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**TRIMMING THE TANGLE OF LEGEND:
HEROIC HAIRCUTS, MATERIALISING MEALS,
AND THE LEGITIMISATION OF DYNASTIC SUCCESSION
IN NORWEGIAN AND POLISH FOUNDATION
NARRATIVES***

Abstract

The medieval origin narratives of both Poland and Norway feature dynastic founders who came to power following a ritualistic haircut. In the Polish tradition, Siemowit of the Piast dynasty is anointed duke after his coming-of-age haircut, which is administered by two mysterious strangers; in the Norwegian version, Harald Fairhair vows to only cut his hair after he has united the realm. In both traditions, the transfer of power to these new rulers is also symbolised by a feast that vanishes from the table of a previous ruler and materialises before the dynastic founder. This chapter examines these narratives and compares their use of haircutting and feasting motifs to explore the transmission of royal authority both within and between ruling dynasties. Two traditions are explored from each arena: Gallus Anonymus's *Gesta principum Polonorum* and Kadłubek's *Chronica*

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Polonorum from Poland; and *Fagrskinna* and Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* from Norway. In comparing how the haircutting tradition in each polity evolved, we gain profound insights into their authors' approach towards the development of dynastic power and the structure of dynastic history. In particular, we consider how these authors rationalised the concept of dynastic fragmentation and the rise of rival claimants as these elements came to dominate the political struggles of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Broadly speaking, we conclude that Polish historiography sought to cut away rival dynasts, whereas Norwegian traditions visualised competing dynastic branches as locks of hair cascading from one head.

Keywords: origin legends, medieval historiography, dynastic legends, ritual haircut, feast

INTRODUCTION

Can a haircut change the course of history? Can haircutting *represent* history, or even serve as a narrative blueprint for historiography? In the dynastic foundation narratives of medieval Poland and Norway, the ritual cutting of a ruler's hair and the transfer of food from one feast to another marks a translation of power from an old to a new political order, from the legendary to the "historical" past. In Poland, the pre-eminence of the Piast dynasty is first recognised at the ritual haircutting feast of Piast's son Siemowit. Food vanishes from the table of the tyrannical Duke Popiel of Gniezno and miraculously multiplies in the humble cottage of the ploughman Piast, marking the start of Siemowit's rise to pre-eminence. He later replaces Duke Popiel and becomes the first Piast ruler in Poland. In Norway, food for a planned feast is stolen from the hall of King Halfdan the Black, only to be given to his son Harald Fairhair in return for an act of kindness. Later in the narrative, the shearing of Harald's tangled locks marks the fulfilment of his promise to unite the kingdom of Norway under his sole rule. In both polities, the haircuts of these ostensibly ninth-century dynastic founders (the historicity of Harald or Siemowit is neither proven nor relevant to our present interests) are first attested in twelfth-century dynastic narratives and draw upon well-established European cultural motifs with roots in Antiquity. Nevertheless, these "trichological" (i.e. pertaining to hair) episodes, in particular, have received relatively little scholarly attention within a comparative framework.

Despite their shared imagery, key differences between the traditions hint at the differing attitudes of their authors and the political milieus in which they were employed as narratives of dynastic

legitimation.¹ The following analysis focuses on four of these narratives: Gallus Anonymus's *Gesta principum Polonorum* (before 1118) and Vincent Kadłubek's (Master Vincentius's) *Chronica Polonorum* (before 1208) from Poland; and *Fagrskinna* (c. 1220) and Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (c. 1230) from the Norse corpus of the Kings' Sagas. We compare both traditions' use of haircutting and feasting motifs to explore the transmission of royal authority both within and between ruling dynasties. Narratives such as these served as symbolic resources of legitimation for the rulers and dynasts who held or contended for power at the time the narratives were formulated. Legitimation was achieved in part by extending the ruling pedigree back into the legendary past to enigmatic progenitors positioned at the threshold of cultural memory. This legendary setting created opportunities for narrative motifs such as those analysed herein to justify the dynasties' rise to prominence but also to forestall dynastic issues that had arisen by the time of the texts' composition.

The analysis of these circumstances can, in turn, shed light on the political and historiographical motivations that dictated the form that the episodes under analysis ultimately took.² Therefore, besides considering how the differences between these narratives were produced and what light they shed on the dynastic politics of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Norway and Poland, this article will also consider how the use of the haircutting motif as a rite of accession and a vehicle for legitimacy in these traditions more broadly reflects their authors' approach to the structure of dynastic historiography, and in particular their engagement with rival claimants to royal power.

BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

As Chris Wickham has pointed out, an essential basis for comparison is the need to compare like with like, using commonalities as a starting point for the exploration of cultural difference.³ In this case, we compare two

¹ Björn Weiler, 'Tales of First Kings and the Culture of Kingship in the West, ca. 1050 – ca. 1200', *Viator*, xlvii, 2 (2015), 123.

² *Ibid.*, 126–7.

³ Chris Wickham, 'Problems in Doing Comparative History', in Patricia Skinner (ed.), *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History: The Legacy of Timothy Reuter* (Turnhout, 2009), 8–11.

traditions which relate the origins of the Norwegian and Polish ruling dynasties. Both traditions circulated and developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and both drew upon remarkably similar motifs to frame the process by which the first ruler of each dynasty – Siemowit in the Polish tradition and Harald in the Norse – came to power. This unusually close alignment of medieval historiographical traditions provides a solid foundation for a comparison of this nature. From such a starting point, we are able to explore how the motifs were utilised to differing – sometimes wholly inverted – effects in each tradition, which not only hints at the different political contexts in which they were developed but also allows these episodes to be treated as case studies for the varied application of contemporary medieval political ideas.

Both origin narratives are first attested in the early twelfth century. The *Gesta principum Polonorum* has been dated between 1112 and 1118 and is a panegyric to the reigning Duke of Poland, Bolesław Wrymouth (Krzywousty). Its unknown author appears to have been foreign (both French and Italian origins have been proposed) and has been known as Gallus since the sixteenth century. This text is the first witness to the Piast origin story,⁴ including the haircutting feast of Siemowit. Harald Fairhair is first described as the unifier of the Norwegian realm in a native history of Iceland called *The Book of Icelanders*, which was completed by c. 1135.⁵ The text's efforts to establish a dynastic link between Harald and subsequent Norwegian kings are unlikely to be its own innovation as it serves no particular purpose within the text's Icelandic identity-building agenda.⁶ It is argued below that

⁴ Marian Plezia, *Kronika Galla na tle historiografii XII w.* (Kraków, 1947); Norbert Kersken, *Geschichtsschreibung im Europa der nationes. Nationalgeschichtliche Gesamtdarstellungen im Mittelalter* (Cologne, 1995), 491–9; Thomas Bisson, 'On Not Eating Polish Bread in Vain: Resonance and Conjunction in the Deeds of the Princes of Poland (1109–13)', *Viator*, xxix (1998), 275–82; Alheydis Plassmann, *Origo gentis. Identitäts- und Legitimitätsstiftung in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Herkunftserzählungen* (Berlin, 2006), 292–321; Zbigniew Dalewski, 'A New Chosen People? Gallus Anonymous's Narrative about Poland and its Rulers', in Ildar H. Garipzanov (ed.), *Historical Narratives and Christian Identity on a European Periphery. Early History Writing in Northern, East-Central and Eastern Europe (c. 1070–1200)* (Turnhout, 2011), 145–66.

⁵ *Íslendingabók; The Book of Settlements*, Jakob Benediktsson (ed.), Íslenzk fornrit 1 (Reykjavík, 1968), 3–4. On the dating of the text, see Ben Allport, 'The Sources, Dating, and Composition of *Íslendingabók*', *Gripla*, 35 (forthcoming).

⁶ On this agenda, see Ben Allport, 'The Chronological Structure of *Íslendingabók* and its Legacy', in Ben Allport and Alison Finlay (eds), *Time, Space, and*

Harald's change in hairstyle may already have been established at this point, although it is first concretely attested (in fragmentary form) in the Old Norse text *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum* from c. 1190.⁷

In both cases, we are also able to gain some sense as to how the traditions evolved or became less important in response to changing political circumstances over time. Both traditions reappear in narratives from the early 1200s, following a century of drastic shifts in dynastic politics within both Norway and Poland. The story of Siemowit's haircutting feast is repeated in Kadłubek's *Chronica Polonorum*, written around ninety years after Gallus's text. Kadłubek was a bishop of Kraków who retired to become a Cistercian monk in Jędrzejów, and his *Chronica* was probably completed in the first decade of the thirteenth century.⁸ *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, the most detailed narratives to preserve the story of Harald's unification, have been dated to c. 1220 and 1230, respectively, early in the reign of Hákon Hákonarson (r. 1217–1263).⁹ The anonymous *Fagrskinna* is likely to have been produced in Norway and portrays the Norwegian rulers in a positive light, whereas *Heimskringla* was the work of the Icelandic chieftain and scholar Snorri Sturluson and is somewhat more ambiguous in its attitude to Norwegian royal power.¹⁰

Nevertheless, we must also be clear about the limitations of our comparison. The Piast origin narrative is essentially unattested in the century between Gallus's *Gesta* and Kadłubek's *Chronica Polonorum*,¹¹

Narrative in Medieval Icelandic Literature (Turnhout, forthcoming); Kirsten Hastrup, 'Defining a Society: The Icelandic Freestate between Two Worlds', in *eadem* (ed.), *Island of Anthropology: Studies in Past and Present Iceland* (Odense, 1990), 87–8.

