THE NORTHERN WORLD

Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages

Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes

Edited by
Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal and Ian Beuermann

BRILL

THE NORTHERN WORLD

Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages

The Northern World

North Europe and the Baltic *c.* 400–1700 A.D.
Peoples, Economies and Cultures

Editors

Barbara Crawford (St. Andrews)
David Kirby (London)
Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (Oslo)
Ingvild Øye (Bergen)
Richard W. Unger (Vancouver)
Piotr Gorecki (University of California at Riverside)

VOLUME 52

Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages

Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes

Edited by
Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson,
Jan Erik Rekdal and Ian Beuermann

BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2011

Cover illustration: Haraldr Finehair Cuts Dofri's Shackles. Flb, c.1390
With kind permission of Árni Magnússon Institute, Iceland

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ideology and power in the Viking and Middle Ages : Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney, and the Faeroes / by Gro Steinsland … [et al.].
p. cm. — (The Northern world, ISSN 1569-1462 ; v. 52)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-90-04-20506-2 (hbk. : acid-free paper) 1. Vikings—History. 2. Middle Ages. 3. Kings and rulers—History—To 1500. 4. Ideology—History—To 1500. 5. Power (Social sciences)—History—To 1500. 6. Scandinavia—History—To 1397. 7. Iceland—History—To 1262. 8. Ireland—History—To 1603. 9. Orkney (Scotland)—History. 10. Faroe Islands—History. I. Steinsland, Gro.

DL65.I34 2011
948'.02—dc22

2011006132

ISSN 1569-1462
ISBN 978 90 04 20506 2

Copyright 2011 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.
Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Global Oriental, Hotei Publishing, IDC Publishers, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers and VSP.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Koninklijke Brill NV provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA.
Fees are subject to change.

CONTENTS

List of Contributors vii
List of Maps and Figures ix
Preface xi

Introduction. Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes 1
Gro Steinsland

Chapter One. Origin Myths and Rulership. From the Viking Age Ruler to the Ruler of Medieval Historiography: Continuity, Transformations and Innovations 15
Gro Steinsland

Chapter Two. Kings, Earls and Chieftains. Rulers in Norway, Orkney and Iceland c. 900–1300 69
Jón Viðar Sigurðsson

Chapter Three. *Jarla Sǫgur Orkneyja*. Status and Power of the Earls of Orkney According to Their Sagas 109
Ian Beuermann

Chapter Four. An Arena for Higher Powers. Cult Buildings and Rulers in the Late Iron Age and the Early Medieval Period in the Mälar Region 163
Olof Sundqvist

Chapter Five. From Wine in a Goblet to Milk in Cowdung. The Transformation of Early Christian Kings in Three Post-Viking Tales from Ireland 211
Jan Erik Rekdal

Chapter Six. The Warrior in Old Norse Religion 269
Jens Peter Schjødt

Chapter Seven. Óðinn, Valhǫll and the Einherjar. Eschatological Myth and Ideology in the Late Viking Period 297
Anders Hultgård

Chapter Eight. Family Matters? The *Cultus* of the Scandinavian Royal Martyrs 329
Joanna A. Skórzewska

Conclusions. The Long Adaptation of Pagan and Christian Ideologies of Rulership 367
Ian Beuermann

Index 387

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Ian Beuermann, Humboldt University Berlin, Germany.

Anders Hultgård, University of Uppsala, Sweden.

Jan Erik Rekdal, University of Oslo, Norway.

Jens Peter Schjødt, University of Aarhus, Denmark.

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, University of Oslo, Norway.

Joanna A. Skórzewska, Independent scholar, Prague, Czech Republic.

Gro Steinsland, Centre for Advanced Study Oslo, Norway.

Olof Sundqvist, University of Gävle, Sweden.

LIST OF MAPS AND FIGURES

Introduction: Steinsland

Map for *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages*: Important regions and places mentioned in the book 14

Chapter 3: Beuermann

Figure 1. Ancestors of the Earls of Orkney: Fornjótr—Rǫgnvaldr and Sigurðr, *Orkneyinga saga* 114
Figure 2. Earls of Orkney: Rǫgnvaldr and Sigurðr—Jón and Davíð, *Orkneyinga saga* 130

Chapter 4: Sundqvist

Figure 1. The Mälar region. The Landscapes around the lakes Mälaren and Hjälmaren. From Ljungkvist 2006 165
Figure 2. The Vendel Period hall in Old Uppsala. Drawn by Alicja Grenberger 172
Figure 3. The hall at Helgö. Find distribution in the hall on Foundation Ia at Helgö. (a) Fragments of filigree glass claw and cone beakers = open triangle. (b) Guldgubbar = open square; weapons = filled square. (c) Knives = filled triangle; loom-weights and wetstones = a dot. (d) Density map of the kind of distribution. The first isarithmic curve marks areas with at least 1 find per m^2. The most dense square metre contains 8 finds, and the entire house (125 m^2) contains 90 finds. The 'H' marks a presumed position of the high seat. After Herschend 1998 174

PREFACE

The present book is the result of research carried out at the *Centre for Advanced Study* (CAS) in Oslo during the academic year 2007–08. An international group of scholars from different disciplines—history of religion, medieval history and celtology—attempted to gain a better understanding of the ideological aspects of rulership in the Nordic countries during the Viking and early Middle Ages. The most important research is now presented in this book, *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages. Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*. We have incurred a great debt to the *Centre for Advanced Study* for the stimulating and luxurious research conditions we enjoyed during our project there.

Together, the volume's individual chapters thus represent our interdisciplinary project: methodological approaches and professional interests differ, but our common research revolved around the relation between power and religion. We have then also chosen to publish our results as chapters of a common book, rather than as a collection of articles. All authors have contributed with much more than their texts. Even though the length of the stay at the *Centre for Advanced Study* varied for individual participants, we were all engaged in an exciting, challenging, and fruitful discussion on the power of rulers and religion from the Viking to the Middle Ages.

At the end of a year of intensive research into a common project, we have all developed a deeper, perhaps new, understanding of the important relations between power, ideology, myths and rituals in a common northern European warrior culture of the late Viking Age and the transition to Christianity and the Middle Ages. The main hypothesis, that important elements of the pre-Christian ideology of rulership survived into the early Middle Ages, transformed or even simply transferred, seems to have been strengthened by our research. This book presents some of our main results, and hopes to initiate further discussion.

Four of the participants have been responsible for the continuation and publication of our research: Prof. Gro Steinsland, Prof. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Prof. Jan Erik Rekdal, and Dr. Ian Beuermann.

Oslo, August 2010
Gro Steinsland Jón Viðar Sigurðsson Jan Erik Rekdal Ian Beuermann

INTRODUCTION

IDEOLOGY AND POWER IN THE VIKING AND MIDDLE AGES SCANDINAVIA, ICELAND, IRELAND, ORKNEY AND THE FAEROES

Gro Steinsland

Subject and research questions

The power of the ruler, and ideology, are central elements in the political, social, religious and cultural development of the North during the transition from the Viking to the Middle Ages. The processes at work during this period of change can be discerned in the concepts and practices associated with chieftains, earls and kings. It has therefore been a premise for our research project that the ideology of rulership constitutes a focal point during this transformation of Nordic culture from the ninth to the thirteenth century. Consequently, we examine the ideology of rulership in a wide spectrum of analyses.[1]

The medieval European Christian ideology of rulership has been widely discussed both in European and Nordic scholarly circles. However, a wider approach which also considers the Nordic pre-Christian expressions of power, and their transformations and confrontations with the 'new' ideals of the Christian Middle Ages, has so far been lacking.

Geographic and chronological perspective

Geographically, chronologically, and concerning our sources, the perspective of this book is wide. Geographically and culturally, we understand 'The North' to encompass the modern Nordic countries where our focus is on Scandinavia and Iceland, the Atlantic Islands including the Orkneys and the Faeroes, and Ireland. With this, our

[1] The term 'rulership' has been coined in analogy to 'kingship' (cf Norwegian 'herskermakt' and 'kongemakt'), encompassing like the latter all the social, cultural, religious, and ideological issues connected to the exercise of power.

studies discuss different societies with different types of rulers, where the titles chieftain, earl and king relate to different levels of power and ideological contexts. Iceland only knew chieftaincies (almost) until the Norwegian crown gained overlordship in the 1260s (see Sigurðsson's chapter). Also in the Faeroes there were only chieftains. In Viking Age Norway, the earls of Hlaðir and the kings descending from Haraldr hárfagri competed for power until the victory of royalty, defined as the Ynglingar-dynasty (see Steinsland's chapter). The Mälar region in Sweden was dominated by rival petty kings long into the medieval period (see Sundqvist's chapter). Orkney is presented as an earldom in some sort of dependency of the Norwegian crown until the end of the twelfth century (see Beuermann's chapter). Ireland, christianised early, was split into many competing small kingdoms (see Rekdal's chapter). Sami culture is important in our book when the Nordic sources present Sami affairs because of ideological motives.

Thus the book has a broad cultural-historical coverage. Its discussions are interdisciplinary and wide-ranging, but our book does not attempt to offer a comprehensive overview. In an ideal world, some other important sources and geographical areas (such as the Anglo-Saxon culture) might have been included, but for practical reasons this remained outwith our scope here. Also within the areas analysed by us elements remain that require greater in-depth discussion, such as the meaning and use of the titles king (*konungr*), earl (*jarl*) and chieftain (*hǫfðingi*) over time and space. We therefore hope that the results we present here are an inspiration for further research. The research-complex 'power and religion' requires further in-depth analyses of individual sources, and challenges scholars to offer tentative syntheses which consider the whole cultural arena of the North and Europe together.

Change of religion

A main focus of the volume is on questions and problems connected to the transition from pagan rulership to Christian kingship. 'Change of religion' is thus a keyword in this book. The introduction of Christianity to the Nordic countries from the mid-tenth century on brought a new world-view, new belief and new rituals, and in its wake fundamental ideological changes with important consequences for Nordic history. The change of religion came to transform Nordic

culture, both the mental and the physical landscape. The arrival of Christianity and Christian kingship led to frictions between old and new which Nordic culture had to overcome. A majority of chapters therefore focus on the interactions between native tradition and foreign impulses.

Typologically, while Christianity is a universal religion propagating a doctrine of salvation, Nordic paganism is an ethnic religion. It does not seem to have known either a hierarchic priesthood or any other permanent institutions. A religion without dogmas, its focus was on cult rather than faith. The ruler would have been the guardian of the cultic places, possibly even the central figure of the cult.[2]

Christianity is a radically different type of religion. It arrived in the North both as part of a long drawn-out process of cultural transformation, and, more dramatically, as the religious programme and means of control of a new type of kingship. This new kingship was native Nordic, but its representatives returned home from abroad: young Scandinavian royals who had grown up or had been educated at European Christian courts. A classic example is the tenth century King Hákon goði, youngest son of King Haraldr hárfagri. His by-name Aðalsteinsfostri stems from his growing up at the royal court of Anglo-Saxon England. As an adult, Hákon goði returned to Norway to claim the crown and attempt to christianise the country.

Which ideological forces defined Viking Age power? How did the ideology of power change when the pagan Nordic society became Christian? What happened to the concept of rulership when Óðinn and Freyr were replaced by the Christian God as the new ideological and mythical yardstick?

One of the most important differences between Europe and the Nordic countries is religion. In the Viking Age, the Nordic countries were largely pagan, while northern Europe, Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England had long since been christianised. Ireland, Christian since the fourth/fifth century, provides a show-case of a 'non-mainstream European' Christian ideology of rulership (see Rekdal's chapter).

At some stage in the development, Christianity and centralised kingship become two sides of the same coin—it is no surprise that, from the ninth century on, also the Nordic countries were by and large

[2] Sundqvist 2007.

christianised by kings who harboured ambitions of forming a new type of kingdom.[3]

Thus 'change of religion' is a keyword in analyses of power between the Viking and the Middle Ages, pointing to other significant elements such as questions about breaks, changes, transformations and continuity.

Ideology

Within our focus on the relation between power and religion, we concentrate on *ideological elements* connected to power, rather than on economic, political, or military aspects.[4] There are many discussions of the term ideology, and it is not our intent to provide yet another complicated definition. Suffice to say that ideology differs from mentality in that the latter refers to a more subconscious, vague, and possibly quotidian understanding of life and the world, while the former concerns systems of thought formulated with a greater degree of intention. These thought-complexes are relatively systematised, yet not necessarily analytical. Scholars use the term ideology in many diverse understandings, frequently as a system of thought which expresses a world-concept and which permeates culture as a whole. In this general sense, the term ideology refers to explanations and interpretations of the world which are shared by a whole culture—for example the Christian worldview in the Middle Ages.

Ideology thus encompasses both the construction of a culture's worldview and the explanations that unite this culture. More specifically, it also refers to the intentional use of myths, rites or narratives by individual groups with the aim to legitimise a certain type of rulership. We see ideology, here in the understanding religious ideology, as an important portal to analyse the type of power which is connected to control of belief, perceptions, world-view, and values.

Viking Age rulership

Rulership in the Viking Age took its physical shape in the hall with its ceremonial drinking-banquets. The ruler's and his warriors' behaviour in the hall was determined by rituals and ceremony, in everyday life,

[3] Berend 2007.
[4] Mann 1986.

during festivities, and in crises. The hall was the venue for shows of respect with the declamation of skaldic poetry, stories about heroes, and the recitation of genealogies.

Archaeology has discovered many traces of Scandinavian halls within the last decades, providing us with a more tangible basis to discuss the relation between power and religion in the Nordic countries in the Viking and early Middle Ages. Especially the Iron Age 'central places' and 'aristocratic milieus' are at the centre of archaeologists' attention.[5]

Historians have in recent years begun to focus on the ideology of the Kings' Sagas.[6] A growing interest in a new discussion of power can also be seen in other disciplines. In recent decades, historians of religion debated new perspectives on myths and rituals linked to rulership, turning away from the older discussion of sacral kingship which was limited to considering the king as a representative of the gods.[7] Within research into myths, particular attention is now paid to the interpretation of myths as reflections of a society's ideology.[8] All this encourages a much more layered interdisciplinary debate on the relation between power and religion than previous research traditions.

As a source allowing comparative analysis into halls of the Nordic countries, the Anglo-Saxon heroic poem *Beowulf* is frequently referred to. And the aristocratic ship-burial from Sutton Hoo in East Anglia is discussed together with an exclusive group of rich ship-burials from Scandinavia: Hedeby in Denmark, Vendel and Valsgärde near Uppsala in Sweden, and Gokstad, Oseberg, Borre, Myklebostad and Tune in Norway.[9]

When we consider these results of analyses of power in written and archaeological sources, we can propose the outlines of a northern European aristocratic milieu in which resources and ideas were exchanged on a grand scale. Within this milieu we discern an aristocratic group identity based on personal contacts and alliances in an international network.

---

[5] The literature is quite extensive, see e.g. Herschend 1993; 1997; Söderberg 2005; Gansum 2008, with further references.

[6] Cf Bagge 1991; Ármann Jakobsson 1997.

[7] Steinsland 1991; Sundqvist 2002.

[8] E.g. Lincoln 1999.

[9] Swanton 1997; Hedeager and Tvarnø 2001. Our understanding of Anglo-Saxon warrior culture shall in coming years be greatly influenced by analyses of the huge Staffordshire hoard discovered in 2009, far larger than the Sutton Hoo hoard, and almost wholly made up of weapon-fittings, possibly dating back to the 7th century.

Recent research underlines friendship and alliances as the fundamental building-blocks of Viking Age societies.[10] Kinship was probably more important for the elite than for other classes of the population—note that for example Germanic titles of rulers are derived from kin-groups.[11] The importance of kin for the elite can be seen in the many genealogies: on the level of kings and earls ancestors were counted back to gods and other non-human powers. By contrast, chieftains do not claim descent from mythical forces; they were linked to gods in different ways, for example via initiation.

A key role in the formulation of viking and early medieval ideology was played by the skald. There are, however, only very few surviving contemporary sources for descriptions of rituals in halls; we have to work with later narratives and archaeological sources. *Beowulf* attributes an important role to the king's wife as the leader of rituals during the drinking-ceremonies—a rare feminine element in an otherwise very masculine culture.[12] Also important grave mounds with 'feminine' grave-goods and runic inscriptions might indicate that women could have played a certain leading role at a high level in the Migration- or Viking-Age North. Consider in this context the Oseberg mound in the Vestfold and the great burial mounds on Karmøy and in Sogn in Norway, the female graves in Västmannland and Uppland in Sweden, and at Mammen in Denmark. Nevertheless, on balance a milieu which created a strong warrior-ideology must have been a male-dominated culture in which women played subordinate roles.

Rulership based on personal networks between the political actors is an unstable phenomenon, easily altered when constellations of power change. Viking Age systems of power were different from the medieval institutionalised kingdoms with their well-defined territories where ideologically, power derived from the divine sphere. In contrast to medieval authority conceived of from "the top down", Viking Age power structures were organised from "the bottom up" (see Sigurðsson's chapter).

The great halls, seats for rulers of different ranks—chieftain, earl or king—bear witness to the ruler's or the dynasty's power over a certain area. Scholars have debated in how far control of territory or

[10] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999.
[11] Green 1998.
[12] Enright 1996.

of a group of people was the ideological basis for power. The ruler with his war-band offered protection to the farmers who, in exchange, supported him in his power-struggles. Thus war and plundering were vital elements of the Viking Age socio-economical structure. But they also played an important symbolic role as elements in a warrior code of honour which, in turn, reinforced these patterns of behaviour. War and fighting were necessary in order to procure the resources for equipping and recompensing the war-band which provided the ruler's power-base. War then also had sacral dimensions in that certain godheads, especially Óðinn, initiated and watched over warfare. According to our literary sources, kings and earls expected to enter Óðinn's death-realm after their deaths. This mythology connected to death was such an integral part of Nordic warrior-ideology that even Christian kings were sent to Valhǫll after their demise (see Hultgård's chapter).

With alliance-building such a necessity, a pattern of ritual drinking-banquets developed, providing the venue for the exchange of gifts and high-status objects. Thus during these feasts, the ruler channelled the redistribution of goods and resources within society, thereby strengthening his position. Another important element of alliance-building was the system of fosterage, based on mutual fostering of sons. It established strong ties of loyalty between families. Based on research on the northern European *comitatus*, the group of warriors linked to the ruler and his hall, scholars use the term *warrior-ideology* also with regard to Nordic rulership. There can be no doubt that ideologically and economically, the pagan warrior ideal was a central feature of Viking Age society (see Schjødt's chapter).

The ruler depended on popular support which he, as outlined, secured via gifts and redistribution of resources. Consequently the "good ruler" was generous and extravagant, as by-names such as "giver-of-rings", and "distributor-of-gold" show. Power also found symbolic expressions in rich clothes, weapons, jewellery, gold-rings, horses and their expensive tack, drinking-horns and food-vessels. In addition to plunder gathered abroad, the ruler's own lands provided the economic basis for this.

Warfare was a highly ritualised phenomenon closely associated with religion, especially with the cult of Óðinn. Yet in practice, war and plundering were also seasonal activities, mainly limited to the summer months. The feasts and associated distribution of gifts at home ensured for the ruler a permanent loyal group of professional warriors, bound

to him by oath. From Viking Age Denmark we know the great circular military constructions of Trelleborg, Aggersborg and Fyrkat, witnesses of the ruler's power and warlike intent. It is an open question whether the older circular farmsteads in the south-west and north of Norway are similar permanent military constructions. The later rules regarding the *leidangr*, the farmers' duty to provide crews and equipment for the king's ships, reflect the organisation of warfare at sea.

The ideology of rulership formulated through myths and rites

As mentioned above, research into myths has become more focused on myths as an entrance-portal to the ideology of a given culture. Myths and rituals do not exist in a social void: they may be exploited by the elite in order to advance its own interests. Consequently, myths and rituals express an *ideology*. Through myths and rituals, certain power relations and world views are presented as god-given, an order of things formulated at the beginning of time. Myths and rituals are therefore valuable sources when we want to examine a society's ideology.[13]

A good example of an authoritative tale about the creation of a static, god-given social order where every class has its allocated place is the creation myth in the eddaic poem *Rígsþula*, a poem probably construed in the Middle Ages and written down in the fourteenth century *Hauksbók* manuscript. On the top rung of the power ladder is the king: divine name-giving and instruction raise him to a level close to the gods.

Changing power relations may be expressed via new creations, innovations and re-use of older mythological and ritualistic concepts: although myths and rituals are usually considered conservative elements of society, innovations and transformations are in fact common. The change of religion in the Nordic countries initiated a period of interesting interaction between tradition and innovation. Thus, with regard to our medieval literary sources we should probably beware of postulating either-or, pagan or Christian readings. Rather, we should envisage mixed compositions, and even the possibility of a deliberate double-communication: rulers employing the pagan and Christian ideological languages.

[13] Berger 1997.

Myths and rituals are particularly elaborate when a new ruler takes control, or when the old ruler dies. Many cultures know complicated inauguration or accession rituals with different variations of coronation ceremonies. They frequently include the concomitant transmission of honorific symbols, with initiation and transmission of special knowledge, symbolic journeys to the realm of death for the acquisition of numinous knowledge, and *hieros gamos* between the ruler-to-be and a representative of the mythical world. The death of a ruler is no less surrounded by myths and rituals. His grave is frequently marked by an enormous mound—the power of a dead ruler could be formidable! Burial mounds had different functions as holy places in the landscape, and were probably highly important cultural monuments. We should not forget in this context that in a society without strong permanent institutions the death of a ruler constituted a potential crisis. Personal alliances were likely to break down; usually there were many pretendants to power, and conflicts between brothers or other members of the dynasty frequently ensued. Here also the Old Norse dynastic poems were an important stabilising element in a rite of transition which ordered the difficult period from the death of the old ruler to the accession of the new one.

In sum, we may be able to discern the contours of a—to a degree—consistent ideological complex, indicating that pagan Nordic society propagated through myths, rites and narratives what we may call a religious ideology of rulership. This ideology, admittedly, knew local and regional variations. The various chapters in this volume shall discuss some of these specific regional characteristics, mainly based on their descriptions in the literary sources.

The Middle Ages

Christianity brought an organised international cult with a hierarchic ecclesiastical structure. The Christian ideology of rulership had been developed on the Continent over a long period of time. One of its most important concepts, that of a "righteous king", who was God's representative on earth and the guarantor of law, order and justice, was presented already by the Church father Augustine, and later developed into the important concept of *rex iustus*.

The great early theologians developed the ideology of the righteous king further; foremost amongst them Constantine's court theologian Eusebius. The ideology was fully formulated at the Carolingian

court of the ninth century, as the many so-called *specula principum* or *regis*, "princes' or king's mirrors", of that period propagating this official Christian ideology bear witness to. The second great period for the *speculum regis* was the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, by then influenced by Aristotle's historical philosophy and terminology. It is this second type of *speculum regis*, characterised by its use of *exempla*, which we find in the Nordic countries. The best example is the Norwegian *Konungs skuggsjá*, formulated for King Hákon Hákonarson around 1250.

Historiography, royal saint and identity

The medieval Christian literary culture triggered a Nordic historical consciousness and awareness of identity. This literacy developed what we may call with Jan Assmann a cultural memory.[14] In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries then, Nordic historiographers wrote the history of the Nordic countries into a common European Christian historiography. A main source for this process of transformation are the Kings' Sagas; comparable texts also exist in Ireland. Whether or to which degree the Old Norse Kings' Sagas are influenced by the *rex iustus* ideology is a contentious question that has engendered an extensive scholarly debate, which shall however not concern us here *per se*.

Royal saints were extraordinarily important characters in the Middle Ages, whether politically, religiously, or historiographically. It was through "national" royal saints that the countries in the European periphery were integrated into the common Christian cultural tradition. Only after the Nordic countries had obtained their own royal saints, physically documented with a martyr's grave in their native landscapes, did Christianity permanently become established in these outlying regions of Europe. Royal saints were at the very centre of "state-building" and of the growing awareness of one's own "national history": the narratives recounting the lives of the native, "national" royal saints were to become the new foundation myths, serving the needs of the new, christianised societies.[15] In the North, Norway, Sweden and Denmark acquired saintly kings (see Skórzewska's chapter); Orkney got saintly earls, Iceland saintly bishops. The most important of these

[14] Assmann 2006, cf Geary 2002.
[15] Boje Mortensen 2006; Klaniczay 2002.

CHAPTER ONE

ORIGIN MYTHS AND RULERSHIP. FROM THE VIKING AGE RULER TO THE RULER OF MEDIEVAL HISTORIOGRAPHY: CONTINUITY, TRANSFORMATIONS AND INNOVATIONS

Gro Steinsland

I. *Subject and research questions: The ideology of power—construed and formed through origin myths*

Myths and narratives about the origins of ruling dynasties are at the centre of this study. From the perspective of a historian of religion mythology is always of central importance when we seek to discern the ideology of pre-modern societies: there, power and ideology frequently manifest themselves via the structure and symbolic language of myths.[1] This study in particular shall show that origin myths and genealogies which propagate the descent of individual dynasties from gods and other powers were vital elements in the ideological foundation of the elite's power.

Within our common project shedding light on the Nordic hierarchy of king, earl (*jarl*), and chieftain (*hǫfðingi*), this chapter seeks out those origin myths with a bearing on the ideology of power; first and foremost connected to the great "Norwegian" ruling dynasties of the Viking and early Middle Ages: the earls of Hlaðir and the kings of the *hárfagri*-dynasty, transformed into the Ynglingar-dynasty. In addition, origin and initiation myths are also important ingredients in the narratives on the earls of Orkney and the chieftains in the Faeroes.

At the centre of this study is the permanent tension between the use of pagan origin myths made by the Christian Middle Ages, and the pre-Christian form and function of the mythological complexes. We shall discuss possible innovations, re-use and transformations of pagan mythological models within the educated milieu of medieval

[1] Cf Schjødt 1999; Lincoln 1999.

historiography, and ask whether we can discern ideological changes within this type of mythological material from the Viking to the Middle Ages.

A key term when we talk about how power was constituted in Nordic society is kin. However, in our context the term should not be understood to denote elementary biological relations: on the contrary, we are to a very high degree confronted with ideological constructions of kinship. And while Nordic tradition usually defines kinship via both the father's and the mother's side (cognatic kinship), in the genealogies of the ruling dynasties the male line predominates (agnatic kinship).[2] Such propaganda proclaiming the ancientness of the ruling dynasty and its divine origin with the help of a constructed lineage is a well-known feature in a comparative perspective, and it is usually expressed in dynastic origin myths.

There are two general types of origin myths: those that focus on the origins of an individual ruling dynasty and its territorial conquests, and those that describe the gestation of peoples. Both types can be found in Nordic texts. This study focuses on the first type of myths, in genealogical and in narrative contexts, since they legitimise the claims to power of individual dynasties.

The particular connection between rulers and gods, whichever shape it takes, is a common phenomenon in pre-modern societies. It is precisely his relation with the divine sphere which makes the ruler stand out as someone special. Based on this phenomenon scholars have formulated the well known theory of "sacral kingship".[3]

A distinctive characteristic of Nordic origin myths is that the ruling dynasties do not exclusively descend from gods, but that they to a correspondingly high degree also descend from their antipodes, the

---

[2] The division is not wholly consistent. While *Ynglingatal (Yt)* and *Háleygjatal (Hát)* show constructed agnatic lineages, *Hyndluljóð (Hdl)* shows that aristocratic kinship can also be conceived of along male and female lines, both in the earthly and in the mythological sphere.

[3] The theory of sacral kingship has been discussed intensely for the pagan Nordic society. Newer research has a tendency to play down the divine or sacral aspects of the ruler. Scholars recognise more complex mythological and cultic relations establishing the ruling dynasties as society's elite, yet which do not necessarily render the ruler divine or sacral. Within mythology it is first and foremost origin myths that legitimise the chosen dynasty's right to rule. Since the expression "sacral kingship" can evoke wrong associations with older research based on an evolutionary model, we should consider replacing the term with for example the more neutral "ideology of rulership", cf Steinsland 1991; Sundqvist 2002.

giants. Our texts describe erotic alliances between gods and giant-women, so-called *hieros gamos*, across the social and hierarchical boundaries of the mythological world.[4] The sons engendered in such exogamous relationships represent something new: they are neither gods nor giants, but the prototypes for a new dynasty of rulers. Such patterns of creation correspond to the pre-Christian cosmology where genesis and development result from interaction between the antipodes gods and giants, respectively "cosmos" and "chaos". This pagan Nordic *hieros gamos* myth needs to be understood as part of the pre-Christian concept of the world, which sees Ásgarðr and Utgarðr as the two opposites necessary to create and develop life. It is in this context that Nordic mythology expresses ideas of the ruler's exceptional origin, of his erotic alliances and marriages—and last but not least of his death and fate. The motifs birth, eroticism and death are connected to an origin mythology in which fate is a paramount element: the son engendered via the extreme alliance between a god and a giant-woman is superb "ruler-material", yet his life is also frequently predetermined by an exceptional fate. Rulers usually suffer dramatic deaths; in fact, deaths that according to the contemporary honour-code are remarkably ignoble. Consequently, and contrary to the view in older research, there is no single-layered positive "luck" (*hamingja, gæfa, gipta*) of the ruler. Rather, the ruler's "luck" is interwoven with elements of a dark fate, both of which characterise his extraordinary life. It is this which we find expressed in myths describing the ruling dynasty's origins in antipodal mythological alliances.

It is far more difficult to understand why the giants appearing in the origin myths of the pagan ruling dynasties were retained as dominant motifs also in the ideology of rulership of the Christian Middle Ages. Indeed, it seems that stories about giants are *the* prominent and enduring motif within origin mythology from the pagan Viking to the Christian high Middle Ages. According to the history of power as written down in medieval scriptoria, forces from the sphere of the giants remain fateful for Nordic rulers—be they kings, earls, or chieftains. We need to ask why medieval learned historiographers incorporated pagan origin myths into their accounts of Christian ruling dynasties. Christianity introduced a new concept of the world, and a

[4] Steinsland 1991.

new understanding of life, yet nevertheless pagan origin myths continued to play an important role in medieval historiography.

We shall in this study focus on a number of central origin myths in eddaic and skaldic poetry and in the sagas. The discussion does not follow a linear chronology from the Viking to the Middle Ages. Instead, we begin with medieval historiography, especially with Snorri's presentation of the Ynglingar-dynasty in his *Ynglinga saga* in *Heimskringla*. We shall then move back and forth between the thirteenth, and the eighth and ninth centuries, between the mythography in Christian historiography and traces of pagan origin myths in eddaic and skaldic poetry. The latter group of sources, obviously, continues to pose problems of dating.

In a wider perspective this study shall show that when Nordic culture encountered the European, Christian ideology of rulership, it showed a high degree of independence by retaining native pagan traditions on rulership long into the Middle Ages. Mythological and cognitive elements of the pre-Christian ideology of rulership were perpetuated, transformed, and incorporated into new contexts within the framework of erudite medieval historiography.

II. *Medieval ideology of rulership construed through pagan origin myths*

In the wake of the Nordic countries' Christianisation around the year 1000 a new ideal of rulership gained ground there. Christianity introduced the North to new concepts of the good and rightful ruler. The *rex iustus* ideology, formulated by the church father Augustine and further developed by the court theologians of Constantine and Charlemagne, placed the king at the centre of the Christian conception of history. Although the question is still open to which degree Nordic culture and texts were influenced by the *rex iustus* ideology, it concerns us here merely indirectly. In Nordic sources the first traces of a *rex iustus* ideology appear in the second half of the twelfth century.

The European *rex iustus* ideology was based on the cosmological concept of an almighty God, and on an understanding of history as a divinely controlled, linear development. History was seen as a chronological process from Genesis to the Last Judgement, and kings were the Christian God's agents, in charge of leading this development. This differs fundamentally from the pre-Christian situation, where rulers

enjoyed a different relationship with gods and powers, who were linked to the rulers' halls or high-seats via myths, cults, and rites.

In the wake of the conversion the Nordic countries faced the challenge to write themselves into a common European historiography. This led to an extraordinary increase in Nordic historiographical production from the late twelfth century on.[5] Now writers did not merely construct the histories of dynasties anymore, but the histories of peoples. The prologue in Snorri's *Edda*, for example, gives us a narrative of the origin of the Nordic peoples based on Ari's genealogy of the Ynglingar and on *Skjǫldunga saga*.[6] The fact that Snorri in the prologue and in *Ynglinga saga* presents the Nordic ruling dynasties as founded by Óðinn and his sons who immigrate to the North from Troy in Asia, bears witness to the arrival of a new comprehensive concept of culture and history in the Nordic countries. Through this narrative structure all Nordic countries were equipped with a common origin, with Óðinn as their founding father. Especially the prologue to Snorri's *Edda* presents us with a common Nordic origin myth based on contemporary erudite theories of migration, of euhemerism, and of a "natural religion".

By contrast, society in the Viking Age knew origin myths for the ruling dynasties, but no *common origin myth for the Nordic peoples.* Narratives relating to the emigration of peoples from Biblical or classical regions, and to their establishment of new societies elsewhere, were composed by classical authors, and inserted into Frankish and Anglo-Saxon genealogies. Towards the end of the Migration Age, Germanic peoples settled on the Continent and formed societies with a ruler, a *rex* or a *dux* at their head. Amongst these early Germanic peoples, who later on adopted Christianity, ideas about a common pre-historic origin of different groups were common: they considered themselves to originate in the north, and to descend from a pagan godhead who can be identified as Óðinn, even if he appears under a number of different names.[7] A common element in these narratives is that the *nationes* of Europe were founded by survivors fleeing after the fall of

[5] Jónas Kristjánsson 1997; Lunden 1995.

[6] *Skjǫldunga saga* only survives in late and incomplete copies, but is known from Arngrímur Jónsson's Latin version from the sixteenth century. Snorri was familiar with the saga, which is in all likelihood influenced by traditions going back to Ari and Sæmundr Froði.

[7] Heather 1989; Wolfram 1994; Hedeager 1996.

Troy—see only Virgil's *Aeneid* and the Norse *Trójumanna saga*. It is this tradition which Ari refers to in his *Íslendingabók*, when he with *Langfeðgatal* presents *Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr* as the first member of the Ynglingar-dynasty, and which Snorri adapts to a certain degree when he relates how the Æsir emigrated from the south to the north.[8]

In the wake of the North's Christianisation around the year 1000 views regarding the old gods underwent a change. Pagan gods were now either demonised or euhemerised. It is difficult for us to understand fully how the medieval euhemeristic model of interpretation was conceived of; it seems, however, that euhemerism was of more interest to historiographers than to theologians.[9] Gods were seen as the aristocracy and rulers of the past, yet at the same time they were also considered the gods of the past. But what about the giants, who become more and more central to the origin narratives? It is not easy to discern how views on these cosmological beings from *Utgarðr* developed. While the pagan gods were a threat to the Christian Church in the early phases of Christianisation—hence we see them demonised in the early period—giants may in fact have had a greater chance of surviving the change of faith than the pagan gods *qua* gods. Demonised gods could take on the character of giants, as for example Óðinn, and thus survive in popular belief and narrative traditions. No longer exclusively linked to cosmological forces of chaos, the giants came to represent a whole spectrum of forces. They became associated with core areas of the country, and metamorphosed to symbolise the original and native; their ancientness underlining that they were wise and knowledgeable. As we shall see, medieval historiographers never stopped being fascinated by the sphere of the giants.[10]

III. *Origin myths transform the Hárfagri- into the Ynglingar-dynasty*

The power-struggle between the earls of Hlaðir and the Hárfagri-dynasty, fought in the geo-political arena that was to become the

---

[8] Cf *Langfeðgatal* in *Íslendingabók, ÍF* I: 27. The discussion on the authorship of the prologue in Snorri's *Edda* shall not concern us here; cf only Klaus von See arguing against Snorri as the prologue's author, See 1999: 278; opposed by Dronke, Ursula and Peter 1977. Most modern scholars agree with the latter on Snorri's likely authorship.

[9] Cf Beck 2000 for Snorri's euhemerism: pagan gods are presented as a pre-historic elite, without however denying their past as gods.

[10] Cf Steinsland 1991, appendix, for the relation between Nordic and European giants; cf also Schultz's thorough analysis of giants, Schultz 2004.

kingdom of Norway, was eventually decided in favour of the latter. This construed lineage descending from King Haraldr hárfagri would be the prominent actor in the medieval Nordic historiography of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—then called the Ynglingar, or Ynglingar-dynasty.

Medieval historiographers credit Haraldr hárfagri with uniting Norway to form a kingdom; and according to the sagas it was his descendants who reigned as kings throughout the following centuries. More recent research has raised doubts about the trustworthiness of these traditions, questioning whether Norway as the allodial property (*oðal*) of the Hárfagri-dynasty was indeed a Viking Age achievement, or rather a medieval construction. Scholars have also pointed out the lack of good evidence for the denomination Ynglingar-dynasty. Many in fact argue that the very concept of an Ynglingar-dynasty, with its clear lineage including the great Christianising kings Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson and their heirs, is a fabrication introduced by medieval historiographers.[11] These discussions shall not concern us her *per se*. Rather, we shall analyse the mythological basis of this development, and its role for the legitimisation of the Hárfagri-dynasty's power in the Middle Ages. Thus, of importance for us are the *conceptions* relating to ruling dynasties, and the mythological and ideological explanation for their power, more than any questions about the reality of the biological descent. Indeed, the more artificially construed it is, the more a genealogy tells us about ideology.[12]

Ynglingatal *and* Ynglinga saga: *the genealogy of the Ynglingar-dynasty?*

Snorri bases his *Ynglinga saga* in *Heimskringla* on the skaldic poem *Ynglingatal*. He relates the history of the earliest Ynglingar kings with the skaldic poem *Ynglingatal* as his source, constructing a prose narrative around the individual stanzas of the poem. We cannot say whether Snorri included all of *Ynglingatal*'s original stanzas in his saga.[13] Traditionally, scholars have assumed that *Ynglingatal* dates

[11] Cf Krag 1991; Dørum 2001. The name "yngling" for Haraldr Hárfagri is not well documented; the assumed *ynglingr* in *Hkv* 4 should probably rather be read as *øðling*, see Fidjestøl 1966. It is important to be aware that the term *ynglingr* also denotes a king in general; the Danish kings for example are called *ynglingar*.

[12] Lunden, quoted by Dørum 2001:327.

[13] One of the most contentious questions regarding *Yt* is whether the poem has been included into *Ys* in its entirety or not, hence discussions about possible lost first stanzas and oral traditions. *Historia Norvegiae* gives the main line of the kings of *Yt*, but without referring to the poem as its source.

from the late ninth century, and that it contains the genealogy of a Swedish-Norwegian Ynglingar-dynasty. The poem describes twenty-seven kings, focussing on their extraordinary and ignoble deaths. It ends by praising an otherwise unknown King Rǫgnvaldr heithumhæri, "the highly-honoured". This character has been assumed to be a cousin of Haraldr hárfagri, and with this the poem can be linked to the Hárfagri- or Ynglingar-dynasty. Most scholars ascribe the poem to Haraldr hárfagri's *hirð*-skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir. There has also been near consensus that *Háleygjatal*, the poem and genealogy in praise of the earls of Hlaðir, equally dates to the late ninth century and emulates *Ynglingatal*—a view which has consequences for the interpretation of both poems.[14]

Following European patterns, Snorri starts his *Ynglinga saga* with the pagan gods Óðinn, Njǫrðr and Freyr with whose euhemerised characters the history of the earthly Ynglingar kings begins.[15] Thus Snorri creates a distance between the pre-historic gods and the earthly line of kings with the help of an origin myth. The first of the earthly or "historical" kings, Fjǫlnir, is described as a son of Freyr and the giant-woman Gerðr: "*Gerðr Gymisdóttir hét kona hans; sonr þeira hét Fjǫlnir.*"[16] This significant piece of information is not found in *Ynglingatal*. All the poem tells us is that Freyr was an important character for the future rulers: kennings describe three of the later kings as Freyr's descendants.[17] Snorri however, seems familiar with the Ynglingar's ancestors on both the father's and the mother's side. Searching for where Snorri got this information from, we find the eddaic poem *Skírnismál*, which describes an erotic alliance between

---

[14] Krag's hypothesis, Krag 1991, that *Yt* is a late poem, composed in the Middle Ages, is strongly opposed by philologists, cf Fidjestøl 1994 and Meulengracht Sørensen 1993. In spite of Krag's many interesting observations his views shall not be discussed here.

[15] *Langfeðgatal* in *Íslendingabók* also has *Yt* as its source, but has a slightly different version of the origin myth: 1.*Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr*, 2. *Njǫrdr Svíakonungr*, 3. *Freyr*, 4. *Fjǫlnir*. *Historia Norvegiae* claims three generations before *Fjǫlnir*: 1. *Ingui rex Swethiæ*, 2. *Neorth* (akk.), 3. *Froyr*, 4. *Fiolni* (akk.), *ÍF* I: 27. The debate on *Yt* and the historiographical versions cannot be entered into here; cf Steinsland 1991: 179ff.

[16] This information of *Ys* 10 is in all manuscripts of *Ys*.

[17] Alrek and Dag are called *Freys afspringi*, stanza 11; Adils as *Freys ǫttungr*, stanza 21, cf Sundqvist 2002. However, many different terms for kings appear in *Yt*, which suggests links to several different origin traditions. Scholars assume the kings' list in *Yt* to be a combination of various traditions.

a primeval couple, the Vanir-god Freyr and the giant-woman Gerðr. Snorri took this quite separate myth, and used it as the starting-point for his line of kings. Freyr and Gerðr become the founding-father and -mother of the Ynglingar, with their son Fjǫlnir as the dynasty's first earthly representative.

The very first stanza of *Ynglingatal* relates how Fjǫlnir drowns in a vat of mead, introducing us to the main issue of poem and saga alike: the kings' deaths, which are most often dramatic and frequently dishonourable.

Another motif which the poem focuses on is the kings' marriages. Whenever *Ynglingatal* mentions the women whom the kings married, the feminine part of the alliance is always, and conspicuously, a type of "Utgarðr-woman": the women hail either from the realm of death, or from cold and far-away regions. Women thus represent the "alien". In fact, there is a close relation between marriage and death, as stanzas 3, 12–13, 21, and 34 show. In this context death is described as an affectionate meeting between the deceased king and the queen of the death-realm, Hel.

Scholars continue to be astonished by the scurrilous deaths that the kings suffer in *Ynglingatal*. These deaths are particularly surprising since they occur in what has been assumed to be a royal praise-poem. I have in earlier works argued that *Ynglingatal*'s specific mythology of death makes sense if one considers it in the context of the poem's strong belief in *fate*, itself deriving from the origin myth which may have become attached to the Ynglingar tradition. Thus I have understood the kings' extraordinary fate in connection with the tension between the worlds of the gods and that of the giants, as expressed in the origin myth. The descendant of such an extremely exogamous alliance carries in himself forces from the whole cosmos, from the worlds of gods and of the giants, which manifests itself in his exceptional fate. With this, I accepted the origin myth on which *Ynglinga saga* 10 is based as a genuine tradition of the Ynglingar-genealogy; I reckoned that when Snorri presented the *Skírnismál*-myth as the origin myth of the Norwegian Ynglingar, he did so because as a thirteenth-century historian he was familiar with the ideology of rulership of this eddaic poem. Thus I assumed a latent presence of the origin myth with its main characters Freyr and Gerðr in *Ynglingatal*. In my interpretation, the tension in the origin myths between god and giant was paralleled in the poem's mythology of marriage and death, in which the feminine

part in manifold guises appears as a fateful "Utgarðr-woman" signifying eroticism and death simultaneously.[18]

However, Bergsveinn Birgisson's analysis of *Ynglingatal* in his recent doctoral dissertation requires many of the conclusions of the research on *Ynglingatal* to be reconsidered.[19] Bergsveinn argues convincingly that *Ynglingatal*, which he also dates to the Viking Age, is no genealogy of an Ynglingar-dynasty. Firstly, there would have been no Ynglingar-dynasty during Haraldr hárfagri's reign: the lineage is an ideological construct which owes its existence to medieval historiographers. The poem itself refers to several ruling dynasties. Secondly, Bergsveinn develops the older theory that *Ynglingatal*, written by Haraldr hárfagri's *hirð*-skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir, is in fact a satirical poem. He proposes that the accounts of extraordinary deaths should be read as ridicule directed against foreign kings, in particular the Swedish and Danish kings whom Haraldr hárfagri fought against at that time. These kings who suffer scurrilous and frequently ignoble deaths do not join Óðinn, which would have been the norm according to contemporary warrior-ideology. Instead, they unite with giants and monsters in grotesque and abnormal death-marriages. In Bergsveinn's reading, *Ynglingatal*' is a satirical poem that taunts foreign kings and their miserable ends.

Bergsveinn's dissertation sends out a warning shot not to be ignored; we cannot simply continue to reiterate the common view of *Ynglingatal* as the ancient *genealogy* of the Ynglingar-dynasty. If we follow Bergsveinn's conclusions we are in a wholly different situation for judging Snorri's contribution to the earliest history of the Hárfagri-dynasty: it seems possible that this contribution was far more innovative than previously assumed.[20]

We therefore need to ask the question whether Snorri's use of the *Skírnismál*-myth as the origin myth for the Ynglingar-dynasty is in fact an innovation. In *Gylfaginning*, Snorri presents the myth about Freyr and Gerðr without any reference to possible elements of an ideology of rulership; within the context of Snorri's *Edda* the focus is exclusively on the coming of Ragnarǫk. Or does Snorri base his use of

---

[18] Steinsland 1991:174–206.

[19] Bergsveinn Birgisson 2008.

[20] In an earlier publication I mentioned, but did not discuss, the possibility that Snorri may himself have introduced *Skm*'s myth as the origin myth of the Ynglingar, cf Steinsland 1991:178.

the origin myth for the Ynglingar genealogy on genuine pagan traditions which he then adapts to suit a historiographical work characterised by the ideology of his own time? It is well known that Snorri did have a political agenda of his own in *Heimskringla*. Or, for historians of religion, a more precisely formulated question would be: are ideas about the close relationship between the Ynglingar and the god Freyr a construct of the thirteenth century, without pagan basis?

The ideology of rulership in Skírnismál's *erotic myth*

Very briefly, I shall outline an interpretation of the myth expressed in *Skírnismál*.[21] The prose introduction to *Skírnismál* tells us that the Vanir-god Freyr sits in Óðinn's high-seat. From this cosmic vantage-point Freyr looks into Jotunheim and spots a young woman, Gerðr, crossing a farmyard. He falls deeply and dangerously in love with her. The next 42 stanzas describe a long journey from the abode of the gods to Jotunheim, all to court Gerðr, not by Freyr, but by his messenger Skírnir. He rides off to woo Gerðr for Freyr. Finally, after braving many dangers, and using special objects and runic magic, he manages to trick the recalcitrant giant-woman into the promise that she shall meet Freyr nine nights later. With Gerðr's promise secured, Skírnir returns to his master.

Based on analyses of *Skírnismál's* structure and motifs with regard to mythology, cultural history and iconography I propose that the poem makes statements about the sphere of the power of rulers. The three objects Skírnir receives, apples, ring and baton, represent in an iconographical context a ruler's insignia: globe, ring and sceptre. *Liðskjalf* represents the high-seat, the ruler's "throne", his seat of power. The erotic union the poem culminates in needs to be seen as a *hieros gamos*, a wedding between mythic characters. A possible ritual context for the poem's myth might be an inauguration or accession ritual. The messenger's journey between the abodes of Ásgarðr and Utgarðr in order to fetch the woman from Jotunheim has cosmic dimensions that

[21] Cf Steinsland 1991. *Skm* is preserved in *Codex Regius*, Gl.kgl.sml. 2365, 4to under the titel *Fǫr Skírnis*, dated to ca. 1270; and up to stanza 27 under the titel *Skírnismál* in AM 748 I, 4to, dated to the first quarter of the fourteenth century. These two manuscripts are so similar that a common source is usually assumed. I addition, stanza 42 is quoted in *Gf* and *SnE*.

may correspond to the liminal phase of a rite of transition.[22] While the poem primarily focuses on eroticism and the coming wedding, with the ring Draupnir and the eleven apples it also makes references to death. In Nordic poetry death is a subject that is closely linked to the power of the ruler. Consequently, *Skírnismál*'s structure and motifs together indicate that the poem played a role within the sphere of Nordic ideology of rulership.[23]

However, it is difficult to date this eddaic poem, and we have to consider the possibility that *Skírnismál* in its present version may be a medieval adaptation of a pre-Christian myth.[24] A number of sources give evidence for the existence of the *hieros gamos* myth in the Viking Age, for example the skaldic poem of the earls of Hlaðir, some heroic poems and the core of the eddaic poem *Hyndluljóð* as well.[25] And in *Háleygjatal*, the praise poem giving the earls of Hlaðir's genealogy, there is the earls of Hlaðir's origin myth, similarly to the *hieros gamos* myth in *Skírnismál*: the ruling dynasty at Hlaðir is described as descending from an erotic alliance between a god and a giant-woman. This is what we shall turn to in the following.

IV. *The origin myth of the earls of Hlaðir in* Háleygjatal

Next to the Hárfagri-dynasty the dynasty of the earls of Hlaðir provided the most powerful rulers in Viking Age Norway. At least intermittently,

---

[22] Steinsland 1991: 30–171. For a discussion of traces of initiation rituals linked to rulership see Fleck 1970; Steinsland 2002; Sundqvist 2002, and Schjødt in this volume.

[23] There are parallels to the *Skm*-myth in Irish royal ideology, with *hieros gamos* between the acceding king and the female character Medb, "she who inebriates". Medb simultaneously personifies the sacred drink in the inauguration ceremony, and the land of Erin. Mac Cana underlines Medb's important genealogical function as the king's wife and primeval mother of the royal dynasty, Mac Cana 1955:88; cf Byrne 2001.

[24] The interpretation of *Skm* summed up above is widely accepted, yet a number of scholars oppose it, most strongly Picard 1991. Some consider further parallel material when interpreting *Skm* as a myth with bearing on the ideology of rulership. Frands Herschend points to possible earlier Continental parallels to the *Skm*-myth in Latin sources from the sixth and seventh century, Venantius Fortunatus' wedding-poem dedicated to the Merovingian King Sigiberth, Herschend 1996. Johan Wickström finds parallel narrative structures in heroic poetry, in particular in *Helgakviða Hjorvarðsonar*, Wickström 2004. Else Mundal interpreted the myth with regard to the unification of the Norwegian kingdom, Mundal 1997.

[25] *Hyndluljóð* is an important source for royal ideology, cf Steinsland 1991; lack of space prevents its discussion here.

the earls enjoyed unchallenged authority over the coastal regions up to Nidaros. In *Háleygatal*, a praise poem addressed to Earl Hákon dated to around 985, the skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir gives the dynasty's genealogy. The name *Háleygatal* indicates that the earls of Hlaðir considered themselves to hail from Hålogaland, even if their seat of power was further south, at Hlaðir close to Nidaros.

There is a general consensus that the skaldic poem *Háleygatal* relates the earls' genealogy down to the poem's addressee, Earl Hákon the Powerful of Hlaðir.[26] Óðinn plays an important role throughout the poem. In a suggestive and masterful way the kennings in *Háleygatal* play on two important motifs of the Óðinn-mythology, the motif of the mead or drinking, and that of the hanging, both known from *Hávamál*. The skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir takes his audience into the drinking-party of the living earl, and alludes to Óðinn-like deaths and to burial mounds for the dynasty's members honoured in the poem. In short, *Háleygatal* is a master-piece of Óðinn metaphors.

At the very beginning of the poem, in stanza 1, Eyvindr skáldaspillir announces that he shall recount the earl's dynasty back to the gods, "*hans ætt… til goda teljum*". The following stanzas name the dynasty's ancestral couple as Óðinn and Skaði. In stanzas 3 and 4 the descent of the first earl, the prototype, is described thus: "*Þann skaldblætr skattfæri gat ása nidr vid jarnviðju; þás þau meir í Manheimum skatna vinr ok Skaði byggdu.*"[27] Consequently, when the earls' prototype known as Sæmingr is thus presented as a son of the god Óðinn and the giant-woman Skaði, this again implies that the first character in the line of earls descends from an exogamous relation representing cosmic antipodes: Ásgarðr and Utgarðr.[28] In the first stanza the skald therefore presents us with an origin myth connected to the ideology of

[26] No complete text of *Háleygjatal* has survived. Nine whole and seven half stanzas are quoted by Snorri in *Hkr* and *SnE*, some are also in *Fagrskinna*. Looking at parallel genealogies scholars have reconstructed a line of 27 characters going back to Óðinn and Skaði. This is the same number as in *Ynglingatal*, assumed to have been the model for *Háleygjatal*. The evidence is a genealogy which probably dates to 1300 given by Torfæus in his *Historia rerum Norvagicarum* from 1711, and a list of families from Resen's library. Both these sources, together with Snorri, *Ys* 8, name Sæmingr as the first in the line of earls.

[27] "The younger of the Æsir, worshipped by the skalds, engendered the bringer-of-taxes (earl) together with the giant-woman when they—the friend of men and Skaði—still lived in Manheim" *Skj* B II: 60 (my translation).

[28] In the present context we may use the threefold division Ásgarðr, Miðgarðr and Utgarðr as analytical terms for cosmological categories.

rulership. This myth includes well known characters from the Nordic pantheon, and needs to be analysed as part of *Háleygatal's* cosmology, as well as within its wider cultural and mythological horizons.

As already mentioned, while it is common for rulers to be depicted as descending from gods, usually the focus is on the male element. Examples of this would be the traditions about Óðinn as the apical figure amongst the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic peoples on the Continent.[29] By contrast, the origin myth in *Háleygatal* is extraordinary because of the important role the female element plays in the genealogy of the earls of Hlaðir. Their primeval mother is specifically named as Skaði, and referred to with the kennings *ǫndurdís* and *jarnviðja*, "ski-goddess" and "giant-woman". Conspicuously therefore, this giant-woman rather than Óðinn's wife Friggr is described as Sæmingr's mother. This underlines the exogamous erotic alliance, whose issue, in law, would not have had any right of inheritance. As indicated, the exogamous couple in this myth needs to be seen in the light of a pre-Christian cosmology which is characterised by the main motif of Nordic pre-Christian culture: the dramatic relations between gods and giants who were simultaneously opposed and attracted to one another, who fought and built alliances, an endless drama played out in many acts from genesis to nemesis. The son of such an exogamous union, here the prototypical earl, is neither god nor giant; but a new creation, a prototypical ruler who embodies the complete spectre of cosmic tensions between Ásgarðr and Utgarðr. This equips the earls of the Hlaðir-dynasty with extraordinary energies, pre-destined for an exceptional role in society and history.[30] Yet when the origin myth is seen in connection with cosmology, also its ambivalence becomes obvious. While for the gods it is requisite to co-operate with their opposites, the giants, in order to keep the cosmic peace and balance, such contact is always dangerous: fate rules in these areas of potential conflict between gods and giants. It is this tension between Ásgarðr and Utgarðr, included in origin myths, which lies at the base of the main feature of Nordic ideology of rulership: the fateful death of the ruler.[31]

---

[29] E.g. Dumville 1979.

[30] In Nordic culture the archetypical hero is usually equipped with a similar origin. His father is usually a member of the highest social class, while his mother is base-born. Cf Meulengracht Sørensen 1977, and Beuermann in this volume for the case of Earl Einarr of Orkney.

[31] Death is a highly important subject within the context of Viking Age rulership, and finding its most forceful expression in the Middle Ages, with the royal saint Óláfr

The giant-woman Skaði as the dynasty's primeval mother

While the giant-woman Skaði appears in a number of sources, a union of hers with Óðinn is exclusively described in the skaldic poetry of the earls of Hlaðir. Usually, Skaði is known within mythology as the wife of the Vanir god Njǫrðr.[32] She is a highly independent female character. Linked to Jotunheim, she is associated with uninhabited mountains, winter, and skiing.[33] Eyvindr skáldaspillir was well aware of Skaði's quality of a giant-woman and of her associations with winter landscapes, as evidenced by the kennings *ǫndurdís* and *jarnviðja* in *Háleygjatal*. There may be a possible link between these motifs and the name of Skaði's son, Sæmingr, which some scholars see as referring to the Sami.[34] In medieval texts the Sami are frequently identified as giants. In the Viking and early Middle Ages, the Sami were not limited to the far north of the Scandinavian peninsula, but exploited the natural resources of far greater and more southerly areas.[35] A recent analysis of the etymology of the name Skaði underlines aspects of warfare and fighting, insights which agree well with the warlike earl's milieu.[36] With this, both main characters of the origin myth, Óðinn and Skaði, are associated with war and fighting, underlining the Hlaðir-dynasty's strong ambitions as warriors and conquerors.

Sexuality and conquest

One may ask which type of alliance Óðinn and Skaði enter into: an erotic union similar to concubinage, or more formal marriage? To which degree is the impression of coercion and force, which Óðinn frequently uses vis-à-vis giant-women and which also Gerðr suffers in

---

Haraldsson where it connects to the Christian world view with Christ on the cross. Steinsland 2000 discusses the motif of the king's death, a mental bridge between paganism and Christianity.

[32] Cf *Skm*'s prose introduction, also *SnE*.

[33] *Gm* 11.

[34] A connection between Sæmingr and Sam/Sami has been proposed which, if accepted, would support the Håløygers' traditions about their northern origins, cf Koht: 1910, who takes this as evidence that the name Sæmingr was not invented by the skald. For the possible connections with Sami see the discussion below on Snæfríðr and Haraldr hárfagri in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra, Hkr.*

[35] Zachrisson 1997.

[36] Bjorvand 2006. Others propose that Skaði is an eponymous name for Scandinavia, "Skaði's land".

Skírnismál, important in this context? Is the *hieros gamos* element in origin myths just an example of Nordic misogyny?[37]

The location where god and giant-woman meet may hint at possible interpretations. *Háleygjatal* calls the place where Óðinn and Skaði engender their son *í Manheimun*. Three interpretations have been advanced: "in the human world",[38] or geographically defined as Svitjod (Snorri), or "in the lovers' home", since *munr* can also mean "to desire" or "to want".[39] The expression includes eroticism and coercion at the same time. Also *Skírnismál* knows such ambiguous wordings, oscillating between love and coercion, when the erotic alliance is the result of threats. Gerðr agrees to Freyr's wishes only after being subjected to the strongest threats, to songs of sorcery and runic magic. Thus, sexuality and aggressive conquest are two sides of the same coin. There are clear parallels between the erotic alliance of Óðinn's and Skaði's in *Háleygjatal*, and *Skírnismál*. However, it remains an open question whether Eyvindr skáldaspillir knew *Skírnismál* and derived his origin myth for the Hlaðir-dynasty in *Háleygjatal* from there, or whether he was inspired by traditions from *Ynglingatal*. Moreover, Eyvindr was familiar with other origin traditions.

The ruler's intimate relationship with his land: the giant-woman's body as a metaphor for territory

In stanza 15 of *Háleygjatal* Eyvindr takes up the origin myth again, when he refers to the land as Óðinn's bride, "*brúðr Val-Týs*". Thus, Skaði represents the land embraced by the god or earl; the ruler's conquest of land is described as an erotic act. Since the origin myth refers to the relationship between the earl and his territory, the connection to the sphere of power is plain. The ruler and the land are linked in this intimate way in order to underline that it was there, in the earls' very own realm of the Trøndelag, that Óðinn and Skaði engendered

---

[37] Cf Frank who derides scholars who use the *hieros gamos*-term. In her opinion the term *hieros gamos* hides elements of violence and force against women in Nordic culture, Frank 2007. But that is a view that does not correspond to the common scholarly use of this well established term.

[38] Faulkes 1982:98.

[39] Cf *Ys* 8 where Snorri names the location as Svitjod. Anthony Faulkes 1982 argues that the name points to an early euhemerised godhead, a proposal which is anachronistic in relation to *Hát*. Wickström drew attention to the parallel expression *i munarheimi* in heroic poetry, which denotes a combination of sex and coercion, and which occurs two times in *Helgakviða Hjorvarðsonar*.

the first earl. Since time immemorial, the rich farms of the Trøndelag have been the natural property of the Hlaðir-dynasty.

Such concepts of the land as the ruler's bride or paramour are not exclusive to *Háleygjatal*; they also occur in other skaldic poems related to the milieu of the Hlaðir-earls, such as in Hallfreðr Óttarsson's *Hákonardrápa*, another poem addressed to the already mentioned Earl Hákon the Powerful.[40] In *Hákonardrápa* the erotic imagery referring to ruler and land is particularly expressive. The poem compares the earl to Óðinn, who enjoys an erotic relationship with the land personified as a female giant-character. Earl Hákon's relationship with the Trøndelag soil is that of a lover who embraces a woman; and this sexual motif is played upon stanza after stanza. The motif of eroticism acquires the character of a violent act. Conflict, violence, conquest of land, and sexuality combine to form a higher unit; the ruler's conquest of land and acquisition of power is described in a most vivid imagery.[41] This also insinuates that it is the rightful duty of the ruler to conquer and subdue lands. In short, a warrior ideology is draped in sexual metaphors.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to see this myth as an expression of a general misogyny in Nordic culture. Such an interpretation overlooks the decisive point that the woman who is conquered is fetched from Utgarðr. She represents the alien. At *home*, law and order had to be observed—and regarding women, Nordic morals demanded severe punishments for insulting free women—but this was not the case *abroad*, or vis-à-vis *aliens*. It was perfectly acceptable to conquer and subdue the world of the giants and to kill giants; or, on the other hand if desired, to counter the constant threat from Utgarðr by entering into alliances with these forces. "Internal" laws did not apply to "external" relations. This is precisely why the myths about exogamous marriages describe something which is not merely extraordinary, but dangerous: these alliances cannot follow common rules. That makes them risky, yet the alliances are necessary in order to guarantee cosmic peace and balance.

---

[40] Eyvindr skáldaspillir makes use of the same motif in a *lausavisa* deploring bad summer weather with snow covering the earth, "Óðinn's woman", in midsummer, *Skj* B I:65.

[41] Folke Ström 1981 noted the erotic symbolism linked to land in *Hákonardrápa*, but did not recognise the connection with the origin myth in *Hát* where Óðinn and Skaði procreate *í Manheimum*.

The metaphor of the land as the ruler's bride shows that power was understood to refer to territory rather than to people. The earl of Hlaðir was primarily a ruler of territory, not of a group of people, and it is in this quality that he is the guarantor of the land's fertility, as for example expressed in *Vellekla*. We therefore note undertones of what we would call a Freyr-like ruler, at the centre of an agricultural cult *til árs ok friðar*.

In sum, land is described metaphorically as a wild woman from Utgarðr who needs to be conquered and tamed through sexuality. Within this pagan mental horizon the "holy land" is feminine, wild, and desirable. In the early Middle Ages then, conceptions about land in general, and indeed about the very same area, the Trøndelag in particular, undergo a transformation: masculine metaphors are applied to it. With the rise of the cult of St Óláfr in the Trøndelag land is now associated with and even hallowed through the (male) saint-king's body and the relics linked to it.

Óðinn's central role in the ideological legitimisation of Hlaðir-power

Received scholarly opinion claims that Óðinn was strongly linked to the earls' dynasty in the Trøndelag, but Freyr to the Ynglingar-dynasty. Óðinn-mythology is a recurring theme in many of the skaldic poems dedicated to Earl Hákon: as shown above Óðinn plays a central role in *Háleygjatal* and *Hákonarmál*. Admittedly, Freyr also appears in *Háleygjatal*—he is referred to in kennings as a general metaphor for a god similarly to Tyr—but Freyr is clearly outshone by Óðinn.[42] There are indications that Óðinn-mythology and the cult of Óðinn are particularly prospering within Nordic culture from the mid-tenth century on. Since the earls of Hlaðir and their thriving milieu of skaldic poetry are usually depicted as paganism's last bastion in Norway, it is not too far-fetched to assume that they were the driving force behind the expansion of their very "own" godhead, Óðinn.

Eyvindr skáldaspillir's choice of the dynastic origin myth with Óðinn as the founding-father in the main role, and the warlike Skaði as the primeval mother, can probably be explained as part of the historical

[42] For the relationship between the gods Óðinn and Þórr, both linked to war albeit in different ways, see Schjødt 1999, and in the present volume.

skaldic milieu at Hlaðir, a centre for the development of the Nordic warrior ideology.[43]

Let us attempt to shed some light on the political context of *Háleygjatal* by looking at Eyvindr skáldaspillir's personal background. He hailed from the Nordland, where he belonged to one of the foremost families, descending from both Haraldr hárfagri and the Hlaðir-earls.[44] Eyvindr served first as skald to King Hákon góði for many years. Apart from *Háleygjatal* addressed to Earl Hákon, also the memorial poem *Hákonarmál* dedicated to King Hákon is ascribed to Eyvindr. Indeed, his later poems show that in Eyvindr's eyes no ruler could ever compare to King Hákon, even if Eyvindr never shared the king's positive attitude to Christianity. After King Hákon's death Eiríkr blóðǫx' son Haraldr gráfeldr tried to recruit Eyvindr's services for his court, but king and skald clashed repeatedly. Finally, Eyvindr turned his back on the conflicts between the Eiríkssons and the earls and joined Earl Hákon of Hlaðir. There, late in life, Eyvindr composed *Háleygjatal*, a praise poem that sets out to show that the Hlaðir-dynasty was the Hárfagri-dynasty's social equal. It is therefore justified to call Eyvindr's use of pagan myths ideological: both politically and religiously he had joined the earls' side. *Háleygjatal* can be seen as a work of propaganda against the Eiríkssons of the Hárfagri-dynasty.

The question to which degree Eyvindr shaped or adapted the origin myth in his poem might remain unanswered. It is possible that he based it on stories about other ruling dynasties' origin in exogamous erotic alliances, as for example in *Skírnismál*: that *Háleygjatal's* origin myth as we know it with the primeval couple Óðinn and Skaði, was unknown at the earls of Hlaðir's court, is difficult to believe.

Did Óðinn replace Freyr as god of rulers?

The origin myth of *Háleygjatal* discussed above replaces another, and probably earlier, origin tradition of the earls of Hlaðir which knows an eponymous founding-father Helgi (also Holgi / Hølgi), hence the

[43] In spite of the strong element of death in the mythology of *Hát*, one should note that there are no direct references to Valhǫll as Óðinn's hall. This may indicate that the fully developed topography of Óðinn's death-realm is a later development. Cf Nordberg who argues that the word *hǫll* first appears in Norse sources in the mid-tenth century. This does not exclude the possibility of early *ideas* about Óðinn's hall, cf Nordberg 2003:58.

[44] Mundal 1998.

"Håløyger", and Hålogaland, the earls' original home. Also the Helgi tradition knows the motif of a primeval couple. Helgi's female partner is Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr, who is known as Earl Hákon's patron goddess. According to *Jómsvíkinga saga* 34 Earl Hákon sacrificed his youngest son to her in order to win the battle of Hjørungavåg. Also Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr in the Helgi tradition is a giant-character. Thus, the primeval mother is again a type of "Utgarðr-woman", which supports our view discussed above that such a mythical pattern dates from an early period.[45]

The fact that the skaldic poetry at Hlaðir shows such a markedly erotic imagery might indicate earlier traditions where the ruler had a central position within a *til árs ok friðar*-cult to ensure the fertility of the soil.[46] The motif of *ár ok friðr* is usually seen in Nordic agricultural societies where the Vanir-gods with Freyr at their head are revered. Significantly, also Adam of Bremen attributes an exogamous marriage myth to Earl Hákon: according to Adam, the earl's evil nature is due to his descent from Ing- (Freyr) and a woman of giant-origins.[47] It is tempting to accept the information given by Adam as an indication that an origin myth in which Ing/Freyr and a giant-woman are the main characters, had been well-established in Svealand since time immemorial.[48] Such an origin myth, in fact, might explain a passage in the *Prologue* to *Heimskringla*, where Ingunar/Freyr appears as the founding-father of the line of Hlaðir earls, a passage which many scholars see as a mistake of Snorri's.[49] In his poetry, Eyvindr skáldaspillir may then well have distanced himself from such an elder tradition with Freyr as the apical figure, and focused on Óðinn instead.

---

[45] Storm 1885 proposes that the eponymous couple pre-dates the relationship between Óðinn and Skaði. He suggests that Eyvindr skáldaspillir knew the tradition about Helgi and Þórgerðr, cf *Hkv* 14: *Hǫlga ættar*, Holgi's of Helgi's kin, which would seem to indicate the Håløyger; cf Chadwick 1950; Ström 1983. On Þórgerðr's giant-nature see Steinsland 1991: 220 ff.

[46] On this point I agree with Ström 1981 and 1983, and with Fidjestøl 1993.

[47] "*Haacon iste crudelissimus ex genere Ingunar et giganteo sanguine descendens*" ("*The wicked Hákon does by blood descend from Ingvi and a giantess*") my translation, *Gesta hammaburgensis*, Lib. II, Cap. XXV. Some scholars consider this passage to refer to King Hákon the Good, cf Hultgård in this volume.

[48] Theophoric names need to be considered in this context, cf Vikstrand 2001.

[49] Cf *Hkr*, *Prologue*, whose author explains that according to *Háleygjatal* Sæmingr is called a son of Yngve-Freyr, *Hkr* I, *ÍF* XXVI:4. The same information is given in Snorri's separate *Saga Ólafs konungs hins helga*, where Sæmingr is presented as a son of Ingunarfreyr Njǫrðsson. That Earl Hákon is called *Freys ǫttungr*, "Freyr's ætling", in *Hát* 9, may therefore be skaldic variation, *Skj* B I: 61.

For historians of religion, the most interesting question is that of Óðinn's and Freyr's respective relationship to rulership. As mentioned, accepted scholarly opinion has traditionally linked Freyr to the Swedish Ynglingar and the Norwegian Hárfagri-dynasty, while the earls of Hlaðir were linked to Óðinn. However, we have to be prepared to re-evaluate this simple pattern if detailed analyses show that evidence for Freyr's functions vis-à-vis the highest echelons of the "Norwegian" rulers is weak. The simple pattern of Freyr and Óðinn as founding-fathers for the Ynglingar and the Hlaðir-dynasty respectively is based on views of *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal* as their respective genealogies. *Háleygjatal* has traditionally been seen as a later answer to *Ynglingatal*. Since Óðinn is so manifestly the apical figure in *Háleygjatal*, scholars have argued that Freyr is immanently referred to as the founding-father of the Ynglingar in *Ynglingatal*.[50] Yet this view may owe more to medieval, in particular Snorri's, presentation of an Ynglingar-dynasty in his *Ynglinga saga*. Freyr's links to the Ynglingar may be rather less clear than earlier research assumed.

We may sum up the above discussion by concluding that the Viking Age knew and used origin myths linked to rulership. These myths contain an exogamous *hieros gamos* element between partners who represent gods and giants respectively, and mythological patterns underwent regional variations.

V. Heimskringla's *earliest kings: modelled on pagan origin myths*

Haraldr hárfagri: worshipping Freyr or Óðinn?

If *Ynglingatal* with its references to close relations between kings and gods can no longer be considered to be the genealogy of the Ynglingar-dynasty, we need to look for other sources in order to assess Viking

[50] Cf Steinsland 1991 who notes so-called internal reasons to support the view that Snorri's use of the *Skm* myth in *Ys* is a continuation of a genuine pagan mythological tradition. The so-called death-weddings in *Yt* may be seen as an application of the death-motif in the origin mythology, cf *Yt's* pronounced interest in the type of deaths where women from alien families personify the powers of fate that lead the king to his death. These women of fate are modelled on the giant-women. Bergsveinn's interpretation of the deaths in *Yt* as an expression of níð, however, contradicts such an interpretation, cf Bergsveinn Birgisson 2007. Against Bergsveinn's views I should like to propose that the grotesque deaths of *Yt* may be an expression of skaldic adaptation of a well known contemporary motif: the fateful erotic alliance with a giant-woman.

Age ideas about Haraldr hárfagri's relationship to gods and supernatural powers. Bjarni Fidjestøl only accepts two out of a total of eleven surviving skaldic poems as authentic sources for Haraldr hárfagri's time: *Haraldskvæði* and *Glymdrápa*, ascribed to the skalds Þjóðólfr of Hvinir (and/or Þorbjǫrn hornklofi) and Þorbjǫrn hornklofi respectively. In the present context, *Haraldskvæði* is of interest.

Fidjestøl is of the opinion that the mythological elements in the poetry about Haraldr hárfagri are of a conspicuously literary character, and that they consequently do not bear witness to an actively practised religion at that time. This situation would be contrary to the religious vibrancy in other parts of the elder skaldic poetry, such as the poems dedicated to Earl Hákon of Hlaðir.[51] Fidjestøl therefore concludes that Haraldr hárfagri broke with native pagan traditions, a view supported by saga-tradition. However, Fidjestøl's is an audacious interpretation relying on very few sources. The saga-authors had a clear ideological interest in showing the Yngling Haraldr hárfagri as detached from paganism as possible; he was their example of a "noble heathen" ruling on the threshold of the Christian era.[52] In our view, another god is very much present in *Haraldskvæði*: Óðinn.

A number of kennings contain hidden references to Óðinn as god of death. In stanza 10 for example, the enemy's shining sword is called "Sváfnir's bark roof", an apparent reference to the hall in Óðinn's death-realm.[53] Stanza 12 calls the fallen warriors of a battle the catch of "the embrace-bow of Frigg" that is, of Óðinn. Admittedly, it is the *enemies* who seem to be linked to Óðinn—stanza 8 calls Óðinn-warriors *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar*. This, however, is understandable since they are the losers in the battle, and as such go on to meet their honourable deaths.

In the much discussed stanza 6 of *Haraldskvæði* the skald praises the gruff macho-ruler who eschews an indoor life, the heated rooms of the women, and down-filled mittens. Most scholars see this stanza as evidence for Haraldr hárfagri worshipping Freyr: "*Úti vill iól drekka, ef skal einn ráða, fylkir enn framlyndi, ok Freys leik heyia*".[54] The meaning of the expression *Freys leik heyia* is debated: most would interpret as a

---

[51] Fidjestøl 1993:25.
[52] Cf Lönnroth 1969.
[53] Cf *Gm* 54; *Þul* IV jj.
[54] "*He prefers to drink Yule abroad, when he alone decides, the battle-eager king*" (my translation), and *Skj* B I: 23.

metaphor for fighting, even though a connection between the Vanir-god Freyr and warfare is unusual. In my view the significant element is the adverb *úti*: the stanza plays primarily on the contrast between inside (home) and outside (in nature). The warrior king Haraldr hárfagri breaks with the traditional Yule-festivities associated with farm, family, and Freyr-cult, and prefers instead the rough life of a sea-warrior amongst his men. The masculine ideal of a warrior is contrasted to the homely sphere, metaphorically described as female. Thus *Freys leik* stands for the Yule-festivities at home, conducted in honour of Freyr. *Leik* can have erotic connotations—compare the term *leika* for a concubine. As such, *leik* may on the one hand allude to cultic traditions of Yule, but it may also be an understatement referring to the life of a sea-warrior with its mixed connotations of death on sea and eroticism. The dangerous fight with the elements is depicted in a highly erotic imagery, and death on sea is compared to a sexual union with mythic female beings, as for example shown in the expression "joining Ran's bed" for drowning.[55] We noted a similar tendency to describe conquest and war in sexual terms in the skaldic poetry of the earls of Hlaðir.

Regarding the question of whether Freyr or Óðinn was the first god of the Hárfagri-dynasty, Richard North's observations on Anglo-Saxon culture are illuminating. North argues that originally, Freyr, considered a mythological ancestor, had been closely associated with the ruling power, but that at a later stage Freyr's role was overshadowed by that of Óðinn.[56] In a Nordic context, it seems that Óðinn comes to the fore as the god associated with power from the reign of Haraldr hárfagri on. However, our sources do not allow us to determine whether this stronger Óðinn-cult replaced an elder one of Freyr also here. Óðinn's strong position as the Viking Age god of rulers *par excellence* seems to be fully supported by *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*, two skaldic poems in which the Christian hárfagri-descendants King Hákon the Good and King Eiríkr blodøks after their deaths travel to Óðinn's Valhǫll. Christian rulers going to Valhǫll instead of heaven may appear paradoxical, but it has to be borne in mind that Christianity's paradise was far les useful than the cult of Óðinn and the belief in Valhǫll for inciting rulers and their warriors to fight.[57] This warrior-ideology and the cult

[55] Cf Steinsland 1992.
[56] North 1997.
[57] Regarding Christian kings who go to Valhǫll after death, cf Hultgård in this volume. A possible explanation for this paradox may also be an interpretation focussing

and mythology of Óðinn are two sides of the same coin; Óðinn's cult was closely linked to the ruler's honour. Also the hall-culture was based on these concepts of honour, and war and violence were an inseparable part of pagan ideology of rulership. It is this coastal culture with its sea-warriors which is at the centre of late Viking Age ideological propaganda, not the inland areas where the fertility of the soil and the yearly harvest provide the economy of power. Consequently, a divine character such as Freyr may have yielded his functions within the ideology of rulership to the war-god Óðinn in the late Viking Age. Regarding the historical context, it seems plausible to connect the growth of the cult of Óðinn at that period with the more organised military activities for example at Hlaðir and in Denmark, the latter with its grand ring-shaped military complexes from the tenth century. The prevalent warrior ideology would also account for the pronounced Óðinn-mythology even amongst the first Christian rulers.[58]

In order to probe into Freyr's possible function with regard to rulers in the Viking Age we need to rely on a retrospective analysis of the medieval saga texts. The Icelandic sagas bear witness to the Icelandic chieftains' veneration for Freyr—and Þórr—while Óðinn is conspicuously absent from Iceland.[59] In a Nordic context, Óðinn is associated with the highest echelons of power, with kings and earls; Freyr and Þórr are gods of the level of chieftains.

However, theophoric names are rather widely spread. Onomastics give evidence of a strong cult of the Vanir-god Freyr amongst other

---

on a double communication by the aristocracy during the period of Christianisation, with use of pagan symbols inland, while sending out positive signals to Christian rulers abroad? Cf Fuglestvedt and Hærnes 1996; Fuglestvedt 1997.

[58] There are interesting parallels in Irish texts where the warrior-aspects of a king are criticised by Christian monks, cf Rekdal in this volume.

[59] Cf Meulengracht Sørensen's analysis of the mythology of Freyr in the Icelandic sagas, where he shows how it determines the depiction of chieftains, for example in *Vatnsdølasaga*, *Víga-Glúms saga, Hrafnkels saga* and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. Within the underlying mythology of these sagas Meulengracht Sørensen traces the motif of fate from the origin myth, which recounts how the chosen chieftain suffers a sudden and violent death, frequently combined with the motif of marriage. This combination is evidence of continuing use and transformation of older pagan myths in the saga literature, cf Meulengracht Sørensen 1992. Cf Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1994 for the many names with the element Þórr for Icelandic chieftains. Both Þórr and Freyr represent fertility for the chieftains. No single Icelandic chieftain, however, has an origin myth similar to the earls of Hlaðir or the Ynglingar kings. Óðinn's absence from Iceland corresponds to the generally peaceful character of that society, cf Jón Viðar Sigurðsson in this volume.

Nordic rulers than the west-Nordic ones, for example in Svealand where Freyr-names indicate places of high significance for Viking Age society.[60] Nordic historiographers seem to have been acutely aware of traditions about the close relations between the Swedish Ynglingar and Freyr which may have their origin in prehistoric conditions in Uppland.

A conclusion of the above examination regarding the relationship between Freyr and Óðinn as gods of rulers should therefore be that Óðinn stands out as the central godhead of the "Norwegian" highest aristocracy in the late Viking Age—the Hárfagri- and the Hlaðir-dynasties. In fact, Óðinn monopolises attention as god of death and as inspiration for the skalds. As founding father and ancestor of the earls of Hlaðir Óðinn is joined by a giant-woman, a motif of an origin myth which *may* be based on older patterns. Contrary to Óðinn, Freyr is of little significance for this west-nordic high aristocracy. Instead Freyr, together with Þórr, may have been important for the Icelandic chieftains, as reflected in the Icelandic sagas.

Regarding the question of Snorri's focus on Freyr and Gerðr as the ancestors of the Ynglingar-dynasty, we propose that the eddaic poem appears to elaborate on an older pre-Christian myth, which Snorri then chose as the origin myth of the Norwegian royal line for political and ideological reasons. The relation between Freyr and the Ynglingar kings was useful for Snorri the mythographer.[61] In the Middle Ages, the tradition that the Swedish Ynglingar from the Uppland had a special relationship with Freyr seems to have been widespread, and Snorri takes up this tradition. Snorri's aim was to establish the history of a strong Norwegian line of kings who could resist Danish claims of overlordship of eastern Norway, especially of the Viken area.[62] He thus links the Hárfagri-dynasty genealogically to a Swedish Ynglingar-line,

---

[60] Cf Vikstrand 2001; Brink 2001; Sundqvist 2002.

[61] For this, there are several possibilities: Snorri may have followed Ari and therefore have linked the Freyr-Gerðr myth to his version of the Ynglingar, or Snorri may have taken the mythological model of a wedding between god and giant-woman from *Hát*. If *Hdl* was known during Snorri's time, he may also have known the marriage-myth from there. If we consider parallel material it is possible to argue that the *hieros gamos* myth as an origin myth must have been known within the pre-Christian Nordic culture. It seems highly likely that Snorri made a conscious choice when he presents the *hieros gamos* from *Skm* as the origin myth of the Ynglingar-dynasty. As explained above, Snorri uses the *Skm* myth in a different way compared to *Gf*, where the context is cosmological and eschatological.

[62] Cf Krag 1991.

who according to one reading of *Ynglingatal* had travelled westwards, establishing a Norwegian sideline. With this, Snorri gives legitimacy to the legend of the foundation of the Norwegian kingdom, and to the position that its kings had "always" ruled over the whole realm by right of inheritance. Freyr as the mythological ancestor proclaimed the connection between the Norwegian and the Swedish Ynglingar-dynasties, and equipped the Hárfagri-line with a long prehistory and a model of rulership which signalised fertility and peace.

Via the double presentation of a euhemerised Óðinn as apical figure for the royal line, and of Freyr as the ancestor of the "earthly" prototype for the rulers, warrior- and fertility-aspects are associated with the royal line. Generally, in polytheistic religions gods are complementary, but certain gods are preferred in certain contexts. For examinations of the ideology of rulership it is essential to discern which type of godhead is presented as the dynasty's apical figure. In our case, the origin myth in *Ynglinga saga* makes Freyr as the ancestor of the Ynglingar-dynasty into the primary god. This dynasty of rulers guarantees fertility, good harvests, and peace. Thus, incorporating the *Skírnismál* myth may have been a politico-ideological stroke of genius on the part of Snorri. However, in his further presentation of the Ynglingar's history, Snorri also required gods and powers associated with a warrior ideology—and here Óðinn enters the fray. Óðinn sails in with the hero-king Haraldr hárfagri, while Snorri models Haraldr's father Hálfdan svarti after Freyr, the pagan fertility god and ancestor who ensured good yields and peace. In other words, in *Heimskringla* the break in cults from Freyr to Óðinn occurs with Haraldr hárfagri. Snorri however, does then not discard the origin myth's motif of giants. On the contrary, this motif continues to be strongly associated with rulers, with stories about fosterage and marriage.

The Freyr-like character Hálfdan svarti: the king's body as subjected territory

Haraldr hárfagri's father was Hálfdan svarti from Oppland, a petty king whose power base, according to saga tradition, was Toten, Hadeland, and Ringerike. No skaldic poetry survives dedicated to Hálfdan svarti, but in historiography he plays an important role as the human founding father of the Norwegian Ynglingar-dynasty. Hálfdan is the first king to have his own saga in *Heimskringla*, *Hálfdanar saga svarta*, immediately following on *Ynglinga saga*. Yet as mentioned earlier, the connection to the kings of *Ynglingatal* is problematical. As king in

the Ynglingar-mould Hálfdan descends from Freyr and Gerðr, and he is consequently presented as an archetypical Freyr-descendant: a king guaranteeing fertility and good harvests.[63] We note another classic Freyr-motif in the story about Hálfdan's wedding, which starts with the abduction of the bride, reminiscent of *Skírnismál*. The imagery of the bride who is hauled across the country in a cart evokes ancient mythological associations of Vanir- and fertility-cults. In sum, *Hálfdanar saga svarta* looks suspiciously like the work of a historian who wanted to link the Norwegian royal line to the old Svea-traditions about Freyr and the Ynglingar.

The descriptions of Hálfdan's death and burial engendered a lively scholarly debate. In the present context, they are interesting for two reasons: because they are moulded along the lines of the origin myth from *Ynglinga saga*, and because there is a new dimension to the well known theme of "the king's death": in Hálfdan's saga, the ruler's territory is identified with the dead king's body. We find a clear-cut pattern of a foundation-myth: Hálfdan svarti is the first of the "historical" members of the Ynglingar-dynasty. With his body, almost literally the foundations are laid for what was to become the sphere of interest of the Norwegian Hárfagri-line: the inner Østlandet and the Viken area. From a mythological perspective we notice that the giant-woman from *Háleygjatal* who personified the northern power-base of the Hlaðir earls has disappeared, as have violent sex and eroticism. For the aspirations of future generations, the ruler's death and his dismembered body are the symbolic and genuine basis.

The sources for the story about Hálfdan's burial can be divided into two main groups. According to *Nóregs konungatal*, *Ágrip* and *Fagrskinna B*, Hálfdan was buried in Ringerike, but according to *Heimskringla*, *Fagrskinna A* and *Hálfdanar þáttr svarta, Flb*, his body was divided up and then buried in either three (*Fsk* A, *H.þ, Flb*) or four (*Hkr*) different mounds, all situated within the territory Hálfdan had ruled during his lifetime. The traditions about Hálfdan svarti's many burial mounds thus link the human founder of the dynasty physically to his territory; the area under his rule is identified with the dead king's body.[64]

---

[63] Hálfdan is called "*allra konunga ársælstr*", *Hálfdanar saga svarta* 9, *Hkr*, cf the parallel description of Freyr, *Ys* 10, *Hkr*: "*Hann var vinsæll ok ársæll*".

[64] In the opinion of François-Xavier Dillmann the many references to Freyr in *Hálfdanar saga svarta* cannot wholly explain the division of Hálfdan's body. Dillmann rather sees a transformed myth in the burial-motif, arguing that the tradition about the division of Hálfdan's body parallels the cosmological Ymir-myth. Ymir was the

We need to underline that once more eroticism and death are twinned: the dead king's burial mounds delimit the very same territory through which previously the cart with the robbed bride had travelled. These mythic narratives express a certain ideology of rulership. They propagate that the core area ruled by the Ynglingar was the inner Østlandet; that the dynasty's original power base and inheritance are Oppland and Viken.[65] Thus, the stories about the division and burial of Hálfdan's body establish simultaneously a contrast to and continuity with the ideas on St Óláfr's whole body. According to *Glælognskviða*, quoted in *Óláfs saga helga* 244 in *Heimskringla*, St Óláfr's undivided body rests at Nidaros. This, the royal saint's, *whole* body becomes an ideological symbol for the *whole* kingdom as the inheritance of the Ynglingar-dynasty.[66]

In addition to his exploitation of pagan myths Snorri endows Hálfdan Svarti with an element taken from European royal ideology. In Snorri's narrative, Hálfdan is the first royal legislator and a king guaranteeing the dispensation of justice. These are clearly aspects of kingship associated with the Christian *rex iustus* ideal. In Hálfdan's saga the motif of the king-lawgiver seems to announce the later Christian ideology of rulership of *Heimskringla*, which was to be fully formulated for St Óláfr.[67] Consequently, Snorri's Hálfdan may be said to be a Freyr-like king who at the same time provides us with an outlook towards the royal saint and *rex iustus*, St Óláfr, the central character of the whole saga-collection. This historiography therefore combines elements from the pre-Christian mythic tradition with an outlook towards the Christian royal ideal.

Haraldr Dofrisfostri: the motif of the giant reappears with fosterage and initiation

While Hálfdan Svarti thus fulfils the role of the dynasty's founding-father, Haraldr hárfagri is the Ynglingar-king with whom "history

---

primeval giant killed by the gods in order to create the cosmos, Hálfdan is the first "historical" Ynglinga king who with his death would found a long lasting dynasty, cf Dillmann 1997:149–158.

[65] Cf Krag 1991:243 f.

[66] Frans-Arne Stylegard proposes that the story of Hálfdan svarti's burial follows European models: the European cults of saints, with their custom of boiling and dividing the saints' bodies, Stylegar 1997. Cf also Skórzewska in this volume.

[67] Cf *Óláfs saga helga Hkr*, ch. 58, which stresses the king's efforts to improve the laws.

begins". As the heroic warrior-king who is credited with establishing the Norwegian kingdom, Haraldr is inextricably linked to the Norwegian myth of the unification of the kingdom. In the sources, he appears with a range of by-names, such as Dofrisfostri, Luva, or hárfagri. The epithet Dofrisfostri appears in the stories about his childhood, and is much elaborated upon in late sources. It is here that the pagan theme of giants reappears in a new guise: in the motif of the young prince's fosterage.[68]

Hálfdanar saga svarta in *Heimskringla* describes how a Finn or giant steals food during the Yule-festivities at Hálfdan's royal farm. The thief is punished, but flees into the mountains together with Haraldr, King Hálfdan's son. For many years, Haraldr remains with this Finn as a foster-son. Snorri bases his account on *Fagrskinna*, where Haraldr is called Dofrisfostri.

Several sources identify the Finn as the giant Dofri, Haraldr's foster-father from the mountains who educates Haraldr for and initiates him to the doings of a king. It is Dofri who, several years later, informs Haraldr of his father's death and tells Haraldr that he should return home and assume rule as a king.

In my understanding this story of fosterage parallels the origin myth ascribed to the Ynglingar in *Ynglinga saga*. The motif of the giant from the origin myth is transformed and re-used in a different way. Now, the connection between giants and the ruler is established by a male giant educating the future ruler, rather than by a giant-woman giving birth to him. This also means that genealogically, Haraldr is a genuine king of the Ynglingar. Yet the saga-author creates a break between him and his father with his account of how Haraldr voluntarily becomes the foster-son of the giant in the (Dovre) mountains.

The Dovre-motif is very common in saga-tradition. According to *Haralds þáttr hárfagra* in *Flateyjarbók* Dofri is the name of a giant of the *Dofrafjall*.[69] Dofri thus lives in the mountain range that was to bear his name. The fact that *Vellekla* 26 refers to the earl of Hlaðir as *Dofrar dróttin*, king of the *Dofrafjall*, implies that traditions about the Hlaðir dynasty's genealogical links with the giants were still common at the earls' court. As discussed above, the earls' mythological mother Skaði

[68] Fosterage was widespread in Nordic society, and ensured strong links of friendship which complemented links of biological kinship. Generally, the motif of the hero's fostering with giants occurs frequently in the Fornaldarsǫgur, Ellis 1941.

[69] Cf *pul* IV b 6.

hailed from this mountain range and together with Óðinn engendered sons north of Dovre.

Especially when we remember that the political and economical heartland of kingdom and culture was in the coastal areas—they, the *norðvegr*, gave the kingdom its name—the symbolic function of the inland mountain areas of Dovre is remarkable. The pre-Christian motif of the giant was geographically placed in the mountainous Oppland, with Dovre as its symbolical centre.

In a mythological context Dovre represents Utgarðr. The giants were known from mythology as forces of chaos linked to Utgarðr, to the world's wild and uncultivated regions. In the sagas we can follow this recurrent theme from Gerðr Gymisdóttir, via Haraldr's fosterage in the Dovre-mountains, to his fateful meeting with the Sami-woman Snæfríðr, this latter again, one midwinter-evening during the feast of Yule, occurring at Dovre. In the Middle Ages, the giants were considered to have been the land's primeval people; they were rich, alien, and dangerous. Consequently, the stories about Haraldr's fosterage at Dovre link him to the country's symbolical centre and to conceptions about its primeval people.

Scholars have used the expression "adventure-motif" for the narratives about Haraldr's fosterage. Ólafia Einarsdóttir proposes that the function of "den eventyrprægede saga om Harald Dovrefostre" is to establish Haraldr's inherited right to rule also for the inland areas.[70]

---

[70] Ólafia Einarsdóttir 1971 ("the adventurous saga of Haraldr Dofrisfostri"), also Sverrir Jakobsson 1997: 597–610. Both discuss a motif of adventure within the traditions about Haraldr Hárfagri. Ólafia proposes that the motif of the Dovre-fosterage has an ideological aim, to strengthen a tradition of Haraldr's links with Sogn (cf the discussion of where the centre of power of Haraldr's kingdom was). Ólafia shows that the different traditions go back to Sæmundr and Ari. Sæmundr, the earlier of the two, refers to a tradition about Haraldr's origins, and consequently rights of inheritance to power, in Sogn and Vestlandet, a version also found in the poem *Norges konungatal*. By contrast, *Historia Norvegiae* and *Heimskringla* follow Ari, where the history of Haraldr Hárfagri is based on the genealogy of the Ynglingar from *Ynglingatal*. Haraldr is first linked to the Ynglingar in the inserted parts of *Islendingabók* and *Historia Norvegiae*. Ólafia considers Sæmundr's version to be the original one, and therefore argues that Vestlandet had been Haraldr's primary power base, with Trondheim as his sphere of influence. *Fagrskinna* propagates different origin tradition: according to this source Haraldr's mother was a member of the famous Danish Skǫldungar-dynasty. Also *Hkr* adopted this version. Ólafia argues that the concept of kingship by God's grace permeates *Fagrskinna*, something which may explain the portrayal of Hálfdan Svarti in *Hkr*, since this is influenced by *Fagrskinna*. King Hákon Hákonarson was the great ideologist of the Norwegian kingdom, and he conducted an aggressive foreign policy with warfare against the Danish kings and dynastic marriage alliances. In this

We suggest here that the stories adhere to a more mythologically informed ideology. As said, Haraldr's fosterage by the giant Dofri introduces a break between father and son—and therefore, since historiography associates the Ynglingar down to Hálfdan Svarti with Freyr, also between the king and this Vanir god. Young Haraldr's fosterage with the giant means that his father Hálfdan's, and his whole dynasty's original link with Freyr is discontinued. Snorri's intuition may have been correct here, considering the meagre evidence for Freyr in the skaldic poetry dedicated to Haraldr hárfagri, and the clearer evidence for Óðinn in for example *Haraldskvæði*. But for Snorri and the other historiographers who employed the motif of fosterage it was also important to establish that a new era had dawned in the royal line beginning with Haraldr hárfagri. The extant saga-version admirably meets all the requirements: it maintains the connection to the past, the proud Ynglingar tradition, while simultaneously underlining the singularity of the new Hárfagri-dynasty.

Thus, the motif of fosterage breaks with Hálfdan svarti's links to Freyr and renews the connection between kings and giants; and it may also symbolise a rapprochement to the cult of Óðinn. A number of scholars advance that Haraldr's foster-father Dofri is a covert Óðinn-character, as Óðinn is well known in the role of an initiator for rulers.[71] The author of the saga seems to have required Óðinn, the warrior-ideology's god of choice, to provide the perfect setting for the proud history of the conqueror-king Haraldr hárfagri.

The motif of fosterage returns later in the saga-compilation with Haraldr hárfagri's youngest son Hákon, nicknamed Aðalsteinsfostri. And also here this motif marks a break within the dynasty's relations to gods, now from paganism to Christianity: Hákon is considered to have been the first of the Norwegian conversion kings. Yet again therefore, a king—now Hákon—is portrayed both as a link within the legitimate old Ynglingar-line, and as a representative of a new time with a new god.

---

context, Hákon would have welcomed the idea that his own ancestor Haraldr Hárfagri was a member of the Danish royal dynasty. In order to achieve this change in the traditional account, *Fagrskinna*'s author simply doubled the stories about Haraldr's ancestry: he added an older deceased brother and mother with the same name. This adjustment has then been taken over in *Hkr*.

[71] Bugge 1899 16,1–37.

Pagan myths historicised: Haraldr hárfagri and Snæfríðr at Dovre

Skírnismál's hieros gamos myth proves to have manifold uses within historiography. It began its life within the sagas as the origin myth of the Ynglingar-dynasty, and later found itself reshaped into "history" in that its tension between the dynasty of the gods and that of the giants was transformed into an ethnic, social, or geographical tension between the ruler's and the bride's kin. The most obvious element in the sagas is the tension between upper and lower social kin-groups, in particular between a high-born man and a low-born woman. Yet the tension between the partners can also be expressed in geographical opposites, between native and alien, so for example in the motif of the ruler marrying a woman from abroad. The alliance with such an Utgarðr-woman is fateful for the king, since the bride is modelled according to the pattern of giant-women.

We easily recognise the old origin myth in *Haralds saga hárfagra*, in the narrative about Haraldr's marriage to Snæfríðr, a "Finnish", that is Sami, wife. Snorri uses this tradition extensively in *Heimskringla, Haralds saga hárfagra* chapters 25–26. Here, Snorri follows *Ágrip*, where the story of Snæfríðr takes up most of the space dedicated to Haraldr hárfagri. The king's sixty-year-reign is dealt with in a few lines; *Ágrip's* focus is clearly on the detailed account on Snæfríðr and one of the four sons engendered in this "Utgarðr-marriage", Rǫgnvaldr rétt-tilbeini. Of all Haraldr hárfagri's many sons, this son with Snæfríðr is described in greatest detail.

Else Mundal bases her analysis of Haraldr's and Snæfríðr's marriage in *Heimskringla* as the last act in the unification of the Norwegian kingdom, on the above-mentioned combination of the Snæfríðr-story and the *Skírnismál*-myth. Haraldr hárfagri's marriage to the Utgarðr-woman Snæfríðr from Dovre allows the medieval historiographer to incorporate the Sami into the Norwegian "nation" in a way that is both convincing and elegant.[72]

Following the pattern of the old origin myth, and in accordance with the medieval identification of Sami with giants, Snæfríðr functions as the giant-woman *cum* primeval mother of rulers.[73] The Christian

[72] For the Snæfríðr-story's transformation from myth to history, see Steinsland 1991: 207 ff; 2000: 130 ff. For the function of the historicised myth for the unification of the Norwegian kingdom, see Mundal 1997.

[73] One may argue that the same mythical origin-pattern informs the portrayal of Eiríkr blóðøx and his wife Gunnhildr, who according to one tradition grew up

historiographical corpus vilifies the four sons Haraldr has with this Utgarðr-woman from Dovre. Snæfríðr supposedly bewitched the king, who was to mourn her after her death for years in a state of lunacy, refusing to part from the body of the woman he had loved so much. Such stories correspond well to the ambivalent traditions circulating about the Sami as well as the mythological giants.[74] These "aliens" were respected as a distinct group of people and the Sami were ruled by their own "kings"; but as they were perceived as foreign, they were also credited with riches and abilities that are different from those of the Norse.

Within *Heimskringla* however, we note a genealogical connection from the exogamous marriage between Haraldr hárfagri and Snæfríðr, to Haraldr harðráði, half-brother of St Óláfr. Haraldr harðráði is said to be a son of Sigurðr syr, himself the grandson of Sigurðr risi, one of the four sons of Haraldr hárfagri and Snæfríðr.[75] It is from this line that the later kings of Norway descend: since St Óláfr died without sons he was succeeded by his half-brother Haraldr harðráði.

Consequently, following the genealogies on which *Heimskringla* and other historical works are based, from the reign of Haraldr harðráði onwards, it was the descendants of Snæfríðr who sat on the Norwegian throne. This line is surprisingly well established. All the older historic works, *Ágrip* chapter 39, *Historia Norwegiae* chapter 15, and *Morkinskinna* chapter 9, refer to Haraldr harðráði's descent from Sigurðr risi, Snæfríðr's son.[76] At some point, therefore, it must have been ideologically imperative to re-establish the old origin myth from *Skírnismál* and its "historical" version with Snæfríðr as the primeval mother. This ideological necessity could very well have arisen during the reign of Haraldr harðráði himself, since this king may have needed

---

amongst the Sami in Finnmark, and learned their black arts, cf *Fagrskinna* and *Saga Ólafs konungs Tryggvasonar er ritaði Oddr muncr.*

[74] The motif of a king madly in love with a woman even after her death has earlier been associated with Charlemagne, cf Moe 1926.

[75] Else Mundal pointed out this genealogical connection, Mundal 1997.

[76] The possible older by-name, hrísi, changes to risi, giant, see Mundal 2003. *HN*: 86–7 "*Siwardus Risi (id est Gigas), filius Haraldi Comati, genuit Halfdanum, patrem istius Siwardi. Hic uero genuit Haroldum ex eadem Asta, uirum sagacissimum et in bellica arte peritissimum, de quo quasi quodam filo textus genealogie regum Norwegie hucusque protelaus gloriose descendit.*" ("*Sigurd Rise (the Giant), Harald Fairhair's son, had sired Halvdan, the father of Sigurd Sow. Åsta bore him Harald, a man of deep perspicacity, a great expert in the science of warfare, and from him, as if along a thread, descended the glorious Norwegian royal line in its genealogical pattern up to the present.*")

to establish that with him, a new segment of the old Ynglingar-dynasty provided the rightful kings of Norway from then on.[77] Thus yet again, the dynasty's rights are proclaimed over the inland areas with Dovre at their centre, a region with a rich reindeer-economy driven by Sami competence, and thus an important economic asset for the kingdom.

VI. *Origin myths and initiation to rulership in* Orkneyinga saga *and* Færeyinga saga

VI a. *The earls' power and their origin myths in* Orkneyinga saga

Orkneyinga saga is the only written source for the early history of the Orkney Islands. It is usually assumed that the saga was composed in the late twelfth century, and that it was written in Iceland, but the question of a possible Orkney provenience has recently been discussed afresh.[78] The saga describes a society moving from paganism to Christianity, a cultural melting-pot under the political overlordship of the Norwegian kings. In our context of ideology of rulership the tension in the saga between earl and king is of interest. *Heimskringla* underlines that Haraldr hárfagri established a three-tiered hierarchy of power of king, earl and chieftain, and that King Haraldr gave the Orkneys to Earl Rǫgnvaldr, while retaining overlordship of the islands.

Orkneyinga saga describes a society in which the old warrior-ideology with its special concepts of honour and conspicuous shows of power survived until well into the medieval period. We shall in this chapter focus on the extraordinary origin mythology presented in the first three chapters of the saga. Does this origin myth provide a starting-point for the ideology of rulership of *Orkneyinga saga*? Apart from in this saga, the myth can also be found in *Fundinn Noregr* in *Flateyjarbók* I, chapter 176; and in a more elaborate version in *Hversu Noregr byggðist*, in the introduction to *Flateyjarbók*.

---

[77] Cf Mundal 1997.

[78] The textual history of the saga is complicated. It is extant in *Flb* in the form of interpolations in the two Óláfr-sagas. For an overview of the discussion about origin and dating see Lars Boje Mortensen in *Historia Norwegie* 2003: 11 ff. Mortensen proposes that *Orkneyinga saga* was written in Iceland. In a seminar at the Centre for Advanced Studies in Oslo in spring 2008 Else Mundal has argued that the saga was written in Orkney where the cult of St Magnús probably established a vernacular literary milieu. Beuermann tentatively supports an Orkney origin for at least some parts of the composite saga, Beuermann, this volume.

Similarly to the Ynglingar kings, the earls of Orkney are also accredited with origins of a euhemerised mythological dimension. However, the Orkney earls' origin myth differs significantly from that of the Ynglingar kings. The narrative about the earls' origins is populated exclusively by giants representing the Nordic primeval people; amongst the founding-fathers and -mothers there is no single god, not even in euhemerised form. It appears as if the pagan motif of giants has been strengthened to the point of exclusivity, giving us a rather exceptional version of Nordic origin mythology.

Orkneyinga saga begins with a legendary narrative which can be classified as an origin myth. A king called *Fornjótr* lived in the far north of Norway, in Finland or Kvenland, even further north than the Sami areas.[79] *Fornjótr* had three sons, *Hlér* or *Ægir*, *Lógi*, and *Kári*, who represent forces of nature: the sea, the flame or fire, and the wind.[80] There are further descendants personifying snow and cold, *Frosti, Snær inn Gamli*, and *Þorri*, before two brothers and a sister appear: *Nórr, Górr*, and *Góe*. The names of these characters point to their origin in the furthest reaches of the frozen north. Nórr can also be found as the eponymous founder of Norway in *Historia Norvegiae*; hence the character must date from before the thirteenth century.[81] The remaining personages are not known from any other texts.

When their sister Góe disappears, her two brothers go in search of her. Nórr travels on skis from north to south across the inland areas, while Górr sails along the coast and islands. Thus the brothers establish their respective zones of power, an inland-realm and an island-realm. Nórr's realm comes to be called Norvegr; Górr comes to be called a sea-king. It is Górr who is the mythical founding father of the Orkney earls; five generations later we meet Earl Rǫgnvaldr of Møre who, as said, receives the Orkneys from King Haraldr hárfagri as compensation for his son's death. To return to Nórr and Górr shortly, they find

[79] Clunies Ross 1983; Ashman Rowe 2003. The interpretation of the name *Fornjótr* is discussed, it occurs in *Þul* IV b 3 in *SnE* as the name of a giant. For alternatives, see Beuermann in this volume.

[80] For *Fornjótr*'s three sons, the sea, the fire or flame, and the wind, see Meulengracht Sørensen 1993.

[81] *Historia Norwegie*, 52–3: "*Norwegia igitur a quodam re(ge gui Nor) nuncupatus est, nomen optinu(isse dicitur)*" ("*Norway is said to have taken its name from a king called Nor.*"); cf. *Saga Ólafs konungs Tryggvasonar er ritaði Oddr muncr*, ch. 22: *Sa þar konung forðum er nori het er fyrst bygþi noreg ("Along time ago there was a king who's name was Nórr, he was the first to build Norway").*

Góe who had married a giant from Dovre, Hrólfr of Berg. The parties make peace by exchanging their women. Consequently, Norway is populated by families descending from a marriage between an Utgarðr-woman and a son of a giant from Dovre. Nórr himself is described as part Finn, Sami, or giant. He continues to conquer Norway on skis, and marries Hadda, the daughter of Svaði from Dovre. *Orkneyinga saga's* story about Nórr thus represents a Sami parallel to the Nordic myth of the unification of the kingdom with its marriage between Haraldr hárfagri and Snæfríðr.

This extraordinary origin myth with its development from north to south forms an antipode to the ideas about the Nordic peoples' origins in southern regions, as we find it in Ari's and Snorri's euhemerised narratives about the Æsir's migration from south to north, culminating in the foundation of the Nordic realms by sons of Óðinn.

The Orkney earls' origin myth with its genealogy beginning with Fornjótr may be seen as propaganda in favour of the earls' claim to their island realm, a myth that proclaims their ancient connections to Norway's original people. The genealogy stresses that the earls originated in the most northerly areas of Scandinavia, and that their history reaches back to the beginnings of time, long before the southern mainland areas were populated. Consequently, the dynastic history of the Orkney earls is senior, and more specifically Nordic than that of the Ynglingar.

The saga-writer incorporates a number of motifs derived from Nordic origin mythology. Thus the first earl of Orkney, Torf-Einarr, is the youngest son of Earl Rǫgnvaldr of Møre and a slave-born mother. This model of parentage is a typical result of pagan origin myths transformed by later historiography: the giant-woman is redefined as a slave or low-born woman, an *ambátt*. *Orkneyinga saga* also claims that Earl Rǫgnvaldr did not care too much for Einarr and was more than happy to see this son disappear to Orkney, after Einarr had been made an earl by King Haraldr hárfagri.

Torf-Einarr is a classic exponent of a well known pattern in Nordic ideology of rulership: the prototype of a ruler who descends from a socially polarised sexual union. As the son of an earl and a slave woman Einarr carries in him the whole tension between his father's and his mother's origins. Mythologically, this predestines him to rule—as he indeed shall. The saga-writer in chapter 7 praises Einarr as a conqueror and a great *hǫfðingi*. Einarr is also remarkably similar to Óðinn, a fact which needs to be seen in connection with his giant-

background. Einarr is described as tall and ugly, and as blind on one eye, in spite of which his sight is better than that of most men. In fact, in this first part of *Orkneyinga saga*, we find many references to Óðinn, which agrees well with the saga's explicit warrior ideology.

On the Norwegian mainland meanwhile, Haraldr hárfagri's unruly sons Hálfdan háleggr and Guðrǫðr ljómi are causing problems. Both of them also descend from an exogamous union—their mother is the above-mentioned Sami woman Snæfríðr. Hálfdan háleggr and Guðrǫðr ljómi kill Haraldr hárfagri's friend Earl Rǫgnvaldr of Møre, which leads to conflicts between Haraldr and his sons. Hálfdan háleggr sails to Orkney, and tensions run high between him and the other "Utgarðr-son", Torf-Einarr. Their clash ends with Earl Einarr carving the blood-eagle on Hálfdan háleggr as a sacrifice to Óðinn.

All the saga's "Utgarðr-sons" have dramatic lives; all play important roles in the history of realm and earldom, something which fully corresponds to the old origin mythology. The set-up supports our hypothesis that the pagan origin mythology was well known within the medieval educated milieus.

As indicated, it is possible to argue that the origin myth of the Orkney earls expresses a certain opposition to the origin traditions of the Ynglingar- and Hlaðir-dynasties. While the origin myth of the earls of Hlaðir depicts a ruling dynasty descending from Óðinn and the giant-woman Skaði, the Orkney earls are described as descendants of a line of primeval beings who all show giant-characteristics. The myth in *Orkneyinga saga*'s first three chapters places their origin in the far north, in areas which medieval people considered to be Sami. In this latter respect *Orkneyinga saga* shows parallels to the traditions of the earls of Hlaðir's northern origins, suffice to mention the narrative of Helgi and Þorgerðr and *Háleygjatal*'s prototypical Earl Sæmingr, whose name may be read as "Sami".

Ian Beuermann is the scholar who has asked most critically which tendencies characterise *Orkneyinga saga's* ideology of rulership. He proposes that the saga's origin myth aims to underline the earls' independence with regard to the Norwegian kings.[82] Analysing the account of Earl Rǫgnvaldr (Kali) Kolsson, Beuermann presents two possible interpretations of the saga's ideology of rulership: on the one hand the saga might criticise weak rulers who do not manage to control unruly

[82] Beuermann 2005. Beuermann in this volume develops this further.

viking chieftains such as Sveinn Ásleifarson. Alternatively, the saga may praise Earl Rǫgnvaldr's reign as a golden age, an idealised viking society in which the earl is *primus inter pares* within his aristocracy. The saga may thus extol Rǫgnvaldr's rule as the opposite of the contemporary Norwegian monarchy, the despotic kingdom of Sverrir's, which at precisely that time established a more intrusive overlordship of Orkney. The origin myth as counter propaganda would agree well with the latter interpretation, underlining the earls' descent from Nordic giants who are more genuinely Norwegian and native than the royal dynasty.[83]

Writers in the Icelandic scriptoria used and transformed the pagan motif of giants in a number of ways. More and more, giants are associated with native tradition, exceptional abilities, and great wisdom; they are thus intrinsically tied to the primeval Nordic landscape. The exclusive focus on giants in *Orkneyinga saga's* origin myth therefore fits hand in glove with attempts by the earls of Orkney to legitimise their power with regard to the Norwegian kings.

VI b. *The chieftains' power and their initiation in* Færeyinga saga

With *Færeyinga saga* we move to a different layer within the hierarchy of power, to a chiefdom. *Haralds saga hárfagra* in *Heimskringla* claims that the Faeroes, just like the Orkneys, were conquered by King Haraldr hárfagri in the ninth century. In all likelihood *Færeyinga saga* was composed rather early, between 1200 and 1220. For our discussion this early date is interesting because of its implications for the text's possible closeness to oral traditions.[84]

The saga focuses on the development of Faeroese society with its hero, the chieftain Sigmundr Brestisson and his conflicts with the sly pagan Þrándr from Gata. In addition to the power struggles between leaders in the island-realm the saga also addresses the relations between the Faeroese chieftaincy and Norwegian earls and kings. Earl Hákon

[83] "The mythical origin-legend stressing the earls' descent from native Nordic giants, and the historical progenitor shown to be a born ruler underline the status of the Orkney earls, especially vis-à-vis the Norwegian royal line", Beuermann 2005:148.

[84] There are many open questions about the composition of the saga. No original text survives, so that the full saga as it exists now is a construction based on parts extant in various manuscripts, cf the most recent critical edition by Ólafr Halldórsson 1987. Mundal 2005 discusses oral tradition in this saga which contains no single skaldic poem.

of Hlaðir personifies paganism with its cult of Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr. The missionary-king Óláfr Tryggvason persuades Sigmundr to accept baptism and to bring Christianity to the Faeroes. By relating the story of Sigmundr's dramatic life the author of the saga thus gives us an impression of the great cultural, social, political and religious transformations rocking a society on the way from paganism to Christianity. While Sigmundr introduces Christianity to the Faeroes, he remains throughout his life a transitional character, mid-way between old and new, paganism and Christianity. He dies a tragic death, which agrees with the pagan mythical pattern whose traces we already discussed in several instances above.

Origin myths are not usually associated with chieftains; a mythological genealogy is normally the preserve of kings and some earls. *Færeyinga saga* is out of the ordinary in ascribing mythological dimensions to its chieftains. However, it does not do so in the shape of a genealogical origin myth, but through pagan initiation motifs: the chieftain-to-be is initiated both to Óðinn and to an Utgarðr-woman. It is clear that the saga-author is well acquainted with the whole spectrum of the old origin and initiation myths that developed in connection with the elite of pre-Christian society.

We shall give a very short overview of how the saga-author employs a number of pagan myths connected to the ideology of rulership. He incorporates mythical themes so that they form the framework within which the chieftain's life unfolds. Mythical concepts and structures thus dominate the narrative presentation of the chieftain, and of the development of his rule. It is argued here that this indicates the survival, within oral tradition, of pre-Christian myths connected to social institutions such as the ruler and his power, into the period when *Færeyinga saga* was composed.[85]

Sigmundr, like all heroes, has a rather dramatic life. Aged nine, he witnesses how his father is killed by Trond of Gata, the first of many tests. Sigmundr is then shipped to Norway as a slave, together with his friend Þórir. The two boys risk their lives on a wild journey across the Dovre mountains, before they are rescued by a family of outlaws. Their stay with this family was to prove decisive. Later, Sigmundr

[85] See Steinsland 2005 for a more detailed analysis of the underlying mythology on which the saga's ideology of rulership is based. Cf Meulengracht Sørensen 1990 for examples of a similar underlying mythology in the Icelandic sagas.

meets Earl Hákon at Hlaðir and enters into a symbolical marriage with the earl's patron goddess Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr. Sigmundr receives Þorgerðr's ring as a sign of their union. Returning to the Faeroes, he becomes a chieftain there, and, in the wake of local power struggles, dies an ignoble death. It is Þorgerðr's ring which proves fateful. In a highly dramatic scene Sigmundr refuses to relinquish the ring to Óláfr Tryggvason. Because of this, Sigmundr loses the king's trust, which leads to his death. Faeroese society was to find peace only with the following generations, especially with the women associated with Sigmundr. As the following short discussion shows, the motifs in the narrative about the Faeroese chieftain Sigmundr are all derived from the pre-Christian mythology of rulership.[86]

Óðinn-initiation by Hrafn and Úlfr

The two outlawed boys Sigmundr and Þórir have a number of cataclysmic meetings with different people. The foreign skipper with whom the fatherless boys sail to Norway is called Hrafn ("raven"). In the Dovre-mountains an outlawed man, Úlfr ("wolf"), takes the boys in and becomes their teacher throughout a long winter. These two characters point towards the mythology of Óðinn. It is well known that Óðinn was accompanied by two ravens, Hugin and Munin, and that he was followed by wolves, Gerir and Frekir, non-domesticated animals who embody the god's terrifying aspects. There are references to journeys to the realm of death and to Utgarðr, usually associated with initiations. Úlfr of the Dovre-mountains turns out to be a disguised Óðinn, and, like the god, he imparts his knowledge to the young Sigmundr. Sigmundr however, in spite of his foster-father Úlfr's prohibition, kills a monster, a bear already grey with old age. This is a reference to Óðinn's berserkir, the *ulfheðnar*, dressed in furs.[87]

That the underlying theme of this part of *Færeyinga saga* is the initiation of a ruler-to-be is evident from the parallels with *Grímnismál's* frame story. There, two king's sons of the same age as the Faeroese, Geirrǫðr and Agnarr, end dramatically on a strange island far away from everything, where an ancient couple lives. During the winter,

[86] The saga describes Sigmundr's mother as an alien, without local relatives, which corresponds fully to patterns associated with the ideology of rulership, as discussed above. Her name, Cecilia, is anachronistic, and may be seen as an outlook towards the islands' Christianisation by Sigmundr.

[87] On berserkir, cf Schjødt in this volume.

the man, again Óðinn in disguise, imparts his knowledge to Geirrǫðr. The woman—Friggr—chooses Agnarr, whose fate, following an erotic myth, is different from his brother's. Agnarr engenders children with a giant-woman.

Erotic initiation at Dovre and Hlaðir

Færeyinga saga associates two types of initiation with its hero: an initiation into knowledge, and one into eroticism. In addition to the knowledge imparted by Úlfr, Sigmundr experiences an initiation of erotic character with his daughter, Þuríðr, also at Dovre. Later on, Þuríðr proves to be an extraordinarily resourceful woman. She represents the now well known motif of the "woman from Utgarðr", who determines the fate of the ruler *in spe*. Sigmund engenders a child with Þuríðr, a daughter, Þora. In the last chapters of *Færeyinga saga* Þora is the only person able to make peace between the warring factions in the islands.[88] In accordance with the underlying mythic pattern Þora is described as a giant-woman. She is no beauty, tall, and heavy, but industrious and intelligent, and the saga underlines that she was born in the mountains: "*Þora var ellzst dotter þeirra ere fædd uar afiallinu hon var mikil kona ok skorulig ekki dauæn ok hafdi snemmendis vitzku bragd a ser*."[89] This strong feminine element in the ideology of rulership of *Færeyinga saga* is interesting. It breaks with the pattern of masculine dominance which usually characterises the ideology of power elsewhere.

Sigmundr undergoes a similar erotic initiation at the earl's court at Hlaðir, when he follows Earl Hákon's wish and celebrates a symbolical wedding with the earls' patron goddess Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr. The saga-author describes a ritual at Þorgerðr's statue in the cultic building at Hlaðir. We recognise the erotic motif and the ring from the *Skírnismál* myth, where the Oðinic ring Draupnir is handed over as a sign of marriage. This ring is prominent in mythological sources; in *Skírnismál* it travels between the various worlds, from that of the living to that of the dead and back. It is a well known symbol of fate, and in *Færeyinga saga* it leads to Sigmundr's humiliating death on the

[88] Else Mundal underlined the significant female element in the saga. Three generations of women around Sigmundr are portrayed as heroines, giving us interesting insights into the Nordic female ideal. Mundal 2005.

[89] Ólafr Halldórsson 1987:82. ("*Thora was their eldest daughter. She was born in the mountains and was a big and strong woman; she was not pretty, but wise-looking*" my translation).

sea-shore. The mighty chieftain is brutally clubbed to death by robbers. The ring is the symbol linking Sigmundr to paganism throughout his whole life, something which makes Sigmundr into a tragic character. Sigmundr's life and career are thus depicted according to a common motif within Nordic ideology of rulership: the ruler's fateful life and dramatic death.

How can we interpret the mythological motifs with regard to *Færeyinga saga*'s ideology as a whole? Norwegian overlordship of the Faeroes was only established rather late: the islands were taxed for the first time in the eleventh century. In other words, island society had been independent for some time before. There is no evidence for the saga's story about Earl Hákon of Hlaðir, he appears as the man who binds Sigmundr to paganism. King Óláfr Tryggvason converts the young chieftain, and therewith indirectly also the Faeroes. Sigmundr's character, adhering to pagan society's norms of loyalty and friendship, is described in positive terms in the saga. This indicates a certain ambivalence on the part of the saga-author concerning paganism and Christianity, and also concerning the Norwegian kingdom.

We may conclude that the author of *Færeyinga saga*, for the description of Sigmundr's dramatic life, makes use of a whole spectrum of myths associated with Nordic ideology of rulership: initiation myths as well as themes derived from origin myths. It is proposed here that there are traces of both the characteristic Óðinn-initiation with transfer of knowledge, and of the motif of eroticism from the *hieros gamos* myth, where the woman from Utgarðr plays an important role in the creation of the future ruling dynasty. In *Færeyinga saga* the Utgarðr-woman appears in a euhemerised shape, personified by the very strong characters Þuríðr and Þora.[90] The text thus does not incorporate the pagan myths per se, but rather examples of mythic thinking, which seems to have survived into the period of composition. In sum, in *Færeyinga saga* old myths are re-used and transformed within a new historic context, and, what is unusual, linked to a chieftain.

[90] There is an interesting parallel between *Færeyinga saga's* focus on the importance of women for the development of the chieftaincy, and the significance attached to the birth of girls in the ideology of chieftains in the Icelandic sagas with an underlying Freyr-mythology, cf Meulengracht Sørensen 1992.

VII. *Results and reflections*

1. *Pagan origin myths*

Skaldic and eddaic poetry give evidence that pre-Christian Nordic culture had developed origin myths that propagate ruling dynasties' descent from mythological characters—see for example *Háleygjatal*, *Skírnismál*, and *Hyndluljóð*. This origin mythology is characterised by a specific bipolar structure: a *hieros gamos* myth in which an erotic union between a god and a giant-woman produces offspring. The result of this exogamous alliance is a son who, because of his extraordinary character, is predestined to rule: he unites the forces of the both cosmic fields of energy, which makes him eminently suitable as a ruler. With this, the Nordic origin myth reflects pre-Christian cosmology with its interaction between the forces of gods and giants.

In a comparative perspective the Nordic origin myth is unusual because of its strong focus on the feminine element, the giant-woman. The resulting dangerous exogamous erotic alliance across the boundaries of the cosmic fields may have dramatic consequences, and opens the myth to different interpretations: as genealogical legitimisation of power, as sexual conquest, as justification for marriage across ethnic and cultural divides, or as a myth of fertility and fateful death.

The Nordic origin myth is ideological in that it legitimises the power and rulership of a few chosen dynasties. In terms of hierarchy, genealogical origin myths are only ascribed to royal or comital dynasties, not usually to chieftains.

In the praise poem to the earls of Hlaðir, Óðinn and Skaði are the couple who engender the prototypical earl, Sæmingr. Óðinn is very much to the fore in the praise poetry at Hlaðir, while the giant-woman personifies the conquered territory in a number of poems. Thus, many poems are characterised by an imagery of sexual conquest.

There are reasons to believe that the same mythological model had been associated with the Ynglingar, as Snorri claims in *Ynglinga saga* where Freyr and Gerðr, the couple from *Skírnismál*, engender the first Ynglingar king, Fjǫlnir. Here however, we have to establish indirectly that the eddaic myth which Snorri transforms into an origin myth, does in fact date back to an early period. The argument in favour of this is that the marriage myth such as it appears in *Háleygjatal* and *Skírnismál* shows traces of an origin mythology which dates back to the Viking Period, and possibly to an even earlier era if we consider

the Scandinavian gold-foil pieces with their depiction of a couple. This material, found in central places associated with the hall and the ruler's seat, was deposited from the seventh and eighth century until the Viking Age.[91]

For historians of religion an interesting question is which gods and powers the pre-Christian ruling dynasties attached themselves to. Received opinion held that Freyr enjoyed a special place as the god of the Ynglingar-dynasty, while the earls of Hlaðir based their power on Óðinn's favour. This chapter agrees that Óðinn had a strong position as god of kings and earls in the late Viking Age, but warns that Freyr's relationship to rulers is not as clear-cut as has been assumed.

2. *The Middle Ages historicise pagan myths: from mythology to mythography*

Medieval historiography—in our context especially the kings' sagas—are highly interested in the pagan origin traditions of the ruling dynasties. In medieval Icelandic scriptoria older myths were extensively re-used: they were incorporated, euhemerised, transformed, and adapted to new contexts wherever positions of power needed to be legitimised. Surprisingly, the giant-element of the pagan origin myths is becoming more prominent; giants are associated with the native population. They are equated to Sami and Finns, and connected to wintry northerly regions, that are then presented as the genuine Nordic landscape. Arguably, this is evidence for the continuing popularity of concepts which oppose new contemporary theories about the rulers' migration from southern Europe to the North.

2 a. Heimskringla *and Snorri's* Edda

Based on Ari and *Skjǫldunga saga* Snorri develops a new migration and origin theory: the Nordic realms were founded by a powerful dynasty headed by Óðinn and his sons, an aristocracy which arrived from classical and biblical regions in the South, and came to settle in the North. Intermarriage with the local population then created the Nordic peoples. This version of the Nordic peoples' common origin represents a new, all encompassing cultural concept, in clear contrast to the older dynastic myths, which however did not disappear.

---

[91] Cf Steinsland 1990.

Snorri employs the *hieros gamos* myth from *Skírnismál* for the Norwegian royal dynasty, the Ynglingar, on whom his *Heimskringla* focuses. He models the origin of the Norwegian Ynglingar on the *Skírnismál* myth by letting Freyr and Gerðr engender the first "historical" Ynglingar king, Fjǫlnir. Snorri the historiographer thus creates an arena for tensions, but also an impressive background for the Norwegian royal dynasty. With Óðinn as the legendary ancestor and Freyr as dynastic founding father both war and peace are "covered".

In the following, Hálfdan svarti is depicted as king in the typical Freyr mould. After his death he comes to rest in burial mounds in the part of the country where he established a new dynasty, ensuring their future fertility and peace. With the conquering and heroic Haraldr hárfagri the setting changes: the giant-element of the pagan origin myth is activated, and Haraldr is fostered with a giant at Dovre.

Also if, as discussed above, Snorri's use of the *Skírnismál* myth as the origin myth of the Ynglingar is an innovation connected to medieval political interests, we nevertheless see him reactivating an origin myth whose structure seems to have been common in Nordic pre-Christian culture.

The *hieros gamos* myth reappears in the saga's version of Haraldr hárfagri's marriage with the Sami woman Snæfríðr; especially in *Ágrip* and *Heimskringla* the underlying pattern of the pagan origin myth is obvious. In Snorri's narrative the meeting at Dovre between the king and the Sami woman needs to be seen as the last act of the legendary unification of the Norwegian kingdom.

2 b. Orkneyinga saga

It is argued here that the origin legend in *Orkneyinga saga* is a conscious political re-formulation of older mythological material. The dominant element in the saga is a euhemerised giant-dynasty; the Orkney earls are ascribed an origin in the far north of Norway, with a giant as their ancestor. This Fornjótr and his sons also underline the place of Dovre as a central region in the fatherland, Norway.

This origin legend sets out to propagate that the Orkney earls have older dynastic traditions in Norway than the Ynglingar kings. In clear contrast to the southern-oriented migration theories popular in contemporary scriptoria, the author of *Orkneyinga saga* creates a northerly origin legend where the Orkney earls descend from a primeval people of giants, or indeed of Sami or Finns. The giants of the old

origin myths are re-defined into the native population, and the northern regions of Norway are depicted as the genuine Nordic landscape.

2 c. Færeyinga saga

The description of chieftainly power in *Færeyinga saga* relies on a whole spectrum of pagan myths. Normally, chieftains' dynasties do not descend from gods or other supernatural powers. Interestingly, the Faeroese chieftains' rule is legitimised via an initiation of the chieftain-to-be to gods and powers. We see an initiation to Óðinn with transfer of knowledge, an erotic initiation in the Dovre Mountains with a representative of the mythical "Utgarðr-woman", and a symbolic wedding to Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr at the earls' seat at Hlaðir. All these mythological stories are elements in the creation and legitimisation of the chieftains' power in the Faeroes.

As said, it is unusual that a chieftains' dynasty is as strongly associated with gods and powers as that of the Faeroese Sigmundr Brestisson. Admittedly, the links are created via elements of initiation, not via genealogical origin myths. Nevertheless, one wonders why an Icelandic composer ascribes such pagan mythology to the Faeroese chieftains—no Icelandic chieftain's dynasty is singled out in this way. Here, further research is required to examine the saga's ideological context. In any case however, the rich mythological content of *Færeyinga saga* shows that mythical thinking survived into the time of the saga's composition.

3. *The Sami element in the origin myths*

The Sami element in the Nordic origin narratives requires further thought. As discussed, medieval historiography transforms myths into "history", and in this context, giants into Sami or Finns. But should this appearance of Sami be seen exclusively as a result of medieval historiographical changes, or does it in fact already date to the Viking Age?

3 a. *The female giant*

Particularly interesting is the giant-woman of the myths. *Háleygjatal* calls the primeval mother of the Hlaðir earls, Skaði, *ǫndurdís*, "ski-goddess". She was born in the mountains and represents the people of the mountains. Remembering the Hlaðir earls' traditions of their northern origins, in Hålogaland, we may wonder whether the character of Skaði points towards the Sami. Then, since Skaði in several

skaldic poems personifies the land which the earl conquers, this probably does not refer to the soil of the Trøndelag, but rather to the whole of northern Norway—Hålogaland, which at an earlier date was settled by Sami. The name of the prototypical earl of Hlaðir, Sæmingr, might contain the element "Sami". Consequently, the earls' origin myth, whether it was created in the skaldic milieu at Hlaðir, or perpetuates older traditions, might express an awareness of the integration of two people, the Sami and the Scandinavians.

In *Vellekla* Earl Hákon is called *Dofra dróttin*, "king of Dovre", of the mountainous area in Oppland which had long been characterised by the Sami reindeer-economy. Ideas about the Dovre Mountains, giants and the Sami thus seem to be part and parcel of mythological-ideological concepts that go back to the Viking Period.

Eyvindr Finnssonr skáldaspillir, the skald who composed *Háleygjatal*, was himself of Sami origin. His presentation of the myth of Óðinn and Skaði who engender sons in the north, may be a territorial foundation myth. This interpretation would imply that the concept of power over an area expressed in terms of a mystic-ideological construction, existed long before the historiographer Snorri used it for his last act in the unification of the Norwegian kingdom.

3 b. *Dovre as the symbolical origin of power*

In the myth of the unification of the Norwegian kingdom the alliance between Haraldr hárfagri and the Sami woman Snæfríðr symbolises the merging of the Norwegian and the Sami people, metaphorically expressed via the wedding at Dovre. The story can also be traced in later saga tradition within the genealogies of Norwegian kings beginning with Haraldr hárfagri. The fact that historical compilations like *Historia Norwegiae, Ágrip* and *Heimskringla* underline Haraldr harðráði's descent from Haraldr hárfagri via Sigurðr syr, with a genealogy back to Snæfríðr, would indicate a specific ideology. The later Haraldr (harðráði) shared power with St Óláfr's son Magnús góði, whose line died out on the male side. Haraldr harðráði therefore required a genealogy which simultaneously linked him to and distinguished him from that of St Óláfr's. With Snæfríðr as his ancestress Haraldr could claim rulership over both peoples in the country, the Norwegians and the Sami. The latter were also important since the Dovre Mountains with their reindeer economy were highly coveted by the Norwegian kings.

Our examination of origin myths underlines how useful myths could be in an ideological context; myths legitimise and guarantee power from the Viking to the Middle Ages. It has shown that Nordic origin mythology was colourful and valued for a long period of time: from the last years of the Viking Age when pagan myths may still have been part of a vibrant religion, to the Middle Ages with their scriptoria which transformed mythology into mythography.

4. *Pagan myths side by side with* rex iustus *ideology*

Medieval historiographers wrote the history of the Nordic countries into a common European historiography. As a matter of course, the history of a people was considered to be that of its rulers. While European royal ideology had long been based on the Christian concept of a *rex iustus*, Icelandic-Nordic historiography remained faithful to older, native concepts for legitimising and expressing power. This chapter argues that Nordic culture responded to the new medieval challenges by transforming native pagan mythological traditions to agree with a new cultural and social context. One reason for this may well have been the desire to keep one's identity and distinguish one's own Nordic past as different compared to wider European developments.

The dominant European royal ideology is referred to as the *rex iustus* theory, based on a term coined by the Church father Augustine. The ideology developed throughout many centuries, with an especially productive period during the reign of Charlemagne. In Nordic texts we find the first traces of this *rex iustus* ideology linked to the Norwegian kingdom in the mid-twelfth century, and its apogee was reached with *Konungs skuggsjá* from around 1250. However, when compared to the Christian European ideology we note differences in the traditional Nordic mythology of rulership. It seems that Icelandic authors might have enjoyed greater freedom vis-à-vis the crown than their Norwegian colleagues.

While the descent of a pagan ruler linked him to gods and supernatural powers, the giant-element prevented that earls and kings were considered divine. The person of the Christian ruler was a "normal", earthly man anyway; it was his office which transferred some aspects of the divine onto him. The legitimate king was empowered to rule as rightful *vicarius dei*. This direct connection between the heavenly majestic God and the earthly king who was God's *eikon*, "image", made the latter into a sacral king, a divinely endowed ruler on earth,

with far greater scope to develop his power than the pre-Christian earl or king had enjoyed.

Lastly, this chapter contributes to the wider scholarly debate on the relations between centre and periphery during the making of medieval European culture. While in the 1990s, a leading medievalist such as Robert Bartlett pronounced that medieval cultural and religious impulses had generally been transferred from the centre to the periphery, a decade later Patrick Geary argued the opposite, that the periphery had to a large extent contributed with its own traditions to the meeting with new impulses from Christian Europe.[92] The examination in this chapter of mythological and mythographical elements in the texts supports Geary's view: when medieval Nordic culture began to formulate its own history, it relied strongly on pagan myths and traditions.

Bibliography

Sources

Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sǫgum. Fagrskinna. Nóregs konunga tal, ÍF 29, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson, Reykjavík 1984.
Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigning ved Finnur Jónsson, A I–II, B I–II, Copenhagen 1967–1973.
Eddadigte I. Vǫluspá Hávamál, Nordisk filologi A. Tekster, ed. by Jón Helgason, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo 1964.
Eddadigt II, Gudedigte, ed. by Jón Helgason, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo 1965.
Færeyinga saga, ed. by Ólafur Halldórsson, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, Reykjavík 1987.
Flateyjarbók I–III, Christiania 1860, 1862, 1868.
Heimskringla I, Snorri Sturluson, *ÍF* 26, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík 1979.
Historia Norwegie, ed. by Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, Copenhagen 2003.
Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ. Latinske kildeskrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen, ed. by Gustav Storm, Christiania 1880.
Morkinskinna, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen 1928–32.
Orkneyinga saga, *ÍF* 34, ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson, Reykjavík 1965.
Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen 1932.
Saga Ólafs konungs Tryggvasonar er ritaði Oddr muncr, ed. by P. Groth, Christiania 1895.
Snorri Sturluson. Edda, Nordisk filologi, A. Tekster, ed. by Anne Holtsmark, Jón Helgason, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo 1976.
Sæmundar Edda hins fróða, ed. by Sophus Bugge, (1867) Oslo 1965.

[92] Bartlett 1993; Geary 2006.

Ynglinga saga, ed. by Elias Wessén, Nordisk filologi A. Tekster 6, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo 1976.
Ynglinga saga etter KRINGLA (AM 35 fol), ed. by Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, Oslo 2000.

Studies

Ashman Rowe, Elisabeth 2003. Origin Legends and Foundation Myths, *Flateyjarbók, Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, The Viking Collection, Vol. 14, Viborg, 198–216.
Bartlett, Robert 1993. *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change 950–1350*, London.
Beck, Heinrich 2000. War Snorri Sturluson ein Euhemerist?, *Hesperides* Vol. XII, ed. by Michael Dallapiazza et al., Trieste, 61–72.
Behrend, Nora (ed) 2007. *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy*. Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900–1200, Cambridge.
Berger, Peter Ludwig 1997. *Religion, samfund og virkelighed*. Elementer til en sociologisk religionsteori, Oslo.
Bergsveinn Birgisson 2008. *Inn i skaldens sinn. Kognitive, estetiske og historiske skatter i den norrøne skaldediktningen*, doctoral thesis, University of Bergen.
Beuermann, Ian 2005. Orkneyinga Saga: 1195 and All That?, *Dialogues with Tradition: Studying the Nordic Saga Heritage*, Nordistica Tartuensia No. 14, ed. Kristel Zilmer et al., Tartu, 113–152.
Bjorvand, Harald 2006. Skåne, *Namn och Bygd* 94, 15–23.
Boje Mortensen, Lars (red) 2006. *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom*, Odense.
Brink, Stefan 2001. Mythologizing landscape. Place and Space of Cult and Myth, *Kontinuität und Brüche in der Religionsgeschichte. Festschrift für Anders Hultgård*, ed. by Michael Stausberg et al, Berlin, New York, 76–112.
Bugge, Sophus 1899. Mythiske Sagn om Halvdan Svarte og Harald Haarfagre, *ANF* 16, 1–37.
Byrne, Francis J. 2001 (1973). *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, Dublin.
Chadwick, Nora 1950. Þorgerðr Hölgabruðr and the Trolla þing: A Note on Sources, *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe*, Cambridge, 397–417.
Clunies Ross, Margaret 1983. Snorri Sturluson's Use of the Norse Origin-Legend of the Sons of Fornjótr in his *Edda*, *ANF* 98, 47–66.
Dillmann, François-Xavier 1997. Pour l'Etude des Traditions relatives á l'Enterrement du Roi Halfdan le Noir, *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience*, 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim 3.-9-August 1997, Senter for middelalderstudier, NTNU, 149–158.
Dronke, Ursula and Peter 1977. The Prologue of the Prose Edda: Explorations of a Latin Background, *Sjötíu Ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. Júli 1977*, red. Jónas Kristjánsson et al., Reykjavík, 153–176.
Dumville, David 1979. Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists, *Early Medieval Kingship*, eds. P. H. Saywer and I. N. Woods, University of Leeds, Leeds, 72–104.
Dørum, Knut 2001. Det norske riket som odel i Harald Hårfagres ætt, (Norsk) *Historisk Tidsskrift* 80, 3, 323–342.
Enright, Michael J. 1996. *Lady with a Mead Cup. Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tene to the Viking Age*, Dublin.
Ellis, Hilda R. 1941. Fostering by Giants in Old Norse Saga Literature, *Medium Ævum* 10, 70–85.
Fabech, Charlotte 1994. Society and Landscape. From Collective Manifestations to Ceremonies of a New Ruling Class, *Iconologia Sacra, Mythos, Bildkunst und Dichtung in der Religions- und Sozialgeschichte Alteuropas*, Festschrift für Karl Hauck zum 75. Geburtstag, ed. by Hagen Keller et al., Berlin, New York, 132–143.

Faulks, Anthony 1982. Descent from the gods, *Medieval Scandinavia* 11, 92–125.
Fleck, Jere 1970. Konr-Óttar-Geirrroðr: A Knowledge Criterion for Succession to the Germanic Sacred Kingship, *Scandinavian Studies* 24, 39–49.
Fidjestøl, Bjarne 1966. *Haraldskvæði*. Hovedoppgåve til embetseksamen i nordisk litteratur, UiB.
—— 1982. *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, Øvre Ervik.
—— 1993. Skaldekvad og Harald Hårfagre, *Rikssamlingen og Harald Hårfagre*, Historisk seminar på Karmøy 10. og 11. juni 1993, ed. by Bjørn Myhre, 7–31.
Frank, Roberta 2007. The Lay of the Land in Scaldic Praise Poetry, *Myth in Early Northwest Europe*, ed. by Stephen O. Glosecki, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Vol 21, Temple, Arizona, 175–196.
Fuglestvedt, Ingrid og Hærnes, Per 1996. Rituell kommunikasjon i yngre jernalder. Forslag til modell for forståelse av storhauger og steinkors i brytningstiden mellom hedendom og kristendom, *Nordsjøen—Handel, religion og politikk*, Karmøyseminarene 94/95, ed. by Jens Flemming Krøger et al., Karmøy, 140–150.
Fuglestvedt, Ingrid 1997. Mellom hedendom og kristendom—mellom ættesamfunn og kongerike. Bruken av monumentale anlegg i en brytningstid, *Konflikt i forhistorien*, ed. by Ingrid Fuglestvedt et al, AmS-Varia 30, Stavanger, 41–56.
Gansum, Terje 2008. Hallene og stavkirkene—kultbygninger i en overgangstid? *Facets of Archeology: essays in honour of Lotte Hedeager*, ed. by Konstantinos Chilidis et al., 199–213.
Geary, Patrick 2006. Reflections on Historiography and the Holy: Center and Periphery, *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–13000)*, ed. by Lars Boje Mortensen, Copenhagen, 323–329.
Green, D.H. 1998. *Language and History in the Early Germanic World*, Cambridge.
Gräslund, Anne-Sophie. 2001. *Ideologi och mentalitet. Om religionsskiftet i Skandinavien från en arkeologisk horisont*, OPIA 29.
Heather, P. 1989. Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals: Genealogy and the Goths under Hun Domination, *Journal of Roman Studies* vol. LXXIX, 103–128.
Hedeager, Lotte 1993. The Creation of Germanic Identity. A European Origin-Myth, *Mémoires du Musée de Préhistoire d'Ile –de-France*, 5. 121–131.
—— 1996. Scandza: Folkevandringstidens nordiske oprindelsesmyte, *Nordsjøen: Handel, religion og politikk*, Karmøyseminaret 94/95, red. Krøger et al., Stavanger, 10–17.
Hedeager, Lotte og Tvarnø, Henrik 2001. *Tusen års europahistorie*. Romere, germanere og nordboer, Oslo.
Herschend, Frands 1993. The Origin of the Hall in Southern Skandinavia, *Tor*, 25, 175–199.
—— 1996. A Note on Late Iron Age Kingship Mythology, *Tor* 28, 283–303.
—— 1997. *Livet i hallen.* Tre fallstudier i den yngre järnålderns aristokrati, OPIA 14, Uppsala.
Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1994. Forholdet mellom verdslig og religiøs makt på Island i fristatsperioden, *Myte og ritual i det førkristne Norden. Et symposium*, ed. by Jens Peter Schjødt et al., Odense, 129–140.
Jónas Kristjánsson 1997. *Eddas and Sagas.* Iceland's Medieval Literature, Reykjavík.
Koht, Halvdan 1910. Om Haalogaland og Haaløygætten, *HT* 4. rekke, 1–16.
Krag, Claus. 1991. *Ynglingatal og Ynglinga saga*. En studie i historiske kilder, Studia Humaniora 2, Oslo.
Lincoln, Bruce 1999. *Theorizing Myth*. Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship, Chicago.
Lunden, Kåre 1995. Was there a Norwegian national identity during the Middle Ages? *Scandinavian Journal of History* 1, 19–32.
Lönnroth, Lars 1969. The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas, *Scandinavian Studies* 41, 1–29.

—— 1986. Dómaldis's Death and the Myth of Sacral Kingship, *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, red. John Lindow et al., *The Viking Collection* 3, Odense, 73–93.
Mann, Michael 1986. *The Sources of Social Power. A History from the Beginnings to AD 1760*, Cambridge.
Mac Cana, Proinsias 1955. Aspects of the Theme of King and Godess in Irish Literature, *Etudes Celtique* Vol. VV, 76–114.
Maier, Bernhard 2003. *The Celts. A History from Earliest Times to the Present*, Indiana.
Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben 1977. Starkaðr, Loki og Egill Skallagrímsson, *Sjötíu Ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. Júli 1977*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson et al., Reykjavík, 759–768.
—— 1991. Om eddadigtningens alder, *Nordisk hedendom. Et symposium*, ed. by Gro Steinsland et al, Odense, 217–228.
—— 1992. Freyr i islendingesagaerne, *Sakrale navne*, NORNA-rapporter 48, ed. by Gillian Fellows-Jensen et al., 55–75.
—— 1993. The Sea, the Flame and the Wind. The Legendary Ancestors of the Earls of Orkney, *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*, The Eleventh Viking Congress 1989, ed. by Colleen E. Batey et al, Edinburgh, 212–221.
Moe, Moltke 1926. *Samlede skrifter* II, Oslo.
Mundal, Else 1997. Kong Harald hårfagre og samejenta Snøfrid. Samefolket sin plass i den norske rikssamlingsmyten, *Nordica Bergensiana* 14, Universitetet i Bergen, 39–53.
—— 1998. Eyvind Finsson Skaldaspiller—liv og diktning, *Mangfold og spenninger*, ed. by Ragnhild Engelskjøn, Orkana forlag. 106–119.
—— 2003. Sigurdr hrísi eller Sigurdr risi? *Nordica Bergensia 29*, Nordisk institutt, University of Bergen, 5–13.
—— 2005. Færeyinga saga—A Fine Piece of Literature in Pieces, *Viking and Norse in the North Atlantic*, Selected Papers from the Proceedings of the Fourteenth Viking Congress, Tórshavn, 19–30 Yuley 2001, ed. by Andras Mortensen and Símun V. Arge, *Annales Societatis Scientiarum Færoensis*, Supplementum XLIV, Tórshavn.
Nordberg, Andreas 2003. *Krigarna i Odens sal. Dödsföreställningar och krigarkult i fornnordisk religion*, Stockholm.
North, Richard 1997. *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 22, Cambridge.
Näsman, Ulf 1994. Sydskandinaviska grav- och offerriter från 200 till 1000 e. Kr., *Myte og ritual i det førkristne Norden*, ed. by Jens Peter Schjødt et al., Odense, 73–94.
Ólafia Einarsdóttir 1971. Harald Dovrefostre af Sogn, *Historisk Tidsskrift*, B. 50, 131–166.
Ólafur Halldórsson 1987. *Færeyinga saga*, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar Reykjavík.
Picard, Eve 1991. *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum? Quellenkritische Studien zur Germania des Tacitus und zur altnordischen Überlieferung.* Heidelberg.
Rindal, Magnus 1990. Framveksten av dei filologiske faga, særleg norrønfilologien i Noreg, *Den filologiske vitenskap*, ed. by Odd Einar Haugen, Einar Thomassen, Oslo, 209–226.
Schulz, Katja 2004. Risen. Von Wissenhütern und Wildnisbewohnern in Edda und Saga, *Skandinavistische Arbeiten*, ed. by Klaus von See et al., Band 20, Heidelberg.
Schjødt, Jens Peter 1990. Det sakrale kongedømmet i det førkristne Skandinavia, *Chaos*, vol. 13, 48–67.
—— 1991. Fyrsteideologi og religion i vikingetiden, *Mammen. Grav, kunst og samfund i vikingetid*, ed. by Mette Iversen et al., Jysk Arkæologisk Selskabs Skrifter XXVIII, Viborgs stiftsmuseums række bind 1, 305–310.
—— 1999. Krigeren i nordisk myte og ideologi, *Religion och samhälle i det förkristna Norden. Ett symposium*, ed. by Ulf Drobin et al., Odense, 195–208.

See, von, Klaus 1999. Der Prolog der Snorra Edda, *Europa und Norden im Middelalter*, Heidelberg, 275–310.
Steinsland, Gro 1990. De nordiske gullblekk med parmotiv og norrøn fyrsteideologi, *Collegium Medievale* 1990/1, Vol. 3, 73–94.
—— 1991. *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi.* En analyse av hierogami-myten i *Skírnismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal* og *Hyndluljóð*, Oslo.
—— 1992. Døden som erotisk lystreise, *Eyvindarbók*. Festskrift til Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen, ed. by Finn Hødnebø et al., Oslo, 319–332.
—— 2000. *Den hellige kongen. Om religion og herskermakt fra vikingtid til middelalder*, Oslo.
—— 2002. Herskermaktens ritualer. Kan mytologien sette oss på spor av gjenstander og kult knyttet til herskerens intronisasjon? *Plats och Praxis—studier av nordisk förkristen ritual*, ed. by Kristina Jennbert, et al., Vägar till Midgård 2, Falun, 87–93.
—— 2004. Myten om kongen i historien om religionsskiftet i Norge, *Religionsskiftet i Norden. Brytningar mellom nordisk og europeisk kultur 800–1200*, ed. by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson et al., Senter for studier i vikingtid og nordisk middelalder, Skriftserie 6/2004, Oslo.
—— 2005. The Mythology of Rulership and the Saga of the Faroe Islanders, *Viking and Norse in the North Atlantic*, *Selected Papers from the Proceedings of the Fourteenth Viking Congress*, Tórshavn, 19–30 Yuley 2001, ed. by Andras Mortensen and Símun V. Arge, *Annales Societatis Scientiarum Færoensis*, Supplementum XLIV, Tórshavn, 76–86.
Storm, Gustav 1885. Om Thorgerd Hölgebrud, *ANF* 2, 124–135.
Ström, Folke 1981. Poetry as an Instrument of Propaganda. Jarl Hákon and his Poets, *Specvlvm Norroenvm*, *Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. by Ursula Dronke et al., Odense, 440–458.
—— 1983. *Hieros gamos*-motivet i Hallfreðr Óttarssons *Hákonardrápa* och den nordnorska jarlavärdigheten, *ANF* 98, 67–79.
Stylegar, Frans-Arne 1997. *Mos teutonicus*. Omkring Halvdan Svartes død og begravelse, *Viking* LX, 59–67.
Sundqvist, Olof 1997. Myt, historia och härskare. Mytens och historiens roll i källor som speglar det förkristna skandinaviska härskardömet, *Myter och Mytteorier. Religionshistoriska diskussioner och teoretiska ansatser*, ed. by Olof Sundqvist and Anna Lydia Svalastog, Uppsala, 93–120.
—— Olof 2002. *Freyr's offspring*. Rulers and religion in Ancient Svea Society, *Historia Religionum* Nr. 21, Uppsala.
—— 2007. *Kultledare i fornskandinavisk religion*, OPIA 41, Uppsala.
Sverrir Jakobsson 1997. Myter om Harald Hárfager, *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience*, 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim 3.-9-August 1997, Senter for middelalderstudier, NTNU, 597–610.
Turville-Petre, Joan 1982. On Ynglingatal, *Medieval Scandinavia* 11, 48–67.
Vikstrand, Per 2001. *Gudarnas Platser*. Förkristna sakrala ortnamn i Mälarlandskapen, Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolph LXXVII 17, Uppsala.
Wickström, Johan 2004. Bröllopsmyten i *Helgakviða Hjörvarzsonar*. Ett exempel på fornskandinavisk härskarideologi i Codex Regius hjältediktning, *ANF* 119, 106–123.
Wolfram, H. 1994. Origo et Religio. Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Medieval Texts, *Early Medieval Europe*, Vol. 3, Nr.1, 19–38.
Zachrisson, Inger 1997. *Möten i gränsland. Samer och germaner i Mellanskandinavien*, Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm.

CHAPTER TWO

KINGS, EARLS AND CHIEFTAINS. RULERS IN NORWAY, ORKNEY AND ICELAND *c.* 900–1300

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson

On 24 May 1240 Skúli Bárðarson, the last rebel leader in Norway, was killed. Seven years later, on 29 July 1247, the coronation of Hákon Hákonarson, Skúli's rival, took place. This event signalised the final victory of the Sverrir-dynasty's claim to the throne in Norway. A few years later *Konungs skuggsiá* (King's Mirror) was composed. In this work the king (s. *konungr*) is depicted as a *rex iustus* and God's representative on earth. As such the king has power over life and death for all his subjects. Those who disobey him violate God's will. The king "*er sva mioc miclaðr oc tighnaðr aiorðu at aller skulu sva luta oc niga til hans sæm til Guðs. hann hævir oc sva mycit vælldi at hann ræðr hværs lifdagum þærs er i hans riki er sva sæm han vill. Lætr þann dræpa er hann vill en þann liva er hann vill.*"[1]

Konungs skuggsiá's notion about the king's power stands in clear contrast to the view in *Heimskringla*, written in Iceland *c.* 1230, and many of the Icelandic family sagas, written in the thirteenth century. In these the focus is on the kings' personal qualities. This can clearly been seen in the description of Haraldr Hárfagri [Finehair], he was according to: "*fróðir menn… allra manna fríðastr sýnum ok sterkastr ok mestr, inn ǫrvasti af fé ok allvinsæll við sína menn. Hann var hermaðr mikill ǫndverða ævi*".[2] The sagas use the kings' qualities and luck to explain why some kings are more successful than others.[3] This focus on the kings' qualities in the sagas reveals a different ideological

[1] *Konungs skuggsiá*: 73, "*is so highly honoured and exalted upon earth that all must bend and bow before him as before God. So great is his power that he may dispose as he likes of the lives of all who live in his kingdom: he lets him live whom he wills and causes him to be slain whom he wills.*" Translation from *The King's Mirror*: 246.

[2] *Haralds saga ins hárfagra, Heimskringla* I: ch. 42, "*to learned men… remarkably beautiful, great and strong, and very generous and affable (allvinsæll) to his men. He was a great warrior in his youth* [My translation]."

[3] Gurevich 1971: 42–45. Bagge 1991: 218–224. Cf. Sommer 2007: 275–293.

concept of kingship and power than *Konungs skuggsiá*. In the latter the king derives his power from God, but in the former the king has to use his personal qualities to build up power from below, for example through his generosity and his ability to gather men around him.

In the Orkneys it was the earls (s. *jarl*), and in Iceland it was the chieftains (s. *goði*), who were the leading authorities. No 'official' ideology similar to the one we find in *Konungs skuggsiá* was formulated in Iceland and Orkney about the chieftains and earls. In *Orkneyinga saga*, the Icelandic family sagas and *Sturlunga saga* sagas there are, however, a number of descriptions of the personal qualities of earls and chieftains. What is the difference between these portrayals and the depictions of kings?

In his article 'Ideology: A Definitional Analysis' John Gerring discusses the meaning of 'ideology'. After a thorough analysis of the different aspects of the term, he concludes with a 'core' definition.[4] The key is that the "internal structure of a set of values and beliefs must be coherent".[5] The difference between ideology and comparable terms, such as belief system, worldview, value-system and political culture is "the purview of ideology to explicitly *political* subject matter".[6] Gerring also stresses that it is not "reasonable to try to construct a single, all-purpose definition of ideology, usable for all times, places, and purposes", because different definitions "will be useful for different purposes."[7] In the following we shall therefore examine the ideology of rulership through the ideas on rulers as presented in their descriptions in the sagas and *Konungs skuggsiá*.

The ideological aspect of rulership in the North Atlantic communities has not been dealt with in this broad way before. In Norway scholars have, however, for a long time debated the ideology of kingship,[8] but little attention has been paid to this aspect in the discussion about the Orkneys and Iceland.[9] The challenge in this chapter is therefore to create an overall picture of the ideological differences and similarities

[4] Gerring 1997: 979.
[5] Gerring 1997: 974.
[6] Gerring 1997: 982.
[7] Gerring 1997: 983.
[8] Se e.g. Gunnes 1971. Bagge 1987. Bagge 1996: 156–160. Bagge 1998: 147–166. Helle 2003: 465–469. Vadum 2004.
[9] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2007a: 95–109. See for a comparison of ideology as expressed through myths in Orkney, the Faeroes and Norway Steinsland in this volume; for Orkney Beuermann 2005 and in this volume.

in these three societies and to discern how the political development affected and altered the ideology of rulership. The period in focus will be *c*. 900–1300, that is from the growth of kingship in Norway to the time when Orkney and Iceland had become an integrated part of the Norwegian kingdom.

It was probably Haraldr Hárfagri (*c*. 850–930) who began the political consolidation of Norway at the end of the ninth century. He managed to gain control of the south west and west of the country. Óláfr Tryggvason (*c*. 995–1000) continued to enlarge the kingdom by placing parts of Trøndelag, which was under the control of the earl at Hlaðir, and probably also of Viken, which was under Danish rulership, under more direct royal control—in the following the term "kings" in Norway will also include the earls of Hlaðir. Óláfr Haraldsson (1015–1028) took the consolidation of Norway another step further. He secured real power for himself in Trøndelag and in the eastern part of Norway, but it was Haraldr Sigurðsson (1045–1066) who secured the kingdom's control over the Uplands, Trøndelag and partly also over Viken. The period between *c*. 1065–1130 was a time of peace. After the death of Sigurðr Jórsalfari in 1130, a one hundred-year long civil war began; it ended with complete victory for the Sverrir (1177–1202) dynasty. In 1217 Sverrir's grandson, Hákon Hákonarson, was proclaimed king of Norway. The real ruler, however, was Skúli Bárðarson, who led the battle against the various bands of rebels, although it was Hákon himself who defeated the last rebels in 1225–27. Hostility then developed between Hákon and Skúli, which culminated in Skúli's rebellion and death in 1240. The remaining decades of the thirteenth century were characterised by peace and the consolidation of the position of the monarchy.[10]

According to the saga tradition the earldom of Orkney and Shetland was founded by Haraldr Hárfagri at the end of the ninth century. He gave the isles to Rögnvaldr earl of Mæri as a compensation for the death of his son while fighting a battle for Haraldr. Rögnvaldr gave the isles to his brother Sigurðr, and Haraldr then made him the earl of the isles. The earldom had a strong military and aristocratic character and from there Viking attacks were organised until the end of

[10] For an overview of the political development in Norway in this period see: Helle 1974: 37–145. Helle 1995: 12–77. Sveaas Andersen 1977: 75–158. Krag 1995: 72–225. Helle 2003: 184–201, 369–391.

the twelfth century. In the years 1193/94 Earl Haraldr took part in the rebellion against King Sverrir, 'øyskjeggreisningen', raised in Orkney. The rebellion failed and Haraldr was soon after forced to meet King Sverrir in Bergen, and to accept the king's annexation of Shetland and of half of the income from the Orkney Isles. This event was a turning point for the political development of Orkney; the earldom was now coming under more direct administration from Norway.[11]

There is general agreement among scholars that the settlement of Iceland started *c*. 870, and that approximately 60 years later an assembly for the whole island was founded at Þingvellir. In the late tenth and early eleventh century there were probably 50–60 chieftains in the country. Subsequently there was a reduction in the number of chieftains and around 1220 most of the country was controlled by about seven families. After 1220 the Norwegian monarchy started to interfere in the political development of Iceland, and as a result of the king's involvement, in the years 1262, 1263 and 1264 Iceland became a part of the Norwegian kingdom, and in 1271 a 'new' Norwegian administrative system was implemented.[12]

We will start this chapter by considering the personal qualities of rulers in the sagas; then we will look at the relation between rulers and religion, and finally address the source problems. The discussion is mostly based on *Orkneyinga saga, Heimskringla, Sverris saga, Sturlunga saga*, the Icelandic Family sagas and *Konungs skuggsiá*, that is, on most of the sagas dealing with rulers in Norway, Orkney and Iceland in the above mentioned period.

Rulers and their qualities

When comparing the description of earls and chieftains with that of kings one clear difference emerges: the kings, who were at top of the social hierarchy in the Old Norse society, do not only appear with a

[11] For an overview of the political development in Orkney see: Crawford 1987: 63–91. Helle 2003: 202–208, 385–387, 412. Beuermann 2005: 113–152. Wærdahl 2006: 79–85. Barrett 2007: 310–311. Thomson 2008. For a detailed discussion of the establishment of the earldom see Beuermann in this volume.

[12] For an overview of the political development in Iceland see: Jón Jóhannesson 1956: 68–102, 265–338. Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Líndal 1978: 34–79. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999: 39–83. Gunnar Karlsson 2004: 63–86, 205–365. Cf. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2005: 109–113.

greater number of personal qualities than other secular leaders, but their qualities are also usually better than those of other rulers and depicted in greater detail. Kings are taller and stronger, more beautiful, wiser, more just, more generous and more victorious than other rulers.[13] It is thus the number of personal qualities and the qualities linked to them that separate leaders in Old Norse society. In the bottom league we have the Icelandic chieftains, usually portrayed with one to three of the above mentioned qualities.[14] *Sturlu saga* states for instance that Oddi Þorgilsson (d. 1151) was *vitr* (clever) and "*manna snjallastr í máli*".[15] One rung up we have the earls of Orkney, generally with two to four personal qualities, for example Earl Erlendr Haraldsson (d. 1154), he "*var lengstum í Þórsá, en stundum í Eyjum eða í hernaði, síðan er Óttarr jarl var andaðr. Hann var inn mannvænsti maðr ok görr at sér of flesta hluti ok mildr af fé, blíðr ok ráðþægr ok allra manna vinsælstr af sínum mönnum; hann hafði sveit mikla.*"[16] At the top we have kings, normally with three to six of the above mentioned qualities, for example Haraldr Hárfagri.

---

[13] Bagge 1991: 146–151. Bagge 1998: 52–53. Ármann Jakobsson 1997: 96–106. Hjardar 2001: 114.

[14] The most detailed description af an Icelandic chieftain is that of Gizurr Þorvaldsson: "*gerðist höfðingi mikill, vitr maðr ok vinsæll… Gizurr var meðalmaðr á vöxt ok allra manna bezt á sik kominn, vel limaðr, snareygður,—ok lágu fast augun—, ok skýrligr í viðbragði, betr talaðr en flestir menn hér á landi, blíðmæltr ok mikill rómrinn, engi ákafamaðr ok þótti jafnan inn drjúgligsti til ráðagerðar. En þó bar svá oft til, þá er hann var við deilur höfðingja eða venzlamanna sinna, at hann var afskiptalítill, ok þótti þá víst, hverjum hann vildi veita. Hann var frændríkr, ok flestir inir beztu bændr fyrir sunnan land ok víðar váru vinir hans*" (Íslendinga saga, *Sturlunga saga* I: ch. 121). ("*was a powerful chieftain, an intelligent and popular man.… Gizurr was of moderate height, a very accomplished man, with sharp limbs and keen-eyed—he had piercing eyes, intelligent in expression; he was better spoken than most men here in the land, affable, with a very low voice; not an impetuous man but one always considered of very substantial value in all counsels. And yet it often happened when he was in conflict with chieftains or with his kinsmen that he seemed rather indifferent about the issue, even uncertain whom he would support. He was rich in kinsmen, and many of the best farmers from the southern district and elsewhere were his friends*". (*Sturlunga saga* 1, translated by Julia McGrew: 306) The reason for this detailed description is that in the year 1258 Gizurr became an earl and therefore had more in common with the earls of Orkney than with Icelandic chieftains.

[15] *Sturlu saga, Sturlunga saga* I: ch. 6, "better spoken than most other men".

[16] *Orkneyinga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit XXXIV: ch. 92, Erlendr "*spent much of the time in Þórsá, though he sometimes stayed in Orkney or went off on Viking trips. He was an exceptional man, talented in almost every way, open-handed, gentle, always ready to take advice and much loved by his men, of whom he had a large following.*" Translation from *Orkneyinga saga*. The history of the Earls of Orkney: 184.

In descriptions of the earls of Orkney[17] and the kings of Norway, especially of the kings in the tenth and eleventh centuries, their war skills are usually stressed.[18] This is in clear contrast to the descriptions of the Icelandic chieftains. Their ability to fight in battles and to lead men in war is almost never mentioned.[19] This difference between Iceland and the two other societies can also be seen in the fact that only few people in Iceland owned weapons, usually the chieftains, their retainers and some wealthy farmers. The most common weapon in Iceland was stones. In the biggest battle in Icelandic history, at Örlygsstaðir in 1238, the chieftain Gizurr Þorvaldsson commanded his men to stop throwing stones at their enemies, because they could fling them back.[20] Even though stones were used in battles in both Norway and Orkney, most of the warriors that fought in these battles were equipped with proper weapons. The peaceful character of Icelandic society is depicted in many saga episodes, for example when the Norwegian Earl Rögnvaldr suggested to his son that he move to Iceland because he was not a warrior.[21] It was only in the period 1208–1255 that conflicts in Iceland escalated into wars.[22]

That the Norwegian and Orcadian societies were more geared towards war than the Icelandic one can also been seen in the fact that a military levy (*leiðangr*) was never organised in Iceland,[23] and in the organisation of retainers. It was wartime conditions that provided the main stimulus for the growth of a band of retainers. War gave rulers the opportunity to reward their followers with war booty. It is therefore generally assumed that the Viking Age provided good conditions for the growth of this institution. At the end of the Viking Age, only kings and princes could afford to keep a band of retainers. In Norway in the earliest period, the retainers were called housecarls (s. *húskarl*), which underlines the civil law contract of service between the master of the farm and his servants. Like the relationship between the owner

[17] See e.g. *Orkneyinga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit XXXIV: chs. 8, 13, 20, 37. *Óláfs saga helga, Heimskringla* II: ch. 97.

[18] Hjardar 2001: 114. Cf. Barrett 2007: 310–311. For a discussion about the Vikings' violence see Baraz 2003: 59–74.

[19] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999: 86 note 8.

[20] *Íslendinga saga, Sturlunga saga* I: ch. 136.

[21] *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit I: S 309, H 270.

[22] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2008: 113.

[23] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2008: 124–125. The levy was a naval military organisation by free men under the leadership of the king (Helle 2003: 189) or the earl.

of the farm and his servant, the bond between king and follower was a reciprocal one, but the ties that bound retainer and king were stronger than those between housecarl and farm owner. The follower and the master were bound by ties of friendship and loyalty. The retainer was expected to fight for his master in war, to be loyal to him in all legal disputes, and to obey his orders. In return, the master protected and supported his retainers. It was primarily freemen who could become retainers. They lived with their leader and ate at his table. The band of retainers constituted a brotherhood with a code of honour, and in addition to the duties towards his leader, the retainer had responsibilities towards his comrades. By its very nature, the band of retainers could be used to build and exercise power. The band of retainers formed the cornerstone of the state and the basis of all political power in the early Middle Ages.[24] The organisation of retainers in Orkney was similar to that in Norway. There was however one important difference: in Norway there was a law code, *Hirðskrá*, that regulated the relationship between the king and his retainers. Nothing is known about this system after *c.* 1200 in the Orkneys, but it is likely that the earls continued to have retainers at their court.

In Iceland the followers (s. *fylgðarsveinn*) began to play a part in the politics in the second half of the twelfth century, that is, when the Icelandic chieftains started to control large territories (s. *ríki*). The Norwegian system of retainers in *Hirðskrá* was the model for the Icelandic system of followers, although it was there not as developed as in Norway. However, the number of followers varied with each chieftain, from one or two to ten or twelve. In the first half of the thirteenth century the chieftains surrounded themselves with more and more followers. Sometimes they were classified as "home men" (*heimamenn*), and together with those who worked on the farm, the number could rise to nearly thirty. The system developed in such a way that followers came to function more as professional warriors; they were men who did not work on the farm or have any specific duties in the management of it. By and large, the Icelandic system followed the Norwegian pattern. They were the chieftains' bodyguards; they were expected to follow them through thick and thin, and to fight by their side in battles, where their presence was often the decisive

[24] Whitelock 1972, 29–38. *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* VI, 568–571. Helle 1974: 200–206. Sveaas Andersen 1977: 134–135, 289–294.

factor.[25] When Iceland became part of the Norwegian kingdom the group of retainers was replaced by a small number of *sveinar*.

In contrast to Norway and Orkney the power struggle in Iceland was only in a few cases decided on the battlefield, it was usually first and foremost a question of non-physical tactics and manoeuvres. The sagas mainly point to the shrewdness of the chieftains as an explanation of why some chieftains survived the power struggles while others failed. One example is in *Sturlu saga* in the fight between Hvamm-Sturla and Einarr Þorgilsson. Sturla owned a small chieftaincy and was determined and described as intelligent, while Einarr, who managed a large, important chieftaincy, was merely reactive and unwise. This led to the gradual erosion of Einarr's chieftaincy, whereas Sturla's became larger. The clash between them culminated in an armed conflict in 1171. Sturla won a victory, which led to a shift in the balance of power between them.

Sturlu saga makes it clear that it was Einarr's brother, Oddi, who was the heir to the position as chieftain after their father Þorgils. Oddi was brought up on the Oddi, the Oddaverjar chieftain's Sæmundr Sigfússon estate and school, and became a wise man. Einarr, however, was brought up by the farmer Þorgeirr Sveinsson at Brunná. When Þorgils entered a monastery in 1150, the brothers took over the chieftaincy jointly, with Oddi in charge, but he died that same winter. According to *Sturlu saga* it was a great loss, because he was a very able man. He left no heir, so Einarr inherited the estate and the chieftaincy, and became a chieftain. Einarr was a bad leader and the inadequacy of his leadership is shown most clearly in the saga's description of how much the government of the district had changed since his father's time.[26] This caused some of the householders to move away. The saga seldom refers to Einarr's weak points directly, but the descriptions of unfortunate incidents show that he did not enjoy much respect. A good example of one of his more inept acts was when he wounded the wrong man because of his own short-sightedness.

Sturlu saga narrates that when Hvamm-Sturla was to marry Ingibjörg Þorgeirsdóttir, her father, the chieftain Þorgeirr Hallason, had been told that Sturla was "*mikil menni, ættstór, ok líkligr til höfðingja*".[27]

---

[25] Axel Kristinsson 1986: 6–11. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1989: 122–127.

[26] *Sturlu saga, Sturlunga saga* I: ch. 8.

[27] *Sturlu saga, Sturlunga saga* I: ch. 4, "a great man, well born and likely to become a chieftain" [my translation].

Sturla protected his friends well, so more and more farmers became his supporters. The only time the saga author criticises Sturla's actions is when he demands an unreasonably high fine in a case involving self-judgement (*sjálfdæmi*): although Sturla was the plaintiff he was allowed to decide the punishment.[28] The difference between Einarr Þorgilsson and Hvamm-Sturla was that Sturla was wiser and a better leader. Intelligence enabled clever chieftains to outwit less gifted leaders.

The most common word for describing wisdom in the Old Norse sources is *vitr*, and in a few episodes a person is depicted as *stórvitrir* or *allra manna vitrastr*. None of these words were, however, reserved for secular leaders only, not even the terms *stórvitr* or *allra manna vitrastr*.[29] When comparing the wisdom of the kings of Norway, earls of Orkney and the Icelandic chieftains, one striking difference, nonetheless, arises. Only the kings are called *stórvitrir*, and wisdom is not emphasised in the same way for the earls as for the kings or chieftains.[30] It is obvious that because of the king's superior position he had to be cleverer than other men. It is, however, more difficult to explain why the sagas attach such small importance on the earls' shrewdness. The reason is probably that in the politics in the Orkneys other qualities were more important for the earls, for example the ability to lead men into battle or raids. However, to be a good military leader one also had to be intelligent. Thus the sagas underline the earls' wisdom indirectly.[31]

The sagas stress the generosity of the rulers in all three societies. Feasts and gifts were used to build up power and to create or renew ties of friendship. Powerful secular leaders were described as *vinsælir*,

---

[28] *Sturlu saga, Sturlunga saga* I: ch. 32.

[29] See e.g. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit II: ch. 79. *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, Íslenzk fornrit III: ch. 1. *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit IV: chs. 15, 18, 37. *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit V: ch. 33. *Fóstbræðra saga*, Íslenzk fornrit VI: ch. 1, 2. *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, Íslenzk fornrit VI: ch. 4. *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit VIII: ch. 17. *Ljósvetninga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit X, ch. 12. *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit XI: ch. 2. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit XII: chs. 2, 13, 20, 22, 114, 119, 124. *Hálfdanar saga svarta, Heimskringla* I: ch. 7. *Haralds saga ins hárfagra, Heimskringla* I: chs. 1, 35, 40. *Hákonar saga góða, Heimskringla* I: ch. 11. *Haralds saga gráfeldar, Heimskringla* I: ch. 3. *Sturlu saga, Sturlunga saga* I: ch. 6. *Íslendinga saga, Sturlunga saga* I: ch. 121.

[30] *Óláfs saga helga, Heimskringla* II: ch. 97. *Orkneyinga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit XXXIV: ch. 19, 45.

[31] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2007a: 97–99.

which meant they had many friends.[32] Amongst the rulers there was competition for the position of the most generous leader. The straightforward reason was that when a ruler was generous more men wanted to become his friends and supporters. A good example is the case of Þórðr kakali Sighvatsson. He gave Bárðr Þorkelsson a number of gifts, including Svefneyjar at Breiðafjörður, which was valued at 45 hundreds (an average farm in Iceland was valued at 20 hundreds).[33] Bárðr was a tenant when Þórðr came to Iceland in 1242; Bárðr supported Þórðr and gave him permission to manage his farm, and accompanied Þórðr on his first campaign. As a payment for his help Bárðr received Svefneyjar and thus became a big farmer. Thus because Bárðr had helped Þórðr, the latter had to show generosity. Moreover however, Bárðr's help had been quite insignificant compared to Þórðr's gift. Consequently Bárðr had to continue giving Þórðr his support. In addition, Þórðr's lavish gift was an excellent advertisement for Þórðr and increased his reputation in Iceland, so that many more men wanted to be his friends. In 1243, Þórðr kakali gave a feast at Mýrar in Dýrafjörður, and when the guests left the farm many of them received gifts, *"[v]áru þá allir meiri vinir hans en áðr."*[34] These farmers supported Þórðr in the struggle against Kolbeinn ungi, and when Þórðr gained possession of his father's domain and property three years later, he again gave them generous presents. Generous chieftains achieved great honour and consequently more farmers wished to become their friends.

The importance of gift-giving can also clearly been seen in *Óláfs saga helga's* description of how King Knútr mikli bought support from Óláfr Haraldsson's supporters when he was gaining control over Norway:

> *Með Erlingi fóru norðr í Nóreg sendimenn Knúts konungs og hǫfðu með sér óf lausafjár. Fóru þeir um vetrinn víða um land, reiddu þá af hendi fé þau, er Knútr konungr hafði heitit mǫnnum um haustit til liðs sér, en*

[32] Bauman 1986: 142. Byock 1988: Index 'Gifts'. Miller 1990: 77–109. Bagge 1986: 147–165. Bagge 1991: Index 'Generosity'. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1989: 81–91. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999: 84–140. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999: 81–87. Syvertsen 1997: 19–80. Hjardar 2001: 61–77. Orning 2008: 14, 16, 17, 20, 62, 89, 178, 215–217, 225, 310, 311, 318.

[33] *Þórðar saga kakala, Sturlunga saga* II: ch. 12. In 1695 Svefneyjar was valued at 40 hundreds, whilst the farm Bárðr had earlier lived on, Sandar, was valued at 12 hundreds. Björn Lárusson 1967: 192, 202.

[34] *Þórðar saga kakala, Sturlunga saga* II: ch. 19, "*They were all greater friends of his than before.*"

> *gáfu hinum mǫrgum, er þeir fengu með fé keypt vináttu Knúti konungi. En þeir hǫfðu traust Erlings til yfirferðar. Gerðisk þá svá, at fjǫldi manna snørisk til vináttu við Knút konung ok hétu honum þjónostu sinni ok því með at veita Óláfi konungi mótstǫðu. Gerðu þat sumir berlega, en hinir váru miklu fleiri, er leyndusk at fyrir alþýðu.*[35]

Knútr was wealthier than Óláfr, and the local aristocracy in Norway usually followed the maxim to always support the wealthiest and most powerful king. If the reigning king was not capable of fulfilling his obligations towards his friends, they were entitled to change sides. Óláfr Haraldsson, later St Óláfr, was the most famous and most glorious of all medieval kings in Norway, he became *rex perpetuus Norvegiae*. Yet even though he reached the pinnacle of kingship there are no critical remarks in his saga about the 'traitors' who turned away from him. Snorri Sturluson (1178–1241), the author, knew the rules of the game in Norse culture far to well.

In sagas depicting Icelandic chieftains their appearance and physical attributes are less important than their mental qualities.[36] This stands in clear contrast to how earls and kings are depicted in the Icelandic Family sagas, and in *Orkneyinga saga*, *Heimskringla*, *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*.[37] In depictions of earls and kings, and especially in the descriptions of the earliest kings, appearance and physical attributes are underlined, for example strength and the ability to fight and to lead men in battles. The sagas stress that the kings were more beautiful, taller and stronger than other men. The king's appearance and physical attributes were an important part of the royal virtues, and there is a connection "between beauty and strength and masculinity, but they are not synonymous".[38] Even though beauty and strength are not essential, these traits underline that kings are better than other men. Kings are in a group of their own.

---

[35] *Óláfs saga helga, Heimskringla* II: 161. "*With Erlingr went messengers from King Knútr well provided with a large amount of money; and in winter they travelled through all the country, paying the money which King Knútr had promised to many in autumn for their assistance. They gave presents in money, besides, to many whose friendship could be purchased for King Knútr. They received much assistance in their travels from Erlingr. In this way it came to pass that many turned their support to King Knútr, promised him their services, and agreed to oppose King Óláfr. Some did this openly, but many more concealed it from the public.*"

[36] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999: 94.

[37] Bagge 1991: 146–191. Bagge 1996: 148, 151, 156–160. Hjardar 2001: 49–97.

[38] Bagge 1991: 147.

The difference between kings on the one side and earls and chieftains on the other is clearly reflected in the terminology for rulers in Old Norse sources. The terms *dróttinn* and *herra* are used to describe kings, God and Jesus, but never Icelandic chieftains or the earls of Orkney. *Dróttinn* was also used to describe slave owners, landowners (s. *landsdróttinn*) and church owners (s. *kirkjudróttinn*). *Herra* was also used for example for male members of the royal family, bishops, abbots, earls and the king's officials.[39] *Höfðingi* was the term that was used most frequently to describe the Icelandic chieftains and the earls of Orkney. This term was, however, also used to portray all kinds of different leaders, such as leaders of groups of slaves, kings and God.[40] The term *höfðingi* was thus, contrary to *dróttinn* and *herra*, a wider term. The reservation of the terms *herra* and *dróttinn* primarily for kings, God and Jesus, and its absence in descriptions of the earls of Orkney and Icelandic chieftains, reflect two different types of subordination. *Dróttinn* and *herra* possessed more power over their subordinates[41] than the *höfðingjar* possessed over their supporters. *Höfðingjar* had *forráð* or *forsjá* over those they ruled, and they could only take revenge or punish.

In the thirteenth century it became more and more common to use the term *herra* instead of *dróttinn* for kings and God in Norway and Iceland. This can clearly be seen in the *Íslensk Hómilíubók* (Icelandic Book of Homilies) and the *Gamal norsk homiliebok* (Norwegian Book of Homilies), both from the twelfth century. In both books the most common terms used for God and Jesus are *Guð*, *dróttinn* and *Dominus*. The term *herra* does not appear in these two books of homilies. In sources from the thirteenth century the term *herra* is used more frequently. This development thus underlines, at least in theory, the fact that the power of the king, and God, was increasing. The king could now claim the loyalty of his people. He stops taking revenge (*hefna*) and starts to punish (*hegna, refsa*). These changes can be associated with the introduction of *rex iustus* ideology in the second half of the twelfth century.

---

[39] *Guðmundar saga dýra, Sturlunga saga* I: ch. 8. *Íslendinga saga, Sturlunga saga* I: chs. 119, 121, 154, 178. *Þorgils saga skarða, Sturlunga saga* II: chs. 10, 76. *Guðmundar saga, Biskupa sögur* I: chs. 9, 54. *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578*: 50. *Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa*, Íslenzk fornrit III: ch. 4. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit XII: chs. 3, 6, 155. *Norges gamle Love* V: 'herra'.

[40] Svenningsen 2002: 97–124.

[41] *Konungs skuggsiá*: 73. See 1981: 426–435.

The differences between the king on the one side and earls and chieftains on the other side can partly be explained by the political changes that took place in Norway in last decades of the ninth century. Among the Teutons there was a general belief that the chieftains descended from the gods.[42] The chieftains could therefore bring peace to and ensure good crops for their people. Because of their divine attributes, the chieftains had to lead their men into battle, thereby demonstrating that they and their men had the support of the gods. If we use this idea as a starting point for discussing the political development in Norway in the last decades of the ninth century, it can be argued that the rise of royal power—that is the conquest by Haraldr Hárfagri and his family of the west and south-west of Norway, and by the Earls of Hlaðir of Trondheim and North-Norway—led to qualities that were previously attached to chieftains—that is the *hamingja, gipta, gæfa*—now being mostly reserved for those two families.[43] This meant that the rise of kingship took away their divine attributes from other noble families in Norway as well as from the earls of Orkneys and the Icelandic chieftains.

The Eddaic poem *Rígsþula* explains the origin of the three classes of society in the Viking Age, and, interestingly, this explanation seems to imply that that a king boasted qualities which chieftains did not have. *Rígsþula* recounts how the god Heimdallr, calling himself Rígr, travelled amongst men. The first couple he visited was Ái and his wife Edda. Rígr stayed with them for three days, and every night he slept between husband and wife. Nine months later Edda gave birth to a son, Þræll. When he reached adulthood, Þír came to the farm and Þræll and she had affair and became the ancestors of the thralls, the slaves. After leaving Ái and Edda, Rígr continued his journey to arrive at Afi's and Amma's. Events repeated themselves there, and nine months after Rígr's visit Amma gave birth to a son, Karl. Karl was married to Snör, and the couple became the ancestors of the peasants. Lastly, Rígr travelled to Faðir and Móðir, where the same happened yet again. Móðir gave birth to a son, Sveinn, who married Erna. They

---

[42] Schulze 1985: 34–37. Fleckenstein 1988: 32–34.

[43] For an overview of the discussion about the sacred king see: McTurk 1975–6: 139–169. McTurk 1994: 19–32. Ármann Jakobsson 2003: 54–60. The following discussion is based on: Steinsland 1991: 307–313. Schjødt 1991: 305–310. Hultgård 1993: 221–259. Sundqvist 2002: 18–38. Sundqvist 2005: 87–124 and Erkens 2006. For an opposite view see Krag 1991.

are the ancestors of the *jarlar*. Their youngest son was *konr ungr*—he became king.

There is no agreement on when *Rígsþula* was composed. Scholars have proposed datings from the late ninth to the late thirteenth century.[44] This uncertainty means that *Rígsþula* is a problematic source: does the poem describe the social structure of the Viking Age or of the high Middle Ages? However, a number of elements indicate that the poem is early, and thus one of the most important sources we have for social structures in the Viking Age. The most important argument against a late date is that the picture of society in *Rígsþula* does not at all correspond to the social stratification such as we know it from twelfth or thirteenth century Norway or Iceland. To mention but one example, slavery disappeared during the second half of the twelfth century.[45]

The *jarl* in *Rígsþula* fathers twelve sons. The youngest of them, *konr ungr*, has qualities his father does not have, such as saving life, blunting swords, and calming the sea.[46] *Konr ungr* also beats his father in a competition of runic knowledge, and takes the title of ruler from him. Thus *konr ungr* rises above the social level of his father, and becomes a king.[47] It is an open question whether the last stanzas of *Rígsþula* refer to the growth of Norwegian royal power under Haraldr Hárfagri. Nevertheless it is tempting to date the poem to the late ninth or early tenth century.[48]

The difference between the royal families in Norway and the earls and chieftains in Orkney and Iceland can also clearly be seen in their origin myths. In Norway only the Hárfagri-family in the poem *Ynglingatal* from *c.* 890,[49] and the earls of Hlaðir in the poem *Háleygjatal* from the end of the tenth century, are said to descend from the gods. *Orkneyinga saga* also has a myth about the origins of the earls. King Fornjótr, who ruled over 'Finnland' and 'Kvenland' in the far north, had three sons and it was the descendents of Kári, his youngest son, who became the earls of Orkney.[50] It is interesting to note that this

---

[44] Amory 2001: 3–4.

[45] Meulengracht Sørensen 1991: 17–28. Bagge 2000: 37–38. Amory 2001: 7–17. Mickeviciute 2003: 16–18, 100–102.

[46] *Rígsþula, Eddukvæði*: stanza 43.

[47] Fleck 1970: 39–49. *Rígsþula, Eddukvæði*: stanzas 35–48. Cf. Amory 2001: 3–17. Mickeviciute 2003: 79–86.

[48] Amory 2001: 7–8, 11, 14–15.

[49] Bergsveinn Birgisson 2008: 181–250.

[50] See Steinsland and Beuermann in this book.

origin myth does not link the earls of Orkney to a god, but to a king, thus indirectly stressing the kings of Norway's and earls of Hlaðir's superior position. In Iceland in the poem *Nóregs konungatal*, composed for Jón Loptsson *c.* 1180, the Oddaverjar-family is linked to the Norwegian King Magnús Berfættr, and Ari fróði in his *Íslendingabók* lists a pedigree "*nöfn langfeðga Ynglinga ok Breiðfirðinga*", which starts with Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr.[51] Ari is the only Icelandic chieftain claiming such noble origin. Why he created this pedigree is still an unsolved puzzle, but for Ari, as well as for the Oddaverjar, it was probably important to stress that the Breiðfirðingar were of royal blood.

Another important difference between the kings of Norway on the one side and the earls and chieftains on the other is to be found in the chronological frameworks of the three societies. We can assume that before Haraldr and his family and the earls of Hlaðir rose to power, every chieftainship in Norway had its own chronological framework based on the chieftains' regnal period. Therefore there must have existed multiple time zones in the country. However, after the rise of the Hárfagri-family and the earls of Hlaðir a new 'nation'-wide time zone was established: it was now the regnal periods of the kings and the earls that provided the chronological framework, thus underlining their superior position. It must have taken some time for this new chronological framework to be established, but fairly soon it seems to have become the only one in the country.[52] With the arrival of Christianity the Christian notion of time was introduced. This begins with the Creation and ends on Judgment Day. It is, however, the birth of Jesus that is the watershed, and the distance in time was thus measured in accordance to that. In many charters in Norway we see both the 'old' and the 'new' chronological framework used.[53] A number of time zones existed in Europe in the Middle Ages, so when an event had to be placed in a European context it had to be linked to many different time zones.[54] A good example of this is *Landnámabók's* dating

[51] *Íslendingabók*, Íslenzk fornrit I: *ættartala*, "*name of the male ancestors of the Ynglings and the people of Breiðafjörður*."

[52] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2008: 31–33.

[53] See i.e. *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* VIII: nr. 1 [30. november 1154]. *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* I: nr. 69 [25. juli 1280]. *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* I: nr. 85 [2. juli 1297].

[54] Gurevich 1982 (1972): 28–42. Gurevich 1986: 13–28. Le Goff 1988: 175. Ifrah 1994. Goetz 2002: 139–165.

of the settlement of Iceland. The author refers to the reigns of popes, emperors, kings and earls in Scandinavia and Europe.[55]

In Iceland it was the Norwegian kings' chronological framework that was used. This can clearly been seen in *Sturlunga saga*, in the Icelandic Family sagas, and in the *þættir* (short narratives about Icelanders). The very few narratives not employing this royal Norwegian framework based their chronological reckoning on the incumbencies of lawspeakers, the reigns of powerful chieftains like Snorri *goði*, or on major events.[56] There are no written sources available from the Orkneys. In *Orkneyinga saga* the earls' regnal period is always linked to regnal time of the Norwegian kings. Thus, both Orkney and Iceland belonged to Norwegian time zone.[57]

The kings' time underlined who was the most important secular leader in the Old Norse world; at the same time it created a certain identity among the people living in his time zone. The notion of the kings' time is closely associated with the idea that it should be possible to evaluate his time in office (*öld*). *Heimskringla* sums up the reign of Sigurðr Jórsalafari in the following way: "*Sigurðr var konungr yfir Nóregi sjau vetr ok tuttugu. Hann var at aldri fertøgr. Ok var hans ǫld góð landsfólkinu, var þá bæði ár ok friðr.*"[58] Not all kings had their time in office evaluated in this way in the sagas, usually only the best. It is likely, however, that all kings had their regnal period assessed in this way. These assessments made it easier to compare the regnal periods of different kings. No similar evaluation of the earls' or chieftains' time in power was made in the sagas, thus underlining the superior role of kings.

As we can see, there was a fundamental difference between kings, and earls and chieftains, even though the same terms were used to describe them. This difference became more pronounced in the second half of twelfth, and especially in the thirteenth century, when the *rex iustus*-ideology was introduced in Norway. The king was now deriving his power from God and did not have to build it up from below anymore as before. This meant that the king's personal qualities,

---

[55] *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit I: S 2, H 2.

[56] Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964: 243–244. Loescher 1980: 257. Anderson 1989: 74–78. Anderson 1993: 923–925. Miller 1990: 228.

[57] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2008: 31–33.

[58] *Magnússona saga, Heimskringla* III: ch. 33, "*Sigurðr was a king of Norway for twenty-seven winters, and was forty years of age when he died. The time of his reign was good for the country; for there was peace, and crops were good.*"

ideologically, were less important. The king was now God's representative on earth with power over life and death for all his subjects.[59] As a result of the political changes in Norway, especially in the second half of the twelfth century, and of the growth of royal power and royal administration, the local chieftains in Norway lost much of their independent authority. The kin-based aristocracy was transformed into a service aristocracy which received its power from the king, who in turn derived his from God.[60]

These changes can also clearly be seen in Iceland in the period after the country became part of the Norwegian kingdom in 1262–64. With the law-books *Járnsíða* in 1271 and *Jónsbók* in 1281 a new Norwegian administrative and legal system was introduced to Iceland. The General Assembly, which had been an independent legislative and judicial institution, now became a law-court and the highest authority for the delegated government of Iceland. After the changes in 1271 and 1281, the king's official administration in Iceland consisted of one *hirðstjóri* or *höfuðsmaðr* (superior commissioner). The *hirðstjóri* was the leader of the king's retinue in Iceland and consequently the most powerful man in the country. There were two *lögmenn* (law-men) after 1277; their work concerned judicial matters at the General Assembly. They directed the work of the court and chaired the *Lögrétta* (Law Council), which had become a court instead of a legislative body; legislative power was now in the hands of the king. The country was divided in to 12 *sýslur* (sheriffs districts), with the *sýslumenn* (sheriffs) vested with the right of public prosecution and executive authority. *Jónsbók* allowed for the possibility that one sheriff could govern a whole quarter;[61] in this case he was to have his representatives stationed around the quarter. The sheriffs received their offices directly from the king, provided there was a king in Norway, and subsequently from the superior commissioner.[62] These changes thus entailed a new power game in Iceland where the old personal qualities were of less importance than before.

After the introduction of the Norwegian system to Iceland the chieftains lost their independent status and became a part of the king's

[59] Bagge 1987: 209–218.
[60] Helle 1974: 30–31.
[61] Iceland was in *c.* 965 divided into four quarters of almost equal size and population.
[62] Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Líndal 1978: 41–75.

royal administration, receiving their power from the king. This meant that the aristocracy did not need to build up their power anymore through their ability to protect, and with the aid of gifts and feasts, since the support of the householders was no longer essential for their higher positions in society. Thus feasting and extensive exchange of gifts between chieftains and householders gradually declined. The strong and critical mutual vertical ties of friendship between chieftains and householders disappeared. Previously, the chieftains had been obliged to defend and assist their supporters. As the king's servants, however, they had to prosecute and punish those who had formerly been their friends. The duty of the service aristocracy was to govern rather than to lead.[63] These changes meant that the personal qualities which had been so important to build power previously now became more or less superfluous.

As already mentioned, Orkney and Shetland probably came under Norwegian overlordship around the year 900, when King Haraldr Hárfagri is supposed to have given these islands to Earl Rögnvaldr of Mæri in compensation for his son's death during a royal expedition. Rögnvaldr, in turn, passed Orkney and Shetland on to his brother Sigurðr, who was then made an earl by King Haraldr. Thus all earls of Orkney descend from Sigurðr.[64] The earls had their own hirð, and they were also supported by *gæðingar*, local chieftains who were usually members of or intermarried with the earls' dynasty. In return for their support, these chieftains received land and goods from the earls. In other words, relations between chieftains and earls were secured through ties of friendship.

The overlordship of the Norwegian kings was expressed in their right to make any male member of the earls' dynasty into the earl of Orkney. Consequently, it was important for possible successors to the title to enjoy good relations with the Norwegian king. Frequently, the relationship between earls of Orkney and kings of Norway was one of mutual dependency. The king appointed his favourites as earls, and received their support in war in return.

---

[63] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2007b: 181–184.

[64] *Haralds saga ins hárfagra, Heimskringla* I: ch. 22. *Orkneyinga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit XXXIV: ch. 4. For the political development in the Orkneys see: Helle 1974: 122–124. Crawford 1976–77: 97–117. Crawford 1987: 39–91. Sveaas Andersen 1977: 134, 170–171. Wærdahl 2006: 47–51, 61–64, 68–71. *Medieval Scandinavia*: 577.

If the earls took the wrong side during conflicts in Norway they had to bear the (dramatic) consequences. In the late twelfth century King Sverrir accused Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson of having supported an unsuccessful rebellion against the crown. In 1195 Haraldr had to submit to Sverrir. The king was not particularly merciful: he took over direct control of Shetland and the right to half the judicial fees from Orkney—that is, half of all fines in coin or kind which people had to pay to the earl. One year later royal representatives (sheriffs) were in Shetland and Orkney. Shortly after King Sverrir died in 1202, Earl Haraldr had the royal representatives killed and resumed full control of the islands, which he kept until his death in 1206. Also Earl Haraldr's successors, his two sons, retained their independence for some more years, due to internal Norwegian conflicts. But in 1208 they, in turn, had to submit to King Ingi Bárðarson, and pay a large fine.

Orcadian political history was greatly influenced by the fact that since the early eleventh century, after a marriage alliance with the Scottish royal dynasty, the earls held Caithness from the Scottish crown. At the same time, they held Orkney and Shetland from the Norwegian crown. This situation led to conflicts of loyalty, not least during the disputes between the Norwegian and the Scottish kings. After 1231 the earls were members of a Scottish side-line of the old dynasty, and their position as vassals in Caithness became more and more pronounced. Lack of sources prevents us from saying much about the political development in Orkney during the second half of the thirteenth century, but it cannot be excluded that the earls regained their previous authority in administrative matters.

Above, we noted a close connection between political structures and the qualities rulers required in order to distinguish themselves socially. On the other hand we also saw that there are rather great differences in the descriptions of especially kings on the one hand, and earls and chieftains on the other. Of these three types of rulers, kings had the highest standing, and the kings of Norway eventually managed to establish their superior position vis-à-vis Orkney, and to subdue Iceland. It is worth pointing out that shortly after the Orkneys came under direct Norwegian overlordship in 1195, *Orkneyinga saga*, the main source for Orcadian eleventh and twelfth century history, ends. We note a similar development in Iceland after the country came under the rule of the Norwegian crown. At that point all sagas about native secular chieftains end. It seems as if the secular elite in Old Norse society could only be the subject of sagas as long as they were

not directly subject to the Norwegian king. Then it became unseemly to place this secular elite, now the king's *hirðmenn*, into the same category as the king himself. In other words, the incorporation of the island societies into the Norwegian realm had important consequences for the further literary development in the Old Norse cultural area.

Our discussion has so far focused on the personal qualities of the rulers. There is, however, one aspect the sagas say very little about: the relationship between rulers and religion.

Rulers and religion

Little is known about the role the Norwegian kings played in the old religion in Norway, but as soon as they began to expand their power they discovered the advantages of Christianity. The kings who were exposed to Christianity first also encouraged the growth of Church structures. The sagas about the Norwegian kings stress that it was Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, and the two Óláfrs around the year 1000, who introduced Christianity to Norway. The introduction of Christianity into Norway offered a number of advantages for royal power. It could be used to break down the opposition against the idea of a national kingdom and to legitimise the subordination of local communities under the crown. The method used by the first missionary kings and missionaries was a very simple one. It was considered necessary to make the chieftains in the various parts of the country accept the new doctrine; after which the rest of the population would follow suit. If the chieftains accepted Christianity, this would automatically place them in a subordinate position to the king. He was the leader and protector of Christianity; all others were subject to him. It was therefore important for the king to put pressure on the chieftains to accept the new faith, and thus to get them to accept him as their religious superior. Without the protection of the crown Christianity would not have had the favourable conditions for growth that appear to be necessary for the institutionalisation of a new faith, a new code of ethics and a new, nationwide organisation. In turn, the status of the national kingdom was strengthened by the hierarchy of the Church. In the earliest period of Christianity, the king assumed the top position as the head; he became the supreme head of the Church. Below him were the bishops, who in turn controlled the clergy. In this context, the church

organisation was an important element in the process of incorporating the various regions into the Norwegian kingdom.[65]

The king was the head of the Church until the foundation of the archdiocese in Niðarós (Trondheim) *c.* 1152/3. The first bishops in Norway were a part of the *hirð*. Thus they had to obey the king. If the archbishop (in Hamburg-Bremen until 1104, then in Lund until 1152/3) opposed the king's episcopal candidates the king could have them consecrated somewhere else. As long as the bishops were members of the *hirð* they accompanied the kings on their travels around the country. Around 1100 the country's first three bishops had their residence in the largest and most important cities in the country, Niðarós, Björgvin (Bergen) and Osló (Oslo).[66]

Churches were erected in Norway soon after Christianity officially became the only religion in the country. It was the kings who built the first churches in the country, the so called "head-churches" and in many cases functioned as mother establishment for larger districts. The "head-churches" had a superior position with regard to other churches in Norway in the Middle Ages.[67]

The best sources for discussing the relationship between the Church and the rulers in the North are found in Iceland. We will therefore focus our discussion on the relationship between the chieftains and the Church. In Iceland the debate about the relationship between secular and religious power is strongly connected to the debate about the origins of the system of chieftains.[68] For this chapter Konrad Maurer's theory is the most important one. Maurer stresses the sacred origins of the chieftaincy system. He maintains that the Icelandic chieftains, like other Germanic chieftains, were guardians of religion, but that this function was of secondary importance to their secular duties. The most important part of Maurer's argument is that the term *goði* is related

---

[65] Sveaas Andersen 1977: 103, 124, 189–190, 306. Birkeli 1995: 65–198. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2003b: 32–43.

[66] Sveaas Andersen 1977: 332. Helle 1988: 48–49. In 1104 Lund became the metropolitan for Norway.

[67] Sveaas Andersen 1977: 319–323. Helle 1988: 51.

[68] Ólafur Lárusson 1932: 10–15. *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* V: 363–364. Gísli Gíslason 1944: 51–58. Jón Jóhannesson 1956: 72–79. Jakob Benediktsson 1974: 172–173. Lúðvík Ingvarsson 1986–1987 I: 32–72.

to Gothic *gudja*, which means priest, and to Old High German *cotnic*, which probably means a chief with secular and religious functions.[69]

Another important argument in favour of a close relationship between secular and religious power in the earliest decades of the settlement of Iceland is the custom concerning names. Lúðvík Ingvarsson's book *Goðorð og goðorðsmenn* has a register of names where all those whom he believes to have been chieftains in the Free State are given the title *goðorðsmaður*.[70] Altogether, there are some 340 people involved, about 110 of whom are mentioned in the period from 930 to 1030. Of these, roughly 60 had names associated with the heathen gods, such as Ásbjörn and Þorsteinn. A large majority of these, about 50, begin with 'Þór' or 'Þor'. Personal names with 'Þor' as the prefix were the most common ones in the Viking Age and they constitute about a quarter of all those found in *Landnámabók*.[71] This might suggest a closer relationship between religion and the chieftains than was the case with the rest of the population. Possibly the sons of chieftains who had names beginning with 'Þor' were given preference to older and younger brothers.

The strongest argument against Maurer's thesis about the sacred origins of the chieftaincy system and the close connection between secular and religious power in pre-Christian times in Iceland, is the assertion that it would have been impossible for the chieftains to survive the introduction of Christianity at the General Assembly of 999–1000 if their power had been based on sacred-heathen foundations.[72] However, it was precisely because of the chieftains' control of the old religion that it was possible for them to introduce the new faith via a resolution at the General Assembly in 999–1000. When discussing the introduction of Christianity we have to take into consideration the chieftains' leading role in society and the strong mutual bonds that

---

[69] Maurer 1874: 43–45. Maurer 1882: 71–77, 98–104. There are also accounts in *Landnámabók* and in a few Icelandic Family sagas that show a close relationship between secular and religious power e.g. *Landnámabók*, Íslenzk fornrit I: ch. S 96, H 83, H 268. *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzk fornrit IV: ch. 4. *Brot af Þórðar sögu hreðu,* Íslenzk fornrit XIV, ch. 1. Cf. Jón Jóhannesson 1956: 72–74. Olsen 1966: 29–54. Jakob Benediktsson 1974: 172.

[70] Lúðvík Ingvarsson 1986–1987.

[71] Hald 1971: 42. Another argument in support of the theory about the religious function of the chieftains is that there was no separate priesthood in heathen times.

[72] *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* V: 363–364.

tied them to their supporters. In this relationship, the chieftains were dominant and the farmers had to accept their decisions.[73]

After the introduction of Christianity to Iceland in *c.* 1000 the chieftains became leaders and guardians of a new religion. According to tradition, a number of chieftains had become Christians even before the faith had been formally established, and the sagas do not make any mention of any changes in their power bases.[74] In Iceland, as in other countries of Europe that underwent a similar process, a new type of ruler emerged who legitimised his power with the help of the new faith.

The chieftains converted relatively quickly to the new faith. One reflection of this can be seen in the naming practice. As mentioned, a large number of chieftains had names beginning with 'Þór' and 'Þor' up to the middle of the eleventh century; after that, such names are much rarer. It was common for chieftains to be priests in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In Ari's register of the most powerful priests from about 1143, 40 priests are mentioned,[75] 13 of whom were chieftains. During that period there were about 27 chieftains in the country as a whole.[76] The close connection between religion and secular power can also be seen in the farms the chieftains used as their places of residence. Almost all farms which chieftains resided in the twelfth and thirteenth century also had churches. The chieftains gained control over other churches in the twelfth and thirteenth century, and around 1250 about half of all the householders of Iceland probably were parishioners in churches controlled by the chieftains.[77] Control over these churches was important for the subjugation of the population to the chieftains, while at the same time it consolidated their economic base, but not least, ideologically, control over these churches stressed the good relationship between the chieftains and the saints, who were considered the official owners of these churches. The chieftains also controlled the nomination of the bishops and usually the bishops were elected from the chieftains' families or were clients of the chieftains. The chieftains did not monopolise religion, whether pagan or Christian, but the fact that they combined the roles of secular

---

[73] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999: 188. Cf. Gunnar Karlsson 2004: 391.
[74] Gísli Gíslason 1944: 53.
[75] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* I: nr. 29.
[76] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1989: 45–54.
[77] Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999: 192.

chieftain, religious leader and protector was important for their power. The relationship between secular and spiritual power did not change significantly with the introduction of Christianity. One might say there was a Christian-cult basis instead of a heathen-cult one.

Until 1104, Iceland, Norway and Orkney, together with the rest of Scandinavia, belonged to the archdiocese of Hamburg/Bremen, and from 1104 to 1152/53 to that of Lund. An important reason for the foundation of the archbishopric in Niðarós in 1152/53 was the Church reform movement. Its aim was to free the Church from secular influence and place it under the leadership of the pope. The kings of Norway in 1152/53, and later King Magnús Erlingsson (1163–1184) made concessions in three important areas. First, the Church was to have complete authority over its clergy and the final word in the election of bishops and the appointment of priests; members of the clergy should be separated and distinct from other classes. Second, the Church could control its own property and finance. Third, the Church was to have jurisdiction over its own matters and personnel.[78]

As soon as possible, the archbishop of Niðarós tried to introduce these reforms in Iceland. However, to do that successfully he needed support from the Icelandic bishops. He received support from Þorlákr Þórhallsson who became bishop of Skálholt in 1178. Þorlákr managed to gain control of most of the largest churches in the Eastern Quarter, but when he clashed with Jón Loptsson, the leader of the Oddaverjar-family and the most powerful chieftain in the country, Þorlákr gave up his claims, and did not raise them again. The main reason for this shift in Þorlákr's policy was a change in the political situation in Norway. Archbishop Eysteinn was, due to conflicts with the king, forced to leave Norway in 1180. Without the archbishop's support there was little Þorlákr could do on his own, and he was therefore forced to concede defeat.[79]

The archbishop of Niðarós and Þorlákr launched a new attack on the chieftains when matters had quietened down in Norway. This time the ordination of chieftains was the bone of contention. As already

[78] For the Church reform programme see e.g. Jón Jóhannesson 1956: 212–216. Magnús Stefánsson 1975: 92–6. Hoyt 1976: 279–302. Barber 1992: 85–109. Helle 1995: 26–8.

[79] For an overview of these events see e.g.: Jón Jóhannesson 1956: 202–261. Magnús Stefánsson 1975: 92–141. Magnús Stefánsson 1978: 111–226. Gunnar F. Guðmundsson 2000: 13–102. Gunnar Karlsson 2000: 41–42. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2003a: 121–140.

mentioned it was common for chieftains to be ordained as priests. In a letter from *c*. 1190, the archbishop forbade the Icelandic bishops to ordain chieftains, and according to the sources the chieftains respected this. The chieftains' willingness to accept the archbishop's demand was strongly linked to their politics. For them it was more important to keep control over the church property than be able to be ordained as priests. From their point of view this was a compromise. But from the Church's point of view this was an important victory in the battle to free the Church from the control of the chieftains.

After the death of Bishop Þorlákr in 1193, the chieftains in Skálholt bishopric elected as his successor Páll Jónsson. He was a chieftain from the powerful Oddaverjar-family. For the chieftains in the see of Skálholt it was important to elect a bishop whom they could control and who at the same time showed little interest in fighting for the Church reform programme. By choosing Páll the chieftains in the see of Skálholt could prevent the archbishop from intervening in ecclesiastical matters in the bishopric.

The chieftains in the see of Hólar thought that they had successfully achieved this when they elected Guðmundr Arason as bishop of Hólar in 1201. It was Kolbeinn Tumason, the leading chieftain in the see of Hólar, who was the decisive force behind the election of Guðmundr, a relative of Kolbeinn's wife and an illegitimate son of a chieftain. These circumstances should have made it easy for Kolbeinn to control the see. But this was not the case. Guðmundr became a strong proponent of the Church reform. In the disputes and battles between Bishop Guðmundr and the chieftains, two topics dominated. The first one concerned the administration of the bishopric of Hólar, where Guðmundr wanted to be more generous to the poor than Kolbeinn liked. The second and main conflict concerned the judicial status of the clergy: should they obey Church law or the law of the country? The conflicts went on for decades. The outcome of this dispute was a return to the status quo. The Church gained little else from this conflict than a general awareness of its demand to control Church property.

Both bishops in Iceland died in 1237. As usual the chieftains in Iceland elected candidates and sent them to Niðarós for consecration. But this time the archbishop rejected the Icelandic candidates, and instead he and the chapter at Niðarós chose two Norwegians as bishops in Iceland. This action was part of the archbishop's and the chapter's efforts to ensure their right to fill the episcopal seats in the Norse islands. The Lateran Council in 1215 had reiterated that it was

the archbishops and the chapters who should elect bishops, not kings or magnates. Guðmundr had become bishop of Hólar in 1203, and Magnús bishop of Skálholt in 1216. So 1237 was the first opportunity for the archbishop and the chapter to implement the rule of the Lateran Council. Besides that, the Icelandic candidates were illegal according to Canon law: one was of illegitimate birth and the second one was a chieftain. Instead of the Icelandic candidates, the archbishop and the chapter of Niðarós elected two Norwegians.

These Norwegian bishops came to Iceland in 1239. Until approximately 1360 it was the archbishop and the chapter of Niðarós who elected bishops in Iceland. The Norwegian bishops, and also the Icelandic bishops who were elected after 1238, fought for the Universal Church. This can clearly be seen when in 1253 the two Norwegian bishops in Iceland managed to get the Court of Legislation (*Lögrétta*) to accept that "*þar sem á greindi Guðs lög ok landz laug þa skulu Guðs lög raða*".[80] Even though this resolution was never anything else but a dead letter, it was an important step in the introduction of the new *Christian Laws* (*kristinréttar*), which were passed at Alþingi in 1275. In the new *Christian Laws* most of the major demands for the liberty of the Church were adopted. After the archbishop had gained control over episcopal elections in Iceland it became easier for him to influence the ecclesiastical and political developments in the country, and during the next fifty years he managed to transform the Icelandic Church into an episcopalian church which suited better the general ecclesiastical structure created in Europe in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In the last decades of the thirteenth century the Icelandic aristocracy not only had to submit to the king of Norway, it also lost control over the Church and the religious-ideological legitimisation associated with that. The Icelandic aristocracy was reshaped from a kin-based aristocracy into a service aristocracy and took its place in the ideological shadow of the king.

There are no Orcadian sources which would allow us to discuss the development of Church structures there. Probably a proprietory church system similar to the Icelandic one also dominated in Orkney and Shetland. This makes it likely that the organisation of the Church

[80] *Diplomatarium Islandicum* II: nr. 1 [1253], "*in areas of disagreement Canon Law should supersede that of the land.*"

in Orkney and Shetland underwent a comparable restructuring as in Iceland. If we accept this assumption, we may argue that ideologically, control of the Church was as important for the earls of Orkney as for the chieftains in Iceland.

The incorporation of the church of Orkney into the metropolitan see of Niðarós was a slow process. Before *c*. 1200 the Orcadian bishop usually only travelled to Niðarós for his consecration. "[T]he political subjugation of the secular ruler, the jarl of Orkney in 1195 and 1210 came first, then the incorporation of the Orcadian church and bishop into the metropolitan network of Niðarós took place."[81] The metropolitan authority of Niðarós was frail in the Orkneys in the twelfth and the first half of the thirteenth century and had to rely to a large extent on the support of the Norwegian kings. In the second half of the thirteenth century the metropolitan authority of Niðarós became stronger, mostly because of stronger links to the Papacy.[82]

We can conclude the discussion so far by underlining that secular leaders enjoyed relatively firm control over the Church during long periods between *c.* 1000 and 1300, and that this control contributed to cement their position in society. It was important for the Church to limit the secular rulers' control and influence. On the whole, the Church was successful with this during the second half of the thirteenth century. Together with their control of the Church, the personal qualities of the rulers were an important factor in the ideology of rulership. Both elements were in fact complementary. Personal qualities did not, at least not directly, influence the degree of a ruler's control of the Church. What personal qualities did was to distinguish rulers from the remainder of secular society. They were literally better than the common people, and other demands were made upon them. That said, the distinction between for example rich farmers and bad chieftains, or between good earls and bad kings is not always clear cut. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that kings were on a completely different social level than the earls of Orkney or the Icelandic chieftains. Kings were simple the most important secular rulers, in a class of their own.

The greatest problem we face in large parts of this discussion is whether we can trust our sources: the sagas which inform us about the earliest period. Can we use descriptions of rulers in sagas written

[81] Narikawa 2008: 107.
[82] Narikawa 2008: 107–109.

down in the thirteenth century as sources for the ideology of rulership in the tenth and eleventh centuries?

Sagas as sources

The sagas about the Norwegian kings, earls of Orkney, and Icelandic chieftains are usually divided into two groups: contemporary sagas (*samtíðarsögur*) and "sagas about the distant past" (*fortíðarsögur*). Most of them were written down in the thirteenth century. The division between these two groups of sagas is, however, unclear. *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga* are always labelled contemporary sagas, as are the sagas in *Heimskringla* dealing with the period after *c.* 1130.[83] The Icelandic Family sagas, describing the period *c.* 930–1030, are always characterised as sagas dealing with the distant past, whereas the *Sturlunga saga* compilation and other sagas dealing with the period after *c.* 1120 are always termed contemporary sagas. *Orkneyinga saga* is in many ways similar to the sagas about the kings, so maybe we can draw a line in *Orkneyinga saga* around the year *c.* 1130. In the following I will therefore be using the term "contemporary sagas" for all sagas dealing with the period after *c.* 1120/30 and "sagas about the distant past" for sagas describing the period from *c.* 880–1120/30.

There is general agreement among scholars that the contemporary sagas are rather reliable sources. This is due to the short time between the events and the recording of the sagas, normally 20–70 years. *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, which is the oldest of the contemporary sagas, was written down about 120 years after the event described took place. The main argument in favour of their reliability is that the audience would have noticed if the saga authors had not been telling the truth.[84]

For a long time there has been an intense discussion about the source value of the sagas about the distant past, especially the Icelandic Family Sagas.[85] In the following I shall argue that the sagas about the distant past reflect the *main ideas* about the qualities a good ruler should possess. I would like to underline before proceeding that the focus is on the personal qualities associated with the rulers, not on

[83] Helle 1974, 15–16.
[84] Helle 1974: 15–16. Byock 1988: 34. *Sturlunga saga* II: xxvii–li.
[85] For an overview this discussion see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999: 17–38. Helle 2001: 13–57.

the rulers themselves. I would also like to stress that the source value of the sagas about the distant past *will never lead to any indisputable results*; at best we can consider the information about the personal qualities apparently necessary in the power game as *trustworthy*.

The turn of the twentieth century marked a significant watershed in historical research in the Nordic countries. There was a shift towards promoting history as a scientific discipline by introducing rigorous rules of source criticism. It was the Dane Kristian Erslev[86] and the Weibull-brothers, from Sweden, who brought historical criticism to the forefront of scholarship in the Scandinavian countries at that time. Lauritz Weibull published his lectures on the earliest history of Scandinavia in 1911, under the title *Kritiska undersökningar i Nordens historia omkring år 1000* (Critical studies of the history of Scandinavia around the year 1000), a work that has been considered a milestone in Scandinavian historical research ever since.[87] The Norwegian Halvdan Koht also belonged to this group of historians. In 1914 he published the article *Sagaernes opfatning av vor gamle historie* (The Sagas' Conception of our old History), based on a lecture he had given in the previous year, where he presented a radically new view on the sagas, especially *Heimskringla*, as sources.[88] The Icelandic contribution to this discussion did not come from a historian, but from the founding father of the book-prose theory—the literary scholar Björn Magnússon Ólsen, who in 1911 published the book *Om Gunnlaugs Saga Ormstungu. En kritisk Undersøgelse* (On Gunnlaugs saga Ormstunga. A critical examination).[89] An important background for this debate was the influence of the "German historical school" and the source-critical discussion that stressed the difference between the laws and the sagas. In this period, scholars had faith in the laws, and if the laws contradicted the sagas, they placed their trust in the laws. This discussion reduced historians' confidence in the sagas about the distant past.

---

[86] Erslev 1892. Erslev 1911.

[87] Weibull 1911. Weibull 1913.

[88] Koht 1967 (1914).

[89] Björn M. Ólsen 1911. The basic idea behind the book-prose theory is that all Icelandic Family Sagas were written by authors, who worked and thought like modern authors. According to the book-prose theorists, the saga authors used written texts, contemporary events, their own imagination and oral tradition in their work. Book-prose research has concentrated on the saga-writers' use of literary motifs, contemporary events and connections between two sagas where the earlier one has directly or indirectly influenced the later one.

From the second decade of the last century to around 1970 the sagas about the distant past were little used by historians. Then, in keeping with social anthropological influences in historical thought, the sagas about the distant past, especially the Icelandic Family Sagas, were placed on the agenda once more, with scholars now using them to discuss the period from the middle of the twelfth to the end of the thirteenth century.[90] However, this use of the Icelandic Family Sagas by no means solves the problems connected to their use as sources. Why should we prefer the Icelandic Family Sagas, or the sagas about the earliest kings of Norway in *Heimskringla*, to the contemporary sagas, when discussing Icelandic and Norwegian society in the thirteenth century? The contemporary sagas, especially those describing the thirteenth century, depict a different political situation than the Icelandic Family Sagas or the sagas about the first kings in Norway.[91] The difference between those two types of sagas can clearly been seen in the conflicts. There is a difference between the portrayal of feuds in the Icelandic Family Sagas, involving 20–30 individuals, and that of battles in the contemporary sagas, describing the political situation in Iceland in the thirteenth century, for example the Battle of Örlygsstaðir in 1238, where almost 3000 men were engaged. The duty to avenge in *Laxdæla saga* is expressed through women inciting their men, such as Þorgerðr Egilsdóttir. There is no corresponding clear expression of a duty of revenge in connection to the Battle of Örlygsstaðir, where the chieftains Gizurr Þorvaldsson and Kolbeinn Arnórsson killed the chieftains Sturla and his father Sighvatr Sturluson, and three other sons of Sighvatr. When Þórðr kakali, another of Sighvatr's sons, returned to Iceland from Norway in 1242, he tried to gain control of his father's possessions and domain, which was by then ruled by Kolbeinn ungi. Þórðr kakali made no attempt to kill Gizurr or Kolbeinn. There is a clear difference between dying in a conflict involving hundreds or thousands of people as well as entire regions, and dying in a feud involving twenty or thirty people from two or a few more farms. One difference is that the families of a chieftain's friends did not have the

[90] Miller 1990: 44–45.

[91] The authors of the Icelandic Family Sagas realised that there had been changes in society both in Iceland and in Europe. *Gunnlaugs saga ormstunga* (Íslenzk fornrit III: ch. 7) mentioned i.e. that before 1066 it was the same language in Norway, Denmark and England, but after the invasion in 1066 there was a "change of tongues" (*skiptusk tungur*) in England.

same level of personal engagement in a war as in a feud. The family of someone who had died in battle could not seek revenge on the killer since the actual killer was not the real opponent. The chieftains' friends fought for their chieftain's cause, not their own.

The sagas about the distant past are historical literature,[92] something on the boundary between history and literature in the modern sense. The saga writers can be called "retellers and commentators" and there is a fundamental difference between that part and the "role of the novelist".[93] The mixture of fact and fiction in the sagas about the distant past makes it difficult to connect persons to events. It is possible that incidents and patterns of for instance conflicts were known from elsewhere and were used to place narratives into new contexts. We are unlikely to be able to answer the question of whether the descriptions of people and events in sagas about the distant past are factual or fictional. The picture the sagas give of society is not dependent on the historicity of the individual narratives. Fictional conversations or characters do not automatically imply that the social structure of these sagas is invented. The difference between history and literature is often small, sometimes consisting of no more than the fact that the writers of literature use invented names, unlike the writers of historical accounts.

One important element in the discussion about the use of sagas about the distant past as historical sources is the question of the level of *continuity* in the way society developed. Was it high or low? If there was a low level of continuity between the beginning of the tenth century and the end of the twelfth, it is difficult to argue in favour of the use of the above mentioned sagas as reliable sources. But if we assume that there was a high level of continuity, they can be used as "models" of social life and how it "continued for several centuries".[94] I think there are reasons to assume a high level of continuity and stability in these societies in most areas, for example in the kinship systems, in ways of doing business and of how to play in the political game, and the level of generosity expected.[95] I would attribute significant social changes primarily to the consequences the introduction of Christianity had on Icelandic, Norwegian and Orcadian society and to purely political

[92] Beyschlag 1956: 316.
[93] Spearing 2005: 22. Cf. Christiansen 2000: 171.
[94] Turner 1971: 358.
[95] Helgi Þorláksson 1989: 12.

developments in the thirteenth century; but I would argue that the political game, nevertheless, was played out according to more or less the same rules during most of the period *c.* 900–1300.

The general knowledge in the thirteenth century about the tenth and eleventh centuries provided a framework for the authors of the sagas. If we regard the sagas about the distant past as a traditional literary genre which grew out of an ancient culture, we cannot claim that they simply reflect Icelandic or Norwegian society in the thirteenth centuries. The subject matter and internal consistency of these sagas show that they must have been based on a tradition that is rooted in history. If we accept that there existed a general knowledge about the Norwegian kings in Old Norse Society, it is hard to argue that the saga authors could have equipped the rulers with more qualities than they actually had had. Their audience would have resented it.

In spite of similarities between the stories for example in the Icelandic Family Sagas and the *Sturlunga saga* we must be careful not to exaggerate the influence of the authors' own time on the accounts in the Icelandic Family Sagas. Similarities may simply be due to certain social conditions existing for quite a long time. Similar social structures often lead to similar attitudes without one society necessarily having influenced the other one. However, admittedly the similarities between the Icelandic Family Sagas and the Contemporary Sagas could also have arisen because the literary form created similarities, such as in the descriptions of wounds.[96] Form was extremely important in medieval historiography. Direct speech, for example, was "regularly used as a device to give colour and drama, to enable the actors or the author to comment; no one supposed them to be stenographically accurate".[97] I think it right to assume that most people were relatively well informed about their forebears and earlier rulers, and that there was a high level of social stability in most areas. It is much more difficult to argue that a group of authors in the thirteenth century agreed to invent a glorious past for the North-Atlantic society and decided amongst themselves how society, culture, for example the role of gift giving,[98] religion, and

[96] Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1988: 184–203.

[97] Brooke 1967: 45.

[98] Skaldic poetry stresses the importance of the ruler's generosity. There has for some time been a discussion about the dating of skaldic poetry; however, most scholars today accept that their dating is reliable and that they are not 13th century constructions (http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php).

a number of important individuals and their genealogical background were to be described.[99] The skaldic poems provide us with important contemporary information about the rulers and their personal abilities and in most cases they support the view that we find in the sagas, especially about the generosity of the rulers.

The fact that most of the stories about rulers only appear in one saga, makes it extremely difficult to link characters and events—and to distinguish between fact and fiction. This does not necessarily mean that the society depicted in these sagas is a fictional one. The stories in the sagas about the distant past only represent a selection, so historians have to decide in how far they believe them to be representative. They must try to create a comprehensive picture of the society that produced the accounts and of the society that the sagas depict. The sagas must be used both as source material for the society they originated in and as sources for the society they describe. We will never be able to prove that all the events happened exactly as described. The heart of the matter is that we can never get any closer to the tenth and eleventh century and the ideology about rulers than the sagas about the distant past permit us. Finally, we must however also be careful not to *overestimate* the value of the sagas about the distant past as sources. They contain obvious examples of the present, and thirteenth century ideology is forcing its way into descriptions of the past.

In conclusion we can say that there was a fundamental difference between kings on the one hand, and earls and chieftains on the other, even though the same terms were used to describe their personal abilities. The king was above all other men. This difference increased after *c.* 1150 and especially in the thirteenth century, when the *rex iustus*-ideology was introduced to Norway. The king now derived his power from God and did not have to build it up from below as before. This meant that the king's personal virtues, ideologically, were not as significant as before. The king was now God's representative on earth with power over life and death of all his subjects. These changes and the superior position the king gained in both Orkney and Iceland transformed the kin-based aristocracy in those two societies into a service aristocracy which received its power from the king. Therefore the personal qualities of the local rulers, at least ideologically, were not

[99] Vésteinn Ólason 1987: 38.

as important as before anymore. The charismatic local ruler lost his position, simply because there was no place left for him in the political landscape.

A recent anthology, *Princely Virtues in the Middle Ages 1200–1500*, focuses on the cardinal (temperance, courage, justice, wisdom) and Christian virtues (faith, hope, charity, humility), and on whether "some of these [were] more necessary for the prince to possess than others?"[100] The book analyses a number of central texts, and gives us thus a good impression of the medieval learned men's mental horizon, and of how *speculum principum* (mirror of princes) were used to influence the behaviour of rulers. With the exception of *Konungs skuggsiá*, we do not have any discussion in Nordic texts (such as the sagas, for example) on how rulers should behave. The sagas are first and foremost interested in describing the rulers and their deeds. For this reason it is not possible to compare the descriptions of Nordic and European rulers. We can first do that after the second half of the thirteenth century when the political system in Norway has taken a form after the European system.

We began this discussion with this quote from *Konungs skuggsiá*, a work composed a few years after Hákon's coronation: the king "*er sva mioc miclaðr oc tighnaðr aiorðu at aller skulu sva luta oc niga til hans sæm til Guðs. hann hævir oc sva mycit vælldi at hann ræðr hværs lifdagum þærs er i hans riki er sva sæm han vill. Lætr þann dræpa er hann vill en þann liva er hann vill.*"[101] This ideology propagating the king's exalted position had important consequences for the political development of the west Nordic countries, and contributed to the coherence of the Norwegian kingdom and dependencies. *Konungs skuggsiá* also describes how Christ himself accepted to pay taxes to an earthly king. While he lived on earth, he rather wanted to submit to and honour an earthly king than to take his power from him.[102] By virtue of his office, the king was God's representative on earth, with a degree of power over his subjects which previous kings could never have envisaged. However, this idea was not wholly new in *Konungs*

---

[100] Nederman and Bejczy 2007, 2.

[101] Konungs skuggsiá: 73, "*is so highly honored and exalted upon earth that all must bend and bow before him as before God. So great is his power that he may dispose as he likes of the lives of all who live in his kingdom: he lets him live whom he wills and causes him to be slain whom he wills.*" Translation from *The King's Mirror*: 246.

[102] *Konungs skuggsiá* 73–74.

skuggsiá. It is already hinted at in the *Oratio contra clerum Norvegiae* (*Speech against the Bishops*), a propaganda work of King Sverrir's in his conflict with the Church from the late twelfth century—although *Oratio* does not formulate the new ideology quite as expressly as *Konungs skuggsiá*. This new ideology, where the king enjoyed greater power over his subjects and controlled a larger geographical area than ever before, meant that native rulers had to accept a subordinate position. They would from then on always be outshone by the king.

Bibliography

Sources

Biskupa sögur I–II. Ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Jón Sigurðsson, København, 1858–1878.

Codex Frisianus en Samling af norske Konge-sagaer. Ed. by C. R. Unger, Christiania, 1871.

Diplomatarium Islandicum. Íslenzkt fornbréfasafn I–XVI. Ed. by Jón Sigurðsson et al., København and Reykjavík, 1857–1972.

Diplomatarium Norvegicum I–XXI. Ed. by C. C. A. Lange et al., Christiania and Oslo, 1849–1976.

Eddukvæði. Íslenzk úrvalsrit 5. Ed. by Ólafur Briem, Reykjavík, 1968.

Heimskringla I. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI. Ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík, 1941.

Heimskringla II. Íslenzk fornrit XXVII. Ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík, 1945.

Heimskringla III. Íslenzk fornrit XXVIII. Ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík, 1951.

Hirdloven til Norges konge og hans håndgangne menn. Etter AM 322 fol. Ed. by Steinar Imsen, Oslo, 2000.

Islandske Annaler indtil 1578. Det Norske historiske Kildeskriftfonds skrifter 21. Ed. by Gustav Storm, Christiania, 1888.

Íslenzk fornrit I, *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*. Ed. by Jakob Benediktsson, Reykjavík, 1968.

Íslenzk fornrit II, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. Ed. by Sigurður Nordal, Reykjavík, 1933.

Íslenzk fornrit III, *Borgfirðinga sögur*. Ed. by Guðni Jónsson and Sigurður Nordal, Reykjavík, 1956.

Íslenzk fornrit IV, *Eyrbyggja saga. Brands þáttr Örva. Eiríks saga rauða. Grænlendinga saga. Grænlendinga þáttr*. Ed. by Matthías Þórðarson and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Reykjavík, 1935.

Íslenzk fornrit V, *Laxdæla saga. Halldórs þættir Snorrasonar. Stúfs þáttr*. Ed. by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Reykjavík, 1934.

Íslenzk fornrit VI, *Vestfirðinga sögur*. Ed. by Guðni Jónsson and Björn K. Þórólfsson, Reykjavík, 1943.

Íslenzk fornrit VIII, *Vatnsdæla saga, Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks saga, Hrómundar þáttr halta, Hrafns þáttr Guðrúnarsonar*. Ed. by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Reykjavík, 1939.

Íslenzk fornrit X, *Ljósvetninga saga með þáttum. Reykdæla saga ok Víga-Skútu. Hreiðars þáttr*. Ed. by Björn Sigfússon, Reykjavík, 1940.

Íslenzk fornrit XI, *Austfirðinga sögur*. Ed. by Jón Jóhannesson, Reykjavík, 1950.
Íslenzk fornrit XII, *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Ed. by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Reykjavík, 1954.
Íslenzk fornrit XIV, *Kjalnesinga saga. Jökuls þáttr Búasonar. Víglundar saga. Króka-refs saga. Þórðar saga hreðu. Finnboga saga. Gunnars saga keldugnúpsfífls*. Ed. by Jóhannes Halldórsson, Reykavik, 1959.
Konungs skuggsiá. Norrøne tekster 1. Ed. by Ludvig Holm-Olsen, Oslo, 1983.
Norges gamle Love I–V. Ed. by Rudolf Keyser et al., Christiania, 1846–1895.
Orkneyinga saga. Legenda de sancto Magno. Magnúss saga skemmri. Magnúss saga lengri. Helga þattr ok Úlfs. Íslenzk fornrit XXXIV. Ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson, Reykjavík, 1965.
——. *The history of the Earls of Orkney*. Penguin Classics. Ed. by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, London, 1981.
Skálholtsbók. Det Arnamagnæanske Haandskrift 81a Fol. Skálholtsbók yngsta. Ed. by A. Kjær and Ludvig Holm-Olsen, Kristiania, 1910–1947.
Sturlunga saga 1–2. Translated by Julia McGrew, New York, 1970–1974.
Sturlunga saga I–II. Ed. by Jón Jóhannesson et al., Reykjavík, 1946.
The King's Mirror (Speculum Regale—Konungs skuggsjá). Library of Scandinavian literature vol. 15. Ed. by Laurence M. Larson, New York, 1917.

Studies

Amory, Frederic 2001, The Historical Worth of *Rígsþula, Alvíssmál* 10, 3–20.
Anderson, Theodore M. 1989, Introduction. The Literary Setting, *Ljósvetninga saga and Valla-Ljóts saga. Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland*. Ed. by Theodore M. Anderson and William I. Miller, Stanford, 63–118.
—— 1993, The King of Iceland, *Speculum* 74, 923–934.
Ármann Jakobsson 1997, *Í leit að konungi. Konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna*, Reykjavík.
—— 2003, Konungurinn og ég. Sjálfsmynd Íslendings frá 13. öld, *Þjóðerni í þúsund ár?* Ed. by Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson et al., Reykjavík, 39–55.
Axel Kristinsson 1986, Hverjir tóku þátt í hernaði Sturlungaaldar?, *Sagnir* 7, 6–11.
Bagge, Sverre 1986, Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen, *Historisk Tidsskrift* 65, 145–197.
—— 1987, *The Political Thought of the King's Mirror*, Mediaeval Scandinavia supplements 3, [Odense].
—— 1991, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*, Berkeley.
—— 1996, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris Saga and Hákonar Saga Hákonarsonar*, The Viking Collection; vol. 8, [Odense].
—— 1998, *Mennesket i middelalderens Norge. Tanker, tro og holdninger 1000–1300*, Oslo.
—— 2000, Old Norse Theories of Society. From *Rígsþula* to *Konungs skuggsiá*, *Speculum Regale: der altnorwegische Königsspiegel (Konungs skuggsjá) in der europäischen Tradition*. Ed. by Rudolf Simek and Jens Eike Schnall, Wien, 7–45.
Baraz, Daniel 2003, *Medieval Cruelty. Changing Perceptions, Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, Conjunctions of religion and power in the medieval past, Ithaca.
Barber, Malcom 1992, *The Two Cities. Medieval Europe 1050–1320*, London.
Barrett, James H. 2007, The Pirate Fishermen: The Political Economy of a Medieval Maritime Society, *Studies in Scandinavian Sea-Borne Expansion and Settlement Before 1300*. Ed. by Beverly Ballin Smith et al., Leiden, 299–340.
Bauman, Richard 1986, Performance and Honor in 13th-Century Iceland, *Journal of American Folklore* 99, 131–151.

Bergsveinn Birgisson 2008, *Inn i skaldens sinn. Kognitive, estetiske og historiske skatter i den norrøne skaldediktingen*, Bergen.
Beuermann, Ian 2005, Orkneyinga Saga: 1195 and All That?, *Dialogues with Tradition: Studying the Nordic Saga Heritage*. Ed. by Kristel Zilmer, Tartu, 113–152.
Beyschlag, Siegfried 1956, Snorri Sturluson, *Saeculum* 7, 310–320.
Birkeli, Fridtjov 1995, *Tolv vintrer hadde kristendommen vært i Norge*, Oslo.
Björn Lárusson 1967, *The Old Icelandic Land Registers*, Lund.
Björn M. Ólsen 1911, *Om Gunnlaugs Saga Ormstungu. En kritisk Undersøgelse*, København.
Björn Þorsteinsson and Sigurður Líndal 1978, Lögfesting konungsvalds, *Saga Íslands III*. Ed. by Sigurður Líndal, Reykjavík, 19–108.
Brooke, Christopher 1967, *The Saxon and Norman Kings*, The British Monarchy Series, Glasgow.
Byock, Jesse L. 1988, *Medieval Iceland. Society, Sagas, and Power*, Berkeley.
Christiansen, Palle Ove 2000, *Kulturhistorie som opposition: træk af forskellige fagtraditioner*, [København].
Crawford, Barbara E. 1976–77, The Earldom of Caithness and the Kingdom of Scotland, 1150–1266, *Northern Scotland* 2, 97–117.
—— 1987, *Scandinavian Scotland. Scotland in the Early Middle Ages 2*, Studies in the early history of Britain, Leicester.
Erkens, Franz-Reiner 2006, *Herrschersakralität im Mittelalter von den Anfängen bis zum Investiturstreit*, Stuttgart.
Erslev, Kristian 1892, *Grundsætninger for historisk kildekritik*, København.
—— 1911, *Historieskrivning. Grundlinier til nogle Kapitler af Historiens Theori*, København.
Fleck, Jere 1970, Konr—Óttarr—Geirroðr: A knowledge criterion for succession to Germanic sacred kingship, *Scandinavian Studies* 42, 39–49.
Fleckenstein, Josef 1988, *Grundlagen und Beginn der deutschen Geschichte*, Deutsche Geschichte 1, Göttingen.
Gerring, John 1997, Ideology: A Definitional Analysis, *Political Research Quarterly* 50, 957–994.
Gísli Gíslason 1944, *Íslenzkt stjórnarfar síðustu öld þjóðveldisins*, Reykjavík.
Goetz, Hans-Werner 2002, The Concept of Time in the Historiography of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, *Medieval concepts of the past. Ritual, memory, historiography*. Ed. by Gerd Althoff et al., Cambridge, 139–165.
Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1988, Um sárafar í Íslendinga sögu Sturlu Þórðarsonar, *Sturlustefna*. Ed. by Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir and Jónas Kristjánsson, Reykjavík, 184–203.
Gunnar F. Guðmundsson 2000, *Íslenskt samfélag og Rómakirkja*. Kristni á Íslandi II, Reykjavík.
Gunnar Karlsson 2000, *Iceland's 1100 Years. History of a Marginal Society*, London.
—— 2004, *Goðamenning. Staða og áhrif goðorðsmanna í þjóðveldi Íslendinga*, Reykjavík.
Gunnes, Erik 1971, *Kongens ære. Kongemakt og kirke i En tale mot biskopene*, Oslo.
Gurevich, Aaron 1971, Saga and History. The "historical conception" of Snorri Sturluson, *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 4, 42–53.
—— 1982 (1972), *Das Weltbild des mittelