have achieved the effect we know without additional adjustment. Hence, it can be inferred, that the monastic chronicler either applied the Cosmas models in a highly original way, reversing the rules governing them, or drew inspiration from an entirely different model, perhaps one aligned with the religious veneer characteristic of the narrative.

Since the first option is unverifiable, the discussion should solely consider the second. Therefore, it is proposed to incorporate into the

[77] In medieval literature the feast often serves as a scene where the participants reveal their character to those around them — see Mary Frances Zambreno, '"Pryce" Meats and Princes: The Feast as Proving Ground in the Alliterative "Morte Arthure" and "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"', *Enarratio*, 4, 1997, pp. 39–60 (p. 41).

discussion regarding the chronicler's potential sources of inspiration an alternative narrative pattern, not present in the accounts of war-time meals but frequently associated with rulers who, like Soběslav, sought to secure divine favour before battle. In Bohemian historiography, a parallel motif emerges in the *Zbraslav Chronicle* within the account of Wenceslaus II's 1304 expedition to Hungary. Its author states that when entering the Kingdom of Hungary, Wenceslaus did not rely on the size of his army, but entrusted himself to the Creator, akin to Soběslav. Wenceslaus actively engaged in prayers and participated in numerous religious services celebrated in tents. The chronicler also notes that the monarch did not lose his composure, even upon hearing about the approaching enemy. And when an uproar arose in the army at the sight of the advancing enemy, Wenceslaus remained composed and did not rush into battle; instead, he devoted himself to prayer. The chronicler concludes that such a ruler deservedly enjoyed the protection of God due to his unwavering trust in divine assistance.[78] And although there is no mention in this account of any individuals trying to dissuade the king from religious matters to military concerns, the reference to panic in the monarch's army bears a clear resemblance to the events surrounding Soběslav during his *prandium*.

In this respect, what comes closer to the Monk of Sázava's rendering is the story present in *The Life of King Alfred*. Here the motif was used by Asser to model the course of the Battle of Ashdown (871) between the Kings of Wessex, Alfred and Aethelred, and the Vikings. According to this account, while Alfred turned up to fight on time, his brother, despite being admonished to go into battle promptly, remained in his tent listening to Mass, and firmly declared that he would not leave it before the priest finished Mass, and that he would not abandon God's service for earthly service. In light of this, Aethelred managed to get his way, but as it turned out, it was his attitude that gave the Christians the victory, since '[t]he faith of the Christian king signified much with the Lord'.[79]

An almost identical demeanour is attributed by various sources to Władysław Jagiełło before the Battle of Grunwald. Both *Cronica Conflictus* and Długosz agree that the king was preparing for Mass when scouts began to arrive at the Polish camp with information that the enemy had appeared.[80] Like Soběslav, Jagiełło too was expected to respond appropriately

[78] *Cronica Aule regie*, ed. Anna Pumprová, Libor Jan, et al., Wiesbaden, 2022 (MGH SS, vol. 40), p. 138 (Book I, Chapter 68).

[79] *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. William Henry Stevenson, Oxford, 1904, pp. 28 f. (Chapter 37).

[80] For a recent in-depth analysis of the image of Jagiełło before the Battle of

to this threat. However, much to everyone's surprise the ruler was not particularly distressed by the news. Długosz reports that instead of taking the appropriate steps, 'the king was completely unmoved [...], having considered the most important thing to first worship God and then to deal with the war, after arriving in the chapel he listened very piously to two Masses celebrated by his chaplains'. We also learn that during the service the ruler asked for help from heaven with utmost calm and prayed more piously than usual. Moreover, he did not give in to the demands, even those by Prince Vytautas, who repeatedly pressed the king 'with various requests and insistences, first through intermediaries, and then personally with a loud cry to forego Mass and prayers, get up and quickly go into battle'.[81]

According to Sven Ekdahl this portrayal of Władysław Jagiełło draws on the hagiographic model. In this model when faced with danger a virtuous individual is characterized by peace of mind and *constantia*.[82] While this assertion holds true in a broad sense, the argument attributing this model to the hagiographic context is less convincing. This is because we are aware if its variant characteristic of the phenomenon of wartime religiosity. Its origin and evolution are subjects meriting independent exploration.[83] Here, it is sufficient to observe that a developed version of this concept emerges in one of the Carolingian royal mirrors, namely the *Via regia* by Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel. Within this work, the author advises Louis the Pious that in wartime the ruler should not put his trust in the strength and weapons of his army, but, following the example of King David, should seek help in God's grace. For God is a rock and a tower that offers protection against enemies to his chosen ones, who are those who trust in his power.[84]

Grunwald, see Jacek Maciejewski, 'Pleading for Victory and Eternal Life: Religious Preparations of the Poles for the Battle of Grunwald 1410', in *Religious Rites of War beyond the Medieval West*, vol. 2, pp. 244–88.

[81] *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales seu Cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae, lib. X–XI*, ed. Krzysztof Baczkowski et al., Warsaw, 1997, pp. 86–88. Also *Cronica conflictus Wladislai regis Poloniae cum Cruciferis anno Christi 1410*, ed. Zygmunt Celichowski, Poznań, 1911, pp. 20–22.

[82] Sven Ekdahl, *Grunwald 1410: Studia nad tradycją i źródłami*, Cracow, 2010, p. 167.

[83] A similar theme can be found in Orosius's account of the Battle of the Frigidus between Theodosius I and Arbogast (394). Here the manifestation of supernatural power on the emperor's side is determined by the trust placed in God and expressed in all-night prayers. Rufinus of Aquileia wrote more extensively about Theodosius's religious preparations, mentioning, for example, that the ruler, like Soběslav, before marching out 'he was visiting all the places of prayer' ('circumibat omnia orationum loca'), in which he performed acts of devotion. See Bachrach, *Religion and the Conduct of War*, pp. 18, 22.

[84] *Smaragdi abbatis Via regia*, ed. Jean-Paul Migne, in *PL*, vol. 102, Paris, 1851,

The accounts mentioned above emphasize the necessity for the ruler to possess unwavering serenity of mind before entering battle while maintaining absolute faith in supernatural grace and safeguarding. The ruler should not entertain any doubts, even in a critical situation, for the outcome of the clash depends on the constancy and depth of this faith. Consequently, it becomes evident that any request or pressure urging the ruler to put matters of warfare before relations with heaven serves within these narratives as a trial to ascertain whether the monarch merits divine assistance in battle.

Considering the account provided by the Sázava chronicler, Soběslav also appears to undergo a comparable trial. Obviously, the Bohemian prince does not attend Mass, nor does he receive the *viaticum* from the hands of a priest, but his poised response to the admonition articulated by his subjects — a response that testifies to his great calm and strength of spirit — is another indication that the princely *prandium* should be construed as a spiritual rather than a carnal repast.

*

The origins of the chronicler's account of Soběslav's pre-battle lunch, whether it stems from the image propagated by the prince and his supporters, remains undetermined. Nevertheless, within the story of the Battle of Chlumec, it serves as a pivotal narrative motif with the purpose of delivering emotional, intellectual and spiritual experiences to the reader. The chronicler adeptly wields his pen to craft a captivating scene partly open to various interpretations.

On a fundamental level, the narrative recounts the story of a ruler who, despite jeopardizing his fate through his actions, achieves an extraordinary victory in battle. This is accomplished in a manner that defies conventional norms, primarily due to his courage, which surpasses that of ordinary warriors. With such an interpretation, the element of surprise and the emotions it elicits take precedence, appealing to the less experienced reader.

In turn, a reader sensitive to renditions illustrating the interplay between the temporal and the supernatural, will discern in this account a parable of a pious and sagacious ruler — a monarch who overcame a mightier adversary not solely through his valour and the earthly armament of his troops but through fervent devotional practices and exceptional wisdom. This, indeed, is the true message of the narrative. For only

cols 931–70 (cols 969 f.) (Chapter 31). On the presence of such logic in Bohemian sources, see Antonín, 'Pre-, Intra-, and Postbellum Rites', pp. 148–49.

a profound interpretation that allows for metaphorical insights enables the synthesis of all the components of this story into a coherent depiction of the prince's preparations for an exceptionally grave challenge, one that can only be met by entrusting one's fate into the hands of God.

Such a skilful integration of the lunch motif into the plot reveals an author well-versed in literary craft, especially when considering that similar themes in Cosmas's work come out as rather formulaic. Since this observation contradicts the notion that the Sázava chronicler was a somewhat inept imitator of Cosmas's style, and not well read beyond the Bible, these insights can be regarded as encouragement for a more thorough reading of his chronicle as a literary work.

(Translated by Anna Kijak)
(Proofreading James Hartzell)

Summary

This article considers the story, recorded by the Monk of Sázava (in his continuation of the Cosmas of Prague's chronicle, written ca. 1173), about the preparations of Prince Soběslav I of Bohemia for the Battle of Chlumec against King Lothar III of Germany on 18 February 1126. The analysis centres on the motif of the lunch (*prandium*) that the Bohemian ruler is said to have shared with his men shortly before the battle. The theme attracts attention due to its divergence from the prevalent narrative strategies found in medieval historiographical and imaginative literature, where accounts of pre-battle meals tend to carry predominantly negative connotations. At best, a ruler's decision to dine amidst hostilities is portrayed as ineptitude, indicative of poor judgment that jeopardizes his soldiers' and the nation's safety. At worst, it exposes a moral tendency to rely on one's prowess rather than place faith in divine protection. The Monk of Sázava demonstrates awareness of these connotations, imputing the suspicion of *luxuria*, evident in the scene where the prince's men demand he forsake the pleasure of eating to focus on battle preparations due to the threat of enemy attack. However, the lunch scene, seemingly at odds with the prince's overall demeanour marked by piety and sobriety, is more nuanced than it appears. The chronicler subtly embeds clues throughout his account, allowing readers to perceive the meal as a *nobile prandium* with allusions the religious and Eucharistic feast. While the narrative appears open to several interpretations, one of the plausible ones must assume that the chronicler wanted to show Soběslav's lunch as the pinnacle of his efforts to seek divine favour before a confrontation with a formidable adversary.

(Translated by Anna Kijak)
(Proofreading James Hartzell)

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Fig. 1
Bibliothèque municipale de Valenciennes, Ms. 412 (393 bis), fol. 17v, source: Bibliothèque nationale de France, public domain

Fig. 2
Bayeux Tapestry Museum, Official digital representation of the Bayeux Tapestry — eleventh century. Credits: City of Bayeux, DRAC Normandie, University of Caen Normandie, CNRS, Ensicaen. Photo: 2017 — La Fabrique de patrimoines en Normandie