⁷ *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, ed. and trans. by Matthew Driscoll (London, 2008), 2.

⁸ Kersken, *Geschichtsschreibung im Europa*, 499–512; Wojciech Drelicharz, *Unifying the Kingdom of Poland in Mediaeval Historiographic Thought* (Kraków, 2019), 75–94.

⁹ Ármann Jakobsson, 'Royal Biography', in Rory McTurk (ed.), *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2005), 396–7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* For discussions of Snorri's attitude to royal power, see, for example, Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley, 1991); Birgit Sawyer, *Heimskringla: An Interpretation* (Tempe, 2015).

¹¹ Evidence for the reception of the Piast legend is found in dynastic naming practices. For example, the name Lestek, never previously used in the dynasty, was given to Bolesław Wrymouth's son at about the time Gallus was writing, and would appear twice more in the next century. See Paweł Żmudzki, 'A Short History of Interpreting the Polish Chronicle of Gallus Anonymous', in Miłosz

whereas at least nine texts allow us to track the development of the Norwegian origin tradition over the same period.¹² Conversely, the early witnesses to the latter tradition are patchy and do not contain the haircutting episode, forcing us to compare a Polish text from the early twelfth century with Norse narratives from the early thirteenth. What is more, the motif of the food that vanishes from the present ruler's table to materialise in front of a future ruler is attested in Polish tradition from the time of Gallus but is only present in the latest of the Norwegian traditions, *Heimskringla*. Setting aside the curiosity of two motifs from a single episode in a Polish text appearing separately in chronologically disparate versions of the same Norwegian origin myth, the late attestation of the teleporting feast motif in Norwegian tradition means that it can only play a secondary role in our analysis. Nevertheless, the haircut and the teleporting feast are intertwined and largely inseparable in the Polish tradition and have significant implications for Gallus's presentation of the transfer of power and dynastic succession that can fruitfully be compared with their interpretation in all of the Norse texts under analysis.

THE EPISODES

Both of the phenomena that mark the transfer of the authority of rulership – the haircut ritual and the teleporting feast – are found in a single episode near the opening of Gallus's *Gesta* that explains the origins of the House of Piast. We are told that Duke Popiel of Gniezno held a great feast to mark the first haircut of his two sons. Two strangers arrived for the banquet, but they were driven away by the residents of the town. They found themselves in the suburb, in a little cottage belonging to Piast, a poor ploughman of the duke. Piast and his wife Rzepka were holding a haircutting ceremony for their sons. The strangers

Sosnowski (ed.), *The First/the Oldest in the Collections of the National Library of Poland* (Warsaw, 2019), 308; Marcin R. Pauk, 'Regnum in se divisum. Ku syntezie kultury politycznej Piastów doby dzielnicowej', in Roman Michałowski and Grzegorz Pac (eds), *Oryginalność czy wtórność? Studia poświęcone polskiej kulturze politycznej i religijnej (X–XIII wiek)* (Warszawa, 2020), 153–7.

¹² Besides the four Old Norse texts already mentioned are two late-twelfth-century Latin 'synoptic' histories, *Historia Norwegie* and Theodoricus Monachus's *De antiquitate regum Norwagiensium; Orkneyinga saga; Egils saga; and The Book of Settlements*.

accepted Piast's invitation, promising him prosperity and glory for his offspring. The ploughman was able to offer them only a jar of ale and one piglet kept especially for the occasion. Then extraordinary things began to happen: the ale at Piast's feast began to increase so much that all the available vessels had to be filled with it, while at the duke's feast it ran out:

Usque adeo enim crevisse fertur cervisia,
 Donec vasa mutuata replerentur omnia
 Et que ducis convivantes invenere vacua;
 and indeed, we are told, the ale kept on increasing,
 Till the cups that passed among them were all brimful every round
 While those who feasted at the prince's found their vessels empty.¹³

In addition, ten buckets were filled with the piglet meat. In this situation Piast decided to invite the duke and his men to the feast. The strangers cut the hair of the ploughman's son, naming him Siemowit. In the following years, Siemowit grew in strength and excellence until God raised him to the throne of Poland and drove Popiel from the realm. Finally, the deposed duke was eaten by mice, alone in a wooden tower on an island. Later, Siemowit was succeeded by his son Lestek and then his grandson Siemomysł (father of Mieszko I).¹⁴

The corresponding motifs in Old Norse tradition are found in three separate episodes. The earliest attested (although it comes last within the progression of the narrative) tells how a prince named Harald succeeded to the petty kingdom of his father, Halfdan the Black, who had carved out a collection of territories surrounding the Oslofjord in southeastern Norway (although *Heimskringla* suggests that Harald inherited a much-diminished realm, the rest lost to rival dynasties). Having begun to expand on his inheritance, Harald – whose “hair-growth was great with a wonderful appearance, most similar to fine silk to look at” [*hárvøxtr var mikill með undarligum lit, því líkastr at sjá sem fagrt silki*] – “made a vow that his hair should not be cut before he received tribute from every inland valley and outlying headland, as far as Norway extends east to the borderlands and north to the

¹³ *Gesta principum Polonorum. The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*, trans. Paul W. Knoll and Frank Schaer (Budapest, 2003), 20–1 (with a change in the translation of the last line).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16–7.

ocean” [*pá strengir (...) heit, at eigi skal skera hár hans áðr en hann hefir skatt af hverjum uppdal sem af útnesi, svá vítt sem Nóregr er austr til marka ok norðr to hafs*].¹⁵ Harald achieved his aims through a series of battles, the last and most decisive of which was at Hafrsfjord. By this point, his hair had become long and tangled, and people had taken to calling him “tangle-head” [*lúfa*]. After the battle, his goal of unification achieved, Harald had his hair cut by his ally Jarl Rognvald of Møre, and thereafter acquired the nickname ‘the fair-haired’ [*inn hárfagri*]. The earliest text to allude to Harald Fairhair’s change in hairstyle is *Ágrip*, although the full narrative is only preserved for the first time in *Fagrskinna*. *Heimskringla* adds considerably more detail about Harald’s campaign and also introduces a further incitement in the form of the maiden Gyða, who spurned Harald’s advances as his realm was too small, leading him to vow to unite Norway and not cut his hair until he had done so.

A further episode from Norse tradition can be considered relevant to the discussion of hair and dynastic succession. This is not attested earlier than *Fagrskinna* and appears to prefigure the hair-related symbolism of Harald’s unification campaign (although no haircutting takes place). Harald’s father, Halfdan the Black, was troubled by the fact that he was unable to dream. He was advised to sleep in a pigsty and thereafter dreamt that his hair was hanging down in locks of different lengths: some close to his scalp, some down to his neck, others to his waist, his knees, or even the ground. One lock, in particular, “surpassed all the others in fairness and in beauty and brightness” [*sigraði alla aðra með fegrð ok með fríðleik ok ljósleik*].¹⁶ The dream was interpreted as a sign that Halfdan’s progeny would be rulers of great, but unequal glory, the greatest being identified as the saintly king Olaf Haraldsson (r. 1016–1028) by the saga author. There is perhaps a faint, etymological echo of this prefiguring in Gallus’s tradition. Although Siemowit was Poland’s first ruler from the House of Piast, he is not portrayed as the first representative of his family. Despite his peasant descent, we are told his ancestry, as Gallus gives us the

¹⁵ *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum; Fagrskinna – Nóregs konunga tal*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson, Íslenzk fornrit 29 (Reykjavík, 1985), 58 and 66. Translation adapted from *Fagrskinna, A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway: A Translation with Introduction and Notes*, trans. Alison Finlay (Leiden, 2004), 42 and 49.

¹⁶ *Ágrip; Fagrskinna*, 58. Translation adapted from *Fagrskinna, A Catalogue*, 42.

names of not just his parents, Piast and Rzepka, but also his paternal grandfather Chościsko.¹⁷ The latter name is etymologically related to hair,¹⁸ and the function of this hairy ancestry in relation to the haircutting of Siemowit must thus form part of our analysis.

In *Heimskringla*, the transition from Halfdan's reign to Harald's was marked by the episode corresponding to Gallus's teleporting feast. According to Snorri Sturluson's account, on the eve of the feast of Yule Halfdan the Black, a petty king in southeastern Norway, held a feast in Hadeland. During the course of the feast, all of the food and drink disappeared. The king accused a "Finn" (i.e. a Saami) of the theft and had him tortured. Harald interceded for the suspect. As this was to no avail, he helped the man escape. Together they reached a place where an unnamed chieftain was holding a similar feast. They spent the winter there and when spring came, the host told Harald that it was he who had stolen the food from Hálfdan's feast. In the meantime, Halfdan had died, and the host, therefore, instructed Harald to return home to ascend the throne after him; moreover, Harald was in for a time of great prosperity, for he would rule all of Norway.¹⁹

THE SYMBOLISM OF HAIR AND HAIRCUTTING

Despite the clear differences between the Polish and Norwegian traditions, at their core, they have in common that a change in hairstyle – and in most iterations of the tradition, the explicit act of haircutting – is clearly imbued with symbolic meaning. The political symbolism of hair and haircutting has well-established medieval precedents.²⁰ To the

¹⁷ *Gesta principum Polonorum*, 19–20. See Jacek Banaszekiewicz, *Podanie o Piaście i Popielu. Studium porównawcze nad wczesnośredniowiecznymi tradycjami dynastycznymi* (Warszawa, 2010²), 80–99, 104–42.

¹⁸ This goes unacknowledged by the chronicler, see Banaszekiewicz, *Podanie o Piaście*, 133–42.

¹⁹ *Heimskringla I*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit 26 (Reykjavík, 2002), 92.

²⁰ The symbolism of hair in pre-modern cultures has produced a considerable literature, which has focused in particular on associations with fertility and bravery. See, e.g., Bruce Lincoln, 'Treatment of Hair and Fingernails among the Indo-Europeans', *History of Religions*, xvi (1977), 351–62; Robert Bartlett, 'Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, iv

Merovingian kings of fifth- to eighth-century Francia (the *reges creniti*, or long-haired kings), long hair and beards, uncut from birth, were such an ingrained symbol of royalty that coerced tonsuring was used as a disgraceful and delegitimising ritual to deprive rivals of power and their ability to exercise it, in stark contrast to the Norwegian and Polish examples examined herein.²¹ The first Carolingian king, Pippin the Short (r. 751–768), drew upon this symbolism when he had the last Merovingian king, Childeric III, tonsured and sent to a monastery.²² The Carolingians themselves made a conscious break from the symbolism of their Merovingian predecessors by wearing their hair short but cultivating lustrous moustaches (although, as Paul Dutton suggests, they attached less symbolic value to facial hair than their predecessors had done).²³

The Carolingians were clearly aware of the symbolic capital of long hair and haircutting, both of which could be drawn into political strategies and negotiations of power. As a child, Charlemagne's father, Pippin the Short, was sent to King Liutprand of the Lombards for his first haircut, an episode strikingly reminiscent of Siemowit's haircutting feast in Gallus.²⁴ In so doing, Pippin's father, Charles Martel, sought an alliance with Liutprand, hinting at the diplomatic overtones inherent in this act; as Adrevald of Fleury put it, this established Liutprand as "a spiritual father" to Pippin.²⁵ It was, moreover, a gesture of symbolic submission on the part of Charles Martel, yet one which

(1994), 43–60; Ian Wood, 'Hair and Beards in the Early Medieval West', *Al-Masāq*, xxx, 1 (2018), 107–16.

²¹ Erik Goosmann, 'The Long-Haired Kings of the Franks: Like So Many Samsons?', *Early Medieval Europe*, xx, 3 (2012), 233–59; Paul Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York, 2004), 11–17; Robert Kasperski, *Reges et gentes. Studia nad dyskursem legitymizującym władzę nad wspólnotami wyobrażonymi oraz strategiami ich konstruowania we wczesnym średniowieczu (VI–VII w.)* (Warszawa, 2017), 165–217. For a dramatic example, see *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Decem Libri Historiarum*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, MGH SrM 1 (Hannover, 1951), 117–20. See also Karol Potkański, *Postrzyżyny u Słowian i Germanów* (Kraków, 1895), 42.

²² *Einhardi Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. by Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SRG in us. schol. (Hannover, 1911), 2–4.

²³ Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 26.

²⁴ Another strikingly similar tradition is found in the Welsh tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*.

²⁵ *Ex Adrevaldi Floriacensis Miraculis S. Benedicti* 14, ed. by Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH: Scriptorum 15.1 (Hannover, Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1887), 483; cited in Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 19.

obliged Liutprand to offer protection to his symbolic ward (and, by extension, to Charles Martel himself). Conversely, the commandment to cut one's hair could also be employed as a statement of control, as when Charlemagne lent his support to his former hostage, Prince Grimoald of Benevento, on condition that the Lombards acknowledge Charlemagne's overlordship and promise to trim their beards.²⁶ Such a directive struck at the heart of the identity of the Lombards, whose name (Latin: *Langobardi*) was understood to mean 'long-beards' by authors such as Paul the Deacon.²⁷

This context suggests that both traditions drew on motifs and ideas that had circulated in literary expressions of elite identity for centuries and that could also be translated into political strategies. The fact that the Norwegian and Polish traditions appear to have emerged at around the same time as one another and continued to be reproduced a century or more later seems to attest to the continued relevance of these motifs and strategies. Indeed, in the case of Siemowit's first haircut, Gallus alludes to an established Polish ritual, although no Norwegian equivalent is documented. Regardless, the motif of the dynastic protoplasts beginning their reigns with a haircut is no coincidence, and in each case undoubtedly signals an accession or investiture rite both for the ruler himself and the dynasty he represents.

A RITE OF ACCESSION

In the Slavic world, the first haircut [Polish: *postrzyżyny*] was a routine rite of passage performed when a young man entered adulthood, quite similar to the Germanic *barbatoriae*.²⁸ Gallus refers to the ritual several times; for example, the young (seven-year-old) Prince Mieszko I

²⁶ Thanks are owed to Sam Ottewill-Soulsby (personal communication) for drawing our attention to this episode. See Sam Ottewill-Soulsby 'Hair and the Heir: The Politics of Shaving in Eighth-Century Italy', *The Historian's Sketchpad*, posted October 28, 2021, <https://salutemundo.wordpress.com/2021/10/28/hair-and-the-heir-the-politics-of-shaving-in-eighth-century-italy/> [Accessed: 11 Nov. 2022].

²⁷ Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*, ed. by Edward Peters and trans. William Dudley Foulke (Philadelphia, PA, 1974), 16.

²⁸ Ryszard Gansiniec, 'Postrzyżyny słowiańskie', *Przegląd Zachodni*, viii, 11–12 (1952), 353–69; Antoni Gąsiorowski, 'Postrzyżyny', in Gerard Labuda and Zdzisław Stieber (eds), *Słownik Starożytności Słowiańskich*, iv (Wrocław, 1970), 249–50; Kazimierz

supposedly regained his sight miraculously during a feast that should probably be understood as his own haircutting banquet.²⁹ An independent reference to the tradition is found in the epitaph of Bolesław I the Brave (Chrobry; r. 992–1025), which states that his shorn locks were sent to Rome.³⁰ This rite of passage to adulthood is the literal sense of the event that occurred in the Piast hut. It is the involvement of the two strangers that elevates the ceremony from a passage into manhood to a rite of accession. From the logic of the events, one can deduce that Siemowit became a prince precisely because these two extraordinary figures cut his hair. Moreover, although it is his father Piast who shows the strangers hospitality, it is Siemowit who accesses monarchical glory. The recompense of a good deed is thus accomplished with the delay of one generation, though it is rewarded effectively and inevitably.³¹ As a consequence, Siemowit remains passive both with regard to his new patrons and in the course of the events that follow, which essentially elevates him to the throne automatically. Thus, Jacek Banaszekiewicz refers to Siemowit as “a blameless usurper” and compares his first haircut to the anointing of the first Carolingians: both the two wanderers and the popes were representatives of the sphere of the sacrum (respectively pagan and Christian), and Siemowit is appointed to the throne by “rex regum et dux ducum [...] concorditer” (the King of Kings and Duke of Dukes in harmony).³²

The narrative circumstances of the haircut in the Norwegian tradition seem almost completely inverted.³³ Whereas the Polish ruler first gets a haircut and is thus elevated to kingship, Harald

Banek, *Opowieść o włosach. Zwyczaje – rytuały – symbolika* (Warszawa, 2010), 183–90; cf. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 18–19, on *barbatoriae*.

²⁹ *Gesta principum Polonorum*, 26–7.

³⁰ Brygida Kürbis, *Na progach historii*, ii (Poznań, 2001), 281; Przemysław Wiszewski, *Domus Bolezlai. Values and social identity in dynastic traditions of medieval Poland* (Leiden–Boston 2010), 56–63.

³¹ Banaszekiewicz, *Podanie o Piaście*, 163 and 171.

³² *Gesta principum Polonorum*, 22–3; J. Banaszekiewicz, *Podanie o Piaście*, 168–74. Cf. Paweł Żmudzki, ‘Jakiego początku Polski potrzebują badacze?’, *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, liii, 4 (2009), 22.

³³ Cf. Alexey S. Shchavelev, ‘Yeshche raz o mifoepicheskikh ustnykh istochnikakh srednevekovogo istoriopisaniya: rasskazy ob osnovatelyakh dinastiy u Galla Anonima i Snorri Sturlusona’, in Dmitri D. Belyayev and Timofey V. Gimon (eds), *Drevneyshiy gosudarstva Vostochnoy Yevropy. 2013 god. Zarozhdeniye istoriopisaniya v obshchestvakh drevnosti i srednevekov'ya* (Moscow, 2016), 576–9.

first wins power and then has Jarl Rognvald cut his hair, symbolically entrenching the dominion he has created through conquest. Thus, in the Polish tradition, we have a *sine qua non* condition for becoming a prince; in the Norwegian, an act that seals the ascension. Furthermore, Harald voluntarily takes an oath and carries it out of his own accord, remaining an active actor in events. Given the nature of that oath, it seems that Harald's haircut was a singular event and not an example of an established coming-of-age haircutting ritual (for which there is no evidence in Norse sources); indeed, it marks a departure from other Old Norse texts, in which – in stark contrast to the Polish tradition – haircuts are repeatedly associated with emasculation.³⁴ From this context, it becomes clear that it is Harald's active role in bringing about this haircut (rather than it being forced upon him) which robs the act of its negative connotations, allowing it to function as a ritual. Just like the son of Piast, the haircutting grants Harald a new (nick)name (at least according to *Fagrskinna* and Snorri).³⁵ His haircut can be seen as the fulfilment of an oath he took, in which case its sacral aspect becomes apparent (the accompanying creation motif suggests that the saga authors saw this as an oath to the Christian God).³⁶ Harald did not literally swear that he would cut his hair when he became king of all Norway, only that he would not cut his hair until he had accomplished this;³⁷ nevertheless, the cutting of his hair is a confirmation that he has fulfilled an earlier resolution. Furthermore, in *Heimskringla*, the symbolism of the oath and the haircut are fundamentally intertwined. Snorri states that Harald's hair remained "abundant and beautiful" after the haircut, suggesting that this was no humiliating tonsure but more of a trim (and seemingly a comb, as it was so "tangled" before). *Heimskringla* repeatedly stresses

³⁴ Carl Phelpstead, 'Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow: Hair Loss, the Tonsure, and Masculinity in Medieval Iceland', *Scandinavia Studies*, lxxxv, 1 (2013), 3–6.

³⁵ An analogy can also be drawn with the Vinils, who grew long beards and gained a protector in the person of the god Vodan and a new name: the Longobards, see Banaszkiwicz, *Podanie o Piaście*, 160–1.

³⁶ Cf. Bruce Lincoln, *Between History and Myth. Stories of Harald Fairhair and the Founding of the State* (Chicago, 2014), 5–6.

³⁷ This oath is quite similar to that taken by Batavian chief Julius Civilis (see Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache*, 8–9; Lincoln, *Between History and Myth*, 213, n. 15); it also recalls the Nazirites (Num 6,5) and the Chatti (according to Tacitus's *Germania*, 31).

the physical beauty of the Norwegian rulers, an indication of their unique suitability to rule.³⁸ In allowing his hair to grow wild and tangled as part of his oath, Harald creates the conditions in which he can be physically styled into the image of monarchy. From a local, aggressive kinglet, Harald transforms himself into a mature sovereign.

Harald's hairstyling thus emphasises his personal charisma and agency in elevating himself to royalty, whereas Siemowit's passivity positions him simply as a representative of his dynasty. Or rather *the* representative, since only Siemowit is mentioned, and only he becomes "head of the family" (as the name Siemowit can be interpreted, although Gallus does not inform us of this etymology).³⁹ Siemowit's haircut is not only a symbol of his own passage into adulthood and kingship but also represents the maturation of the Piast dynasty. This sense is conveyed by the trichological etymology of Siemowit's grandfather Chościsko. The hairy Chościsko, whose name means something like "broom" or "horse's tail",⁴⁰ a wiry, unruly mop, reflects the dynasty in its adolescent stage. Piast's generosity demonstrates its inherent virtue, and Siemowit's haircut recognises this virtue and signals the dynasty's growth into maturity and the authority to wield power.

This broader dynastic dimension only comes into focus in the Norse tradition with *Fagrskinna's* introduction of the dream of Halfdan the Black. This dream pre-empts the trimming (rather than cropping) of Harald's tangles, altering it from the chaotic intrigues and instability of the era of regional/community kings [*fylkiskonungar*] to the neatly combed locks of a unified Norway. Nevertheless, the dream envisions a strikingly different dynastic future than that implied by the shearing of Siemowit. Here, Halfdan's cascading locks of hair hang to varying lengths, with the longest and brightest representing Norway's holiest ruler, the saint and *rex perpetuus Norvegiæ*, Olaf Haraldsson. We thus have, on the one hand, a Polish vision of dynastic development whereby the cutting back of hair elevates a single dynastic representative,

³⁸ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'The Appearance and Personal Abilities of Goðar, Jarlar, and Konungar: Iceland, Orkney, and Norway', in Beverley Ballin Smith, Simon Taylor, and Gareth Williams (eds), *West Over Sea: Studies in Scandinavian Sea-Borne Expansion and Settlement Before 1300. A Festschrift in Honour of Dr Barbara E. Crawford* (Leiden, 2007), 96.

³⁹ Banaszkiwicz, *Podanie o Piaście*, 126–7.

⁴⁰ See note 18 above.

whereas, on the other, the Norse traditions envisage a unified Norway ruled by different, spreading strands of the same head of hair. To explain how these contrasting dynastic visions could be employed to legitimise contemporary rulers of Norway and Poland, we must consider the political milieus within which they were formulated.

HAIRCUTTING AS A VISION OF DYNASTIC HISTORY

The political context of Gallus's work is somewhat more straightforward than it is for the Norse tradition, the origins of which are obscure. As the first surviving work of Polish historiography, we can more confidently speculate about the contemporary relevance behind the inclusion of the haircutting feast, which is intertwined with the specific purpose of Gallus' chronicle itself. The history's main protagonist, Duke Bolesław III Wrymouth (Krzywousty), had blinded his elder brother Zbigniew in 1112, an act for which he was excommunicated. Zbigniew likely died soon afterwards, before Gallus's *Gesta* was produced. It has often been argued that the chronicle was intended to demonstrate not only that Bolesław had atoned for his sin but also that because of his lineage, he was predestined to rule. The objective was to be achieved in part through the Piast origin legend, which suggested that Poland's prosperity depended on whether a descendant of Piast was on the throne.⁴¹ The chronicle presents a patrilineal and vertical picture of the dynasty. Up to a certain point, it does not contain any information about the representatives of collateral lines of the dynasty, who are known mostly from German sources: the siblings of Mieszko I, Bolesław I the Brave or Mieszko II, who shared power in Poland. Gallus mentions the brothers of a reigning monarch for the first time when he writes about Kazimierz the Restorer's (Odnowiciel's) children (his two eldest sons, Bolesław the Generous [Szczodry] and Władysław Herman, ascended the throne, although the two younger ones Mieszko and Otto, who were not rulers, are mentioned as well).⁴²

⁴¹ Roman Michałowski, 'Restauratio Poloniae dans ideologie dynastique de Gallus Anonymus', *Acta Polonica Historica*, 52 (1985), 5–43, esp. 41–2; Banaszkiewicz, *Podanie o Piaście*, *passim*.

⁴² Zbigniew Dalewski, 'Pamięć i zapomnienie. Dynastia piastowska w kronice Galla Anonima', in Martin Nodl and Piotr Węcowski (eds), *Memoria et damnatio memoriae ve středověku* (Prague, 2014), 71–9.

In addition, Gallus writes extensively about Bolesław Wrymouth's half-brother, Zbigniew, but he does so in a way that undermines his capacity to rule.⁴³ His framing of dynastic history implies that a ruler's sons were not all equally worthy of succeeding him, increasing the sense of predestination for the person who did. This undercurrent within Gallus's *Gesta* begins already in the haircutting episode because Siemowit is called an only child and is not known to have any siblings. In contrast, Popiel is explicitly said to have two sons, a hint of the potential problems of dynastic competition that would not be lost on Gallus's audiences and simply strengthens the case for Piast rulership.

Whereas Gallus's narrative sought to strengthen the primacy of his subject Bolesław and downplay or ignore rival dynasts, it seems clear that the Norse tradition was developed with almost the opposite goal in mind: to reconcile historical Norwegian rulers of various differing dynasties by tracing their patrilineages back to a single ancestor, thus granting legitimacy to members of this extended dynasty who attempted to conquer the territories of their purported collaterals.⁴⁴ The need to do this may have been felt as early as the eleventh century, suggesting that the tale of Harald Fairhair's change in hairstyle may have come into being much earlier than its first, fragmentary attestation in *Ágrip*. Harald himself is first named and referred to as Norway's unifier in *The Book of Icelanders*, which also carefully traces the lineage of every Norwegian king it mentions up to Harald Hardrada back to the legendary unifier.⁴⁵ The reign of Harald Hardrada seems to have marked a shift in the transmission of Norwegian royal power. According to twelfth-century narratives, but with some corroboration in earlier written sources,⁴⁶ no ruler before Harald Hardrada managed to pass

⁴³ Elżbieta Kowalczyk-Heyman, 'Zbigniew i Bolesław – czytanie Anonima zwanego Gall'em', in Stanisław Rosik and Przemysław Wiszewski (eds), *Causa creandi. O pragmatyce źródła historycznego* (Wrocław, 2005), 257–64; Zbigniew Dalewski, *Ritual and Politics. Writing the History of a Dynastic Conflict in Medieval Poland* (Leiden, 2008).

⁴⁴ Sverrir Jakobsson, 'The Early Kings of Norway, the Issue of Agnatic Succession, and the Settlement of Iceland', *Viator*, xlvii, 3 (2016), 178–9.

⁴⁵ Harald Hardrada himself is given the nickname Fairhair in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* ("harfagera"), Aelnoth of Canterbury's *vita* of St Cnut ("coma pulchrus") and William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* ("Harvagra"), suggesting either that he was the first to bear this nickname or that the appellation was intended to evoke his legendary ancestor.

⁴⁶ For which, see the discussion in Sverrir Jakobsson, 'Early Kings', 172–7.

the throne directly to his son besides the historically dubious Harald Fairhair himself. More commonly, the throne passed between siblings, uncles and nephews, and wholly separate dynasties. Harald Hardrada himself succeeded his nephew Magnus the Good in 1047, having pressed his claim as the maternal half-brother of Olaf Haraldsson. However, beginning with Harald Hardrada's death at Stamford Bridge in 1066, the throne was predominantly inherited by (and often shared between) the sons of a previous ruler, and claims were primarily established on the basis of paternity. Consequently, almost all Norwegian rulers from 1066 claimed direct patrilineal descent from Harald Hardrada (with two notable exceptions).⁴⁷

The Fairhair narrative compensated for the more haphazard succession pattern before 1066 by establishing direct patrilineal links between an ever-increasing list of Harald Fairhair's sons to rulers such as Olaf Trygvason (r. 995–1000), St Olaf (r. 1016–1028), and Harald Hardrada himself.⁴⁸ The need to create this direct patriline from the legendary founder figure to the current Norwegian rulers seems to have been established quickly – at least by the death of Sigurd the Crusader in 1130, as it is attested in *The Book of Icelanders* by 1135. The specific narrative of Harald Fairhair's change in hairstyle may even have come into existence by this time, although it should be reiterated that no explicit reference to a haircut survives prior *Fagrskinna*; earlier traditions, including the *Book of Icelanders* and the Latin synoptic histories,⁴⁹ simply refer to the beauty of Harald's hair. The name Harald Halfdansson, the nickname 'lúfa', and the Battle of Hafrsfjord are all mentioned in verses of a skaldic poem named *Haraldskvæði* that are usually dated to c. 900;⁵⁰ they may thus have applied to a genuine petty king who, from the locations mentioned

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 179–82. The most important exception is Magnus Erlingsson, who despite (or because of) inheriting his claim through the maternal line was the first Scandinavian ruler to receive a coronation; see Zbigniew Dalewski and Hans Jacob Orning, 'Making Christian Rulership on the Peripheries of the Latin World' in this volume.

⁴⁸ *Íslendingabók*, 14, 19, and 20.

⁴⁹ See note 12 above.

⁵⁰ 'Haraldskvæði (Hrafnsmál)', in *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, ed. by Diana Whaley, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1* (Turnhout, 2012), 91 and 105.

in the poem, ruled an area in southwestern Norway.⁵¹ The attachment of the nickname “hárfagri” to the same Harald Halfdansson in *The Book of Icelanders* suggests that a tradition surrounding the transition from “tangle-hair” to “fair-hair” had emerged prior to the composition of *The Book of Icelanders*.⁵² Whatever the origins of the haircutting narrative, the tracing of different patrilineal lines to a single legendary founder as a model for Norwegian dynastic legitimacy, attested as early as *The Book of Icelanders*, is perfectly envisioned in *Fagrskinna*’s depiction of a head of hair, with locks of different lengths hanging down from the head of the progenitor, Halfdan the Black.

It is striking that this seems to take the opposite approach to Gallus in acknowledging that the right to rule could spread along parallel dynastic branches or could even be shared among brothers, a reality Gallus seems to have deliberately concealed, or at least downplayed, in order to heighten the legitimacy of his protagonist and sponsor, Bolesław Wrymouth. However, this should not be taken as greater honesty or the acceptance of practical reality on the part of those who formulated the Norwegian dynastic narratives, as the primary aim behind tying all previous Norwegian rulers into the descendants of Harald Fairhair was to conceal the fact that the line of succession was not unbroken: that power had shifted repeatedly between different dynasties.⁵³ Conversely, Gallus is clear about the fact that the rise of Siemowit represented a dynastic break with the past, that the authority of rulership had transferred along with the feast from the hall of Popiel to the cottage of Piast.

Such political aims begin to bring the strikingly different application of the haircutting motifs in each tradition into sharp relief; and indeed, the haircuts in each case seem to reflect differing metaphors of dynastic history. For Gallus, dynastic history is something to be pruned and tidied up like an unruly head of boyish hair. The continued success of the Piast dynasty is contingent on the historiographical

⁵¹ Ben Allport, ‘Eastward and Northward: A Geographical Conception of ‘Norð-mannaland’ in Ohthere’s Voyage and its Analogues in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature’, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, xlviii, 1 (2023), 1–25.

⁵² The transition is also mentioned in a different skaldic verse which *Fagrskinna* attributes to the same tenth-century poet, but this is considered to be a later forgery. See ‘Poem about Haraldr hárfagri’, in *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1*, 60.

⁵³ To the extent that Harald’s line even existed, it seems to have fizzled out with his grandsons in the late tenth century.

replication of the process that transformed it from the wild-haired peasant dynasty of Chościsko to the barbered royal dignity of Siemowit. Rival claimants are errant strands to be snipped off – denigrated, even wholly ignored. Norwegian history similarly sees the maturation of the Fairhair dynasty as a taming of the tangled hair of petty kingship into the radiant locks of a divinely favoured monarch, but the dynastic metaphor favoured by Norwegian historiographers saw it not as a closely shorn head of hair but a flowing cascade of parallel dynastic strands. The compilers of *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* made little attempt to disguise the rivalries that this vision produced, as their increasingly convoluted accounts of dynastic competition make clear, but the unchanging priority was to carefully link each strand back to the head: to Harald (and, by extension, Halfdan).

That Halfdan's dynastic dream appears in a text written a century after *The Book of Icelanders* is no surprise given the tumultuous events of that century. This was the Civil War period, in which the descendants of royal brothers who had (relatively) amicably shared power contended with one another for rulership, fraying into rival branches like so many split ends. Perhaps partly as a result of this dynastic instability, the late twelfth century saw the emergence of a concept of St Olaf as the *rex perpetuus Norvegiæ*, an embodiment of the stability of the realm that was lacking from the internecine conflicts of its current rulers. The concept of Norway's eternal king also smoothed over the coronation of Magnus Erlingsson (d. 1184),⁵⁴ who was himself not a king's son but derived his royal claim from Sigurd the Crusader through his mother, Kristin.

Whatever role the haircutting tradition may have played as a narrative of dynastic legitimisation prior to the Civil War period, it undoubtedly gained new relevance as a result of the conflict, leading to the elaboration of the tradition in subsequent texts. Halfdan's dream, which appears in sagas associated with the dynasty of Magnus's rival Sverrir, the purported son of King Sigurd Munn (Sigurd the Crusader's nephew), could be interpreted as an idealised expression of the reversal of Magnus's succession policy while adopting the new concept of St Olaf's perpetual rule. St Olaf's status is recognised in *Fagrskinna*'s characterisation of the strand representing him as surpassing all the others in fairness, beauty, and brightness. Nevertheless, it was important to stress that all the other dynastic strands stemmed

⁵⁴ See Orning and Dalewski, 'Making Christian Rulership' in this issue.

from the same head as that particularly holy lock: both the strand of Sigurd the Crusader that had ended with the death of his maternal grandson, Magnus, and that of Sverrir to which power had since been transferred. More immediately, when *Fagrskinna* was composed in c. 1220, the last representatives of different dynastic factions still posed a threat to the authority of King Hakon Hakonsson, whose sole claim to rule would not be officially recognised until the Council of Bergen in 1223. Halfdan's dream thus illustrates the continued relevance of the trichological vision that had led to the development of the Fairhair narrative a century earlier.

In contrast, Gallus's hair-related metaphor did not survive the dynastic chaos of the twelfth century, which retroactively confirms how topical and urgent it was at the time of Gallus's writing. Twenty years after he completed his chronicle, Bolesław Wrymouth died and was succeeded by four sons who were each assigned a separate district. The eldest of these, Władysław II the Exile (Wygnaniec), was expected to exercise authority over his younger brothers as their senior. Bolesław probably wanted it this way to prevent the tragedy that ended his conflict with Zbigniew. In a sense, he too was attempting to prune away rival claims as Gallus had done in his account of the dynasty; however, the reality proved to be less manageable than the historiography. The overthrow and exile of Władysław took place just eight years after Bolesław's death in 1138. Subsequently, after the quarter-century-long reign of Bolesław IV the Curly (Kędzierzawy; 1146–1173), Mieszko III the Old (Stary; d. 1202) was quickly deposed by the youngest of his brothers, Kazimierz II the Just (Sprawiedliwy; d. 1194). This event (1177) marks the start of decades of inter-dynastic conflict. By the time Kadłubek wrote at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Bolesław Wrymouth were divided between three dynastic lines, ruling in Silesia, Greater and Lesser Poland, Mazovia, and Kuyavia. Representatives of the various lines fought over Kraków, which (intermittently) was under the control of the descendants of Kazimierz. The final abandonment of the principle of seniority and the fragmentation of the realm occurred in the first half of the thirteenth century.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Janusz Bieniak, 'Polska elita polityczna XII wieku (część I. Tło działalności)', in Stefan K. Kuczyński (ed.), *Spółczesność Polski średniowiecznej*, ii (Warszawa, 1982), 29–61.

Stepping back from Gallus's strictly trimmed trichological metaphor of the Piast dynasty, Kadłubek instead stressed the unity of the Polish realm. His vision of Poland was not fragmented; on the contrary, there was still a kingdom with its capital in Kraków. He pushed the beginning of Polish history back to Antiquity and, in so doing, diminished the role of the Piast dynasty in its creation.⁵⁶

It is clear that the abstract concepts of haircutting or trimming could evoke and legitimise contemporary attitudes to dynastic succession and could even shape approaches to structuring dynastic history. Yet in both cases, we cannot overlook the fact the haircutting was carried out by a third party. The involvement of these third parties in effectively elevating the legendary progenitor to the position of kingship would appear to attribute to them a significance that demands further interrogation. However, it is in this respect that the differences between the two traditions are at their starkest.

HOLY OR HIGH-BORN HAIRDRESSERS

The haircutting of Pippin the Short by King Liutprand of the Lombards hints at the diplomatic dimension inherent in one person allowing their hair to be cut by another. Ultimately, giving someone leave to cut your hair – allowing someone to wield something sharp in the vicinity of your head – must be regarded as a gesture of trust or even obeisance; Charles Martel entrusts the future of his dynasty to Liutprand, who becomes Pippin's "spiritual father". Similar connotations were undoubtedly present in contemporary Polish tradition. Thus, Siemowit's shearing and naming by the strangers can also be viewed as a form of adoption.⁵⁷ The sending of Bolesław I the Brave's cut hair to Rome, as described in his epitaph, taps into the same idea, establishing the Pope as Bolesław's spiritual father and protector.⁵⁸

Gallus's strangers are possessed of the same sacral quality as Bolesław's desired papal patron. The strangers are not invited to the banquet held by Popiel, and thus the duke, as can be concluded from

⁵⁶ Grzegorz Bartusik, Rafał Rutkowski, and Wojtek Jezierski, 'Reception of Antique Traditions as Legitimation of Rule in Poland and Norway' (forthcoming); Jacek Banaszkiwicz, *Polskie dzieje bajeczne Mistrza Wincentego Kadłubka* (Wrocław, 2002²).

⁵⁷ Potkański, *Postrzyżyny u Słowian*, passim.

⁵⁸ See note 30 above.

what happened next, irretrievably loses the chance for his sons to have their first haircut by the strangers, who would have ensured prosperity for them. The opportunity is seized by Piast, and the visitors promise future glory to his progeny. In order for the prophecy to come true, they cut the boy's hair and give him a meaningful name, "head of the family". As we see with Pippin's haircut, this means that a relationship was established between those cutting the hair and the one having his hair cut, a relationship that obliged the former to ensure protection for the latter.⁵⁹ Yet here, the obligation is to mysterious, possibly divine strangers who act as mediators of kingship, injecting energy and change into the political system from without.⁶⁰

The Norse account of the haircut lacks this sacral element, or indeed the sense that power comes from beyond society; although Harald's dynasty was ultimately traced to Sweden, a twelfth-century tradition maintained that they had been based in Norway for five generations prior to Harald himself. Unlike Siemowit's haircut by strangers with supernatural abilities, the attribution of the haircut to Jarl Rognvald of Møre has a more mundane character; he is not a representative of the sacrum sphere but is merely Harald's lay vassal, a subordinate with no apparent spiritual authority. Furthermore, given the political context of *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, the choice of Jarl Rognvald as Harald's barber cannot have been intended to convey the same dynamic of spiritual fatherhood. Jarl Rognvald was regarded as the progenitor of the jarls of Orkney in contemporary texts, including *Orkneyinga saga* (which Snorri Sturluson seems to have had a hand

⁵⁹ Banaszkiewicz, *Podanie o Piaście*, 160–1; Karol Modzelewski, 'Kto postrzygł Siemowita? Słowiańscy Dioskurowie w micie dynastycznym Piastów', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, cxxiv, 4 (2017), 661–75; Roman Michałowski, 'Postacie wędrowców w piastowskiej legendzie dynastycznej (XII–XIV w.)', in Katarzyna Gołąbek et al. (eds), *Monarchia – społeczeństwo – tożsamość. Studia z dziejów średniowiecza* (Warszawa, 2019), 39–50.

⁶⁰ This can be obliquely related to the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins's concept of "stranger kings" who inject power and vitality into a political system from the outside, although the strangers themselves never inhabit a royal role. See Marshall Sahlins, 'The Stranger-King, or Elementary Forms of the Politics of Life', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, xxxvi, 178. For a recent discussion of this concept in a medieval Polish context, see Wojtek Jezierski, 'St Adalbert as a Stranger-king: The Heroization and Estrangement of a Holy Man in the Middle Ages', *History and Anthropology* (2023), 1–22.

in editing)⁶¹ and *Heimskringla* itself. Although these traditions make it clear that Rognvald was an important ally and friend to Harald, it is unthinkable that the haircutting establishes a parental bond as it did in the case of Liutprand and Pippin (particularly in a starkly royalist text such as *Fagrskinna*) as this would imply an inherited Norwegian subordination to the Orcadian jarls. Even pro-Orcadian texts do not go this far; to the contrary, they suggest that it was Harald who granted Rognvald the jarldom of Orkney and depict an ideological struggle in which the jarls of Orkney try to assert their autonomy from the overbearing dominance of the Norwegian dynasty that had made this initial gift.⁶² In aid of these efforts, Snorri himself may have been responsible for producing a genealogical tradition that linked the jarls to the mythical progenitors of the Norwegian aristocracy, in contrast to Harald Fairhair's descent from the Swedish Ynglings.⁶³

Nevertheless, the efforts of the jarls ultimately came to naught. Following a decisive battle at Florevåg in 1195, where Jarl Harald Maddadsson and his Orcadian faction, the Island-beards, were forced to surrender to Hakon Hakonsson's grandfather King Sverrir, hopes for Orcadian autonomy were effectively scuppered; from then on, their jarls were integrated into the Norwegian royal court as direct vassals.⁶⁴ Thus, the choice of Jarl Rognvald as barber is more likely a statement of the Orcadians' subordination, rather than the reverse, or could, more diplomatically, be seen as an alliance of Norway's ancient and more autochthonous aristocracy with its allochthonous rulers.⁶⁵ The obligation of protection seen in the case of Liutprand and the sacral strangers becomes an obligation or expectation of service. That Harald can rely on his subject to carry out this action reveals the

⁶¹ For discussion and further references, see Ben Allport, 'The Prehistory of *Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum*: Connections with the *Chronicon Lethrense* and their Consequences', *Neophilologus*, cvi (2022), 513–32.

⁶² Ian Beuermann, 'Jarla sögur Orkneyja. Status and Power of the Earls of Orkney According to their Sagas', in Gro Steinsland, Ian Beuermann, Jan E. Rekdal, and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (eds), *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2011).

⁶³ This belongs to a tradition which also traces Norwegian aristocratic roots to a mythical founder called Nor, although the Orcadian jarls descend from his brother Gor. See discussion and references in Allport, 'Prehistory'; Beuermann, 'Jarla sögur'.

⁶⁴ Beuermann, 'Jarla sögur', 109.

⁶⁵ Our thanks to our anonymous peer reviewer for suggesting this final point.

extent of his dominance and an implicit reverence for the person of the king in contrast to the looser authority of his predecessors. This is particularly apparent in *Heimskringla*, which takes pains to stress Harald's creation of a strict secular hierarchy of jarls and hersirs (a lesser rank of the nobility).

Thus, despite the centrality of an act of haircutting acting as a rite of accession in both traditions, clear differences emerge in the agency of the ascendant rulers and the identity of the hairdressers which underscore a differing understanding of the nature of royal authority. In the Polish tradition, the act of haircutting assigns a more sacral quality to royal authority. The generosity of Piast demonstrates the virtue of his dynasty and Siemowit's royal authority is not acquired through action but is divinely imbued and thus latent in him and his successors. The idea that regnal authority was bestowed from on high supports Gallus's broader attitude towards dynastic history given the implication that this favour would pass from one "Siemowit" – one "head of the family" – to the next, passing extraneous siblings by. In contrast, although sacral elements are not missing from the Norse tradition, a much stronger emphasis is placed upon Harald's agency and personal charisma in fulfilling his vow, uniting Norway, and establishing a secular hierarchy in which the obligations of his vassals are made clear. This, too, fits the tradition's broader attitude to dynastic history, inasmuch as it supported the idea that power would pass between those descendants with the attributes to seize it rather than simply from father to son, resulting in the distinct locks of cascading dynastic hair depicted in Halfdan's dream.

FEASTING AND THE TRANSFER OF POWER

Our analysis thus far has demonstrated the ways in which both traditions' depiction of haircutting was used to frame a vision of dynastic history and an approach to structuring dynastic historiography that can be clearly connected to contemporary political issues in the respective twelfth- and thirteenth-century polities of Poland and Norway. Nevertheless, in each tradition, the motif was employed to achieve these aims in almost completely opposing ways. The same stark reinterpretation of a shared underlying motif can be seen in both traditions' take on the teleporting feast episode. At their heart, the feasting episodes in both traditions tap into the idea that the prosperity of the realm was intrinsically

tied to royal authority and charisma; this aspect of Norwegian and Polish historiography is explored in greater depth in Wojtek Jezierski and Paweł Żmudzki's contribution to the present issue.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, both episodes also reveal how royal authority is transferred from one ruler to the next, whether between different members of a dynasty or even, in the Polish case, between dynasties themselves. As the motif is only present in the latest iteration of the Norwegian tradition, *Heimskringla*, this analysis invites consideration of how dynastic narratives were shaped to reflect evolving political ideas and circumstances.

Once again, the respective traditions give the motif a very different narrative framing. In the Polish version of the feast episode, the hospitality shown by the poor peasant is rewarded, while its lack on the part of the duke leads to his deposition and, indirectly, his death. Conversely, the future King Harald does not play host to anybody, this is done by the chieftain who had robbed his father and foretells his royal glory. The virtue that marks Harald's suitability for the throne stems rather from his defence of an innocent (a theme that is somewhat undeveloped in comparison to the Polish tradition). Nevertheless, in both cases, we are dealing with a transfer of food and drink from a feast held by an ungenerous ruler to some other feast. In both cases, it is clear that this transfer – miraculous in Gallus's text but more ambiguous in Snorri's – is facilitated by mysterious, unnamed strangers.⁶⁷ This correlates with the transfer of the royal charisma to the one who had stood up for those wronged by an apparent tyrant.

Both stories foretell a change on the throne.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between the two in that Siemowit belongs

⁶⁶ See Wojtek Jezierski and Paweł Żmudzki, 'Feasting and Elite Legitimation in Poland and Norway: Propaganda, Political Economy, and Recognition in a Comparative Perspective, 1000–1300' in this volume.

⁶⁷ Michałowski, 'Restauratio Poloniae', 8–9; Banaszekiewicz, *Podanie o Piaście*, 60–6 and 143–74; Czesław Deptuła, *Galla Anonima mit genezy Polski. Studium z historiozofii i hermeneutyki symboli dziejopisarstwa średniowiecznego* (Lublin, 2000²), 270–1. In the Norse example, the Saami figure may suggest that the food has magically disappeared, see Stephen A. Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2011), 138–40.

⁶⁸ Jacek Banaszekiewicz, 'Trzy razy uczta', in Stefan K. Kuczyński (ed.), *Spółczesność Polski średniowiecznej*, v (Warszawa, 1992), 95–108, esp. 107–8; *id.*, 'Wspólnota tradycyjna i zagrożenie dobrobytu. Kilka przykładów średniowiecznych ilustrujących problem', in Alicja Dobrosielska, Aleksander Pluskowski, and Seweryn Szczepański (eds), *Homini, qui in honore fuit. Księga pamiątkowa poświęcona śp. Profesorowi Grzegorzowi*

to a different dynasty from Duke Popiel, whom he replaces, whereas Harald succeeds his father Halfdan the Black. From the earliest witness to the Norwegian tradition in *The Book of Icelanders*, it is continually emphasised that Harald was the first of an established dynasty of petty rulers “to become king over all Norway”; only in *De antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*, a Norwegian history penned by Theodoricus Monachus between 1177 and 1188, is it stated that there is there no dynastic succession before Harald.⁶⁹ The realm of Norway is only referred to as a loose geographical concept in the narratives of both *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* before Harald embarks on his campaign,⁷⁰ and little attempt is made to define its parameters, their origins, or suggest an inherent need for unification.⁷¹ Conversely, Siemowit becomes the ruler of a polity that already exists. The polity ruled by Popiel is referred to as the “duchy of Poland” [*ducatus Polonie*] or even “kingdom” [*regnum*],⁷² and it is evident that Siemowit, in replacing him on the throne, was his successor and the ruler of the same polity, although Gallus explores neither the realm’s origins nor Popiel’s ancestry.⁷³

Simply put, Gallus’s narrative stresses the continuity of the realm but introduces a transfer of royal authority between two dynasties, whereas *Heimskringla* presents a continuous dynasty but associates the transfer of royal authority with the creation of a new realm. Nevertheless, both narratives have drawn upon the same motif to depict these completely inverted paradigm shifts. An integral feature of the teleporting feast motif is the implication of a moral judgement of the ruler

Białuńskiemu (Olsztyń, 2020), 53–4; A.S. Shchavelev, ‘Yeshche raz’, 571–2; Jezierski and Żmudzki, ‘Feasting and Elite Legitimation’.

⁶⁹ Theodoricus, *De antiquitate regum Norwagiensium. On the Old Norwegian Kings*, ed. by Egil Kraggerud (Oslo, 2018), 4–5. See Rafał Rutkowski, *Norweska kronika Mnicha Teodoryka. Północna tradycja historyczna wprowadzona w nurt dziejów powszechnych (koniec XII wieku)* (Toruń, 2019), 195–214. On the dating of the text, see Theodoricus Monachus, *An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*, trans. David and Ian McDougall (London, 1998), xi–xiii.

⁷⁰ Gyda alludes to Norway’s existence in *Heimskringla* but says that it has no ruler, unlike Denmark or Sweden, thus inciting Harald to embark on his campaign of unification, *Heimskringla I*, 96.

⁷¹ Other traditions fill this gap, such as the twelfth-century text *Historia Norwegie*, which is one of several texts alluding to a mythical Norwegian founder called Nor.

⁷² *Gesta principum Polonorum*, 22.

⁷³ Żmudzki, ‘Jakiego początku Polski potrzebują badacze?’, 20–1; Michałowski, ‘Postacie wędrowców’, 40–1, n. 4.

whose loss of regal authority is embodied in their disappearing food. Are Popiel and Halfdan evil rulers whose downfall and subsequent deaths are deserved? In neither case is this straightforward, and the respective treatment of the previous rulers can once again be connected to contemporary dynastic struggles and political strategies.

CHANGING APPETITES FOR DYNASTIC SUCCESSION

Popiel's fault lay in not inviting the two strangers to the feast and in not being able to provide appropriate food and drink for his guests;⁷⁴ however (as Jezierski and Żmudzki discuss), this is sufficient to rob him of the authority of rulership, to be replaced by someone capable of feeding the people. His gruesome death, too, should be viewed as a distant though direct consequence of the events in question, brought about by the strangers who foretold Siemowit's ducal glory. Not only did Popiel have to be deposed but he also had to die for justice to be done.⁷⁵ The seemingly disproportionate nature of Popiel's fate seems to have already puzzled readers within a century of Gallus's text. Vincent Kadłubek attributed a history of tyrannical behaviour to Popiel (whom he refers to as Pompilius the Younger) to make the crime better fit the punishment. His Pompilius is an evil, cowardly, and effeminate ruler. Persuaded by his wife that his uncles were out to take power from him, Pompilius poisons them by means of a cleverly constructed cup and does not even bury them. From the unburied bodies come mice, which attack and devour the ruler, his wife, and his two sons.⁷⁶ This paves the way for Siemowit's succession. Although Kadłubek faithfully recounts Gallus's narrative of Siemowit's first haircut,⁷⁷ he completely separates it from the story of Popiel's fall,

⁷⁴ Banaszkiwicz, *Podanie o Piaście*, 198. Cf. biblical interpretation: *ibid.*, 149; Deptuła, *Galla Anonima*, 237–9.

⁷⁵ Jacel Banaszkiwicz, 'Die Mäusenthurmsage – the symbolism of annihilation of an evil ruler', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 51 (1985), 5–32; *id.*, *Podanie o Piaście*, esp. 175–213. See also Michałowski, 'Restauratio Poloniae', 10, esp. note 14.

⁷⁶ *Magistri Vincentii dicti Kadłubek Chronica Polonorum*, ed. by Marian Plezia, Monumenta Poloniae Historica, nova series, 11 (Kraków, 1994), 24–8. See Banaszkiwicz, *Podanie o Piaście*, 198–200; Paweł Żmudzki, 'Nieuchwytna tradycja dynastyczna Piastów', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, cxvii, 2 (2010), 122–3; Michałowski, 'Postacie wędrowców', 44–6.

⁷⁷ *Magistri Vincentii dicti Kadłubek*, 31–2.

which is presented as a direct consequence of the poisoning of his uncles. Siemowit simply seizes the throne vacated by Popiel, and the episode in Piast's hut serves only as an explanation of why Siemowit was the right candidate for the throne.⁷⁸

Kađłubek's thirteenth-century take on the teleporting feast episode thus bears more resemblance, at least in some respects, to its presentation in the broadly contemporary text *Heimskringla*. Halfdan's chilling death in *Heimskringla*, plunging through the ice of Randsfjorden, is not directly correlated to his actions or the loss of royal authority, nor can it be tied to the actions of the mysterious, aristocratic feast-thief in the same way that the strangers are implicated in Popiel's death in Gallus's text. Within the context of the episode itself, Halfdan's loss of authority has two causes: firstly, he failed in his duty as a host; secondly, he accused an innocent man of the theft of food. It is to be assumed that these actions justify the inevitability of the change on the throne (although it would presumably have happened anyway as Harald was his only living son).

Yet the similar approach to the motif taken by Kađłubek and Snorri belies opposing motivations. Kađłubek's long view of Polish history retreats from Gallus's presentation of the fate of the polity and the Piast dynasty as intertwined. This was understandable given that the dynasty, divided into three competing branches by Kađłubek's time, could no longer be equated with sole, stable rule of Poland. Kađłubek instead emphasized the Polish realm itself as a stable and ancient entity, and within this context the change in dynasty represented by the transfer of power from Popiel to Siemowit becomes less significant. Conversely, Snorri's take on Norwegian history further developed the century-old tradition that cast Norway's single ruling dynasty back into the mists of time. At the time he wrote, an officially acknowledged representative of that ancient dynasty was succeeding in eliminating his opposition; thus, Snorri could not disparage the progenitor of the Yngling rulers of Norway (and not least because the dream episode had previously drawn an explicit connection between Halfdan and his most holy descendant, St Olaf). Consequently, in the broader context of the saga, Halfdan is portrayed as a good ruler, whose death is mourned by his subjects to the extent that the magnates of each

⁷⁸ Compare with various versions of the story of the deposition of Jarl Hakon Sigurdsson and elevation of Olaf Tryggvason; Rutkowski, *Norweska kronika*, 129–38.

petty kingdom he has conquered claim the right to bury his body. They ultimately divide the cadaver between them, each burying the portion they receive in a mound in their own region.⁷⁹

Although in Kadłubek's account the implied moral judgement of Popiel is a necessary justification for Siemowit's ascension, a transfer of royal authority from one dynasty to another that preserves the pre-existing Polish realm, in Halfdan's case the transfer of authority from one member of the dynasty to another simply marks out his successor Harald as the first member of the dynasty with the necessary qualities and charisma to unify Norway. The reigns of Harald's Norwegian forefathers fall into a consistent pattern in *Heimskringla*. Each successive ruler cobbles together a realm from the petty kingdoms based around the Oslofjord, but in each case this realm does not have the cohesion to survive its ruler's death, leaving his successor to repeat the process. Halfdan the Black creates the largest of these realms to that point but is unable to escape the pattern. His failure to create a lasting realm and the fragmentation of his possessions upon his death is viscerally expressed by the division of his body between the realm's bickering regional aristocracies. However, Harald breaks from this pattern, unifying Norway and establishing a rigid (and entirely anachronistic) hierarchy of jarls and lesser lords which ensures its survival despite many dynastic struggles to come. The transfer of power expressed by the teleporting feast in *Heimskringla* thus reiterates the process of the dynasty coming into its own and maturing from a petty rulership, unable to adequately support the needs of its subjects or the cohesion of its realm, to the might and charisma of full kingship. In this respect, the episode is a better analogue for the function of the haircutting coming-of-age ritual in Gallus and Kadłubek than the haircut of Harald Fairhair itself is.

Snorri's decision to insert an episode further emphasising dynastic continuity and suitability to rule reflects a development from the unsettled dynastic reality that *Fagrskinna* had acknowledged with Halfdan's dream. By Snorri's time, most of King Hakon Hakonsson's opposition had been quashed, and the uneasy alliance between Hakon and his final rival (and Snorri's ally), Duke Skuli (Skule Bårdsson), had yet to break down. Although Snorri's allegiances infused his work with a complicated attitude towards Norwegian kingship, his emphasis

⁷⁹ *Heimskringla* I, 93.

on dynastic continuity unambiguously supports Hakon, all of whose purported paternal ancestors back to Harald Hardrada had claimed the title of king of Norway. Skuli could make no such claim; nevertheless, he had himself crowned in opposition to Hakon in 1239, with ultimately fatal consequences for both himself and Snorri. A decade later, the Norwegian political treatise *The King's Mirror* marked the transformation of the sprawling Norwegian dynastic vision seen in *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*. Here, the parallel dynastic strands implied by Halfdan's dream are unambiguously a bad thing: a cause of strife, instability, and the decline of courtly values. The phenomenon of power-sharing between brothers becomes the basis of a parable of famine and dearth, in which the overall quality of the kingdom's nobility is reduced.⁸⁰ The inclusion of the teleporting feast in *Heimskringla* could be interpreted as a bridge between these two attitudes, dated after most of Hakon's opposition had been quashed.

CONCLUSION

The appearance of shared motifs in two historiographical traditions that circulated simultaneously in two geographically and politically divorced medieval polities is enough to pique the curiosity of any historians looking to explore medieval strategies of elite legitimisation through a comparative framework. This analysis clearly demonstrates the extent to which both this interest and the comparative approach are justified. Both the Polish and Norwegian traditions utilise a motif, also attested in earlier Latin historiography, whereby a haircut accompanied by a ritualistic renaming marks the rise to power of a dynastic progenitor. In both (albeit not in every iteration of the Norwegian tradition), the transfer of authority to this progenitor from an old, unsuitable predecessor is manifested in the form of a magically teleporting feast. Despite the markedly different contexts in which they were produced and the differing presentation and interpretation of the motifs, the traditions use these motifs to explore the nature of succession and the transition of power both within and between dynasties. On a fundamental level, both traditions constitute narratives of legitimisation, providing the dynastic elites of their day with the

⁸⁰ *The King's Mirror (Speculum regale – Konungs skuggsjá)*, trans. Laurence Marcellus Larsson (New York, 1917), 195–9.

symbolic capital to justify their position of power and to exclude their rivals.

Furthermore, the comparison of these traditions brings their differing strategies for elite legitimisation into sharp relief, and these strategies can be related to and explained within the context of dynastic politics in the arenas they represent. In the Polish tradition, Gallus strove to assert that the divinely granted legitimacy of the Piast dynasty had been passively inherited by his patron Bolesław Wrymouth and was not shared by his ill-fated rival and brother, Zbigniew; to that end, he crafted a narrative in which strangers possessed of sacral power cut the hair of the son of Piast, elevating him to be Siemowit, the “head of the family”. Siemowit himself is a passive participant in the proceedings. He is essentially the vessel to channel the strangers’ gift of royal power, an emblem for the dynasty’s rise to maturity from its peasant patriarch, the hairy Chościsko. In contrast, the progenitor Harald Fairhair plays an active role in lifting his dynasty from the obscurity of petty kingship and backs up his military conquests by shaping himself into the physical image of a king. This portrayal speaks of a society in which the personal strength and charisma of claimants reinforces their inherited right to rule, and his freshly trimmed, but still luxuriant locks, as envisaged in his father’s dream, reveal a mechanism by which successful claimants could claim legitimacy by tracing themselves back to a single dynastic wellspring.

This message may have been developed with Harald Hardrada in mind but had an enduring relevance as the dynastic chaos of the Civil War period unfolded and the grandsons and great-grandsons of Harald vied to be the claimant with enough charisma (not to mention wealth and brute strength) to seize and hold the kingdom. The survival and even embellishment of the Fairhair narrative during this period indicate the relative efficacy of this dynastic model when compared to Gallus’s account of Siemowit. Gallus’s restrictive view of succession and intolerance of dynastic rivalry became untenable in the face of a similar form of dynastic fragmentation to that seen in Norway, as the competing Piast siblings gradually split the dynasty into three branches over the course of the thirteenth century. The sacral overtones of Piast beginnings, the significance of the change in dynasty, and the potency of the dynasty itself were diminished as Polish history was extended back to ancient times by Kadłubek. In contrast, it was the end of dynastic instability with the rise of Hakon Hakonsson that put an end to the old dynastic

model in Norway, with *The King's Mirror*, a new expression of royal ideology, regarding the competition of rival dynasts with abhorrence.

Ultimately, the value of the comparative approach lies in its potential to reveal aspects that would not necessarily be apparent when studied alone. In this case, the comparison of the haircutting episodes points us towards a shared way of understanding and organizing historiography that manifests in the surviving texts in the form of the progenitors' power-granting haircuts. As Siemowit's hair is cut, so Gallus cuts away extraneous dynasts, banishing them from his vision of dynastic history to be attested only in external sources. In Norway, Halfdan's vision of spreading locks of dynastic hair, descended from a single head, reflects a historiographical tradition which must justify its detailed coverage of the turbulent transmission of Norwegian royal power between different claimants by carefully linking each of them back to the same source.

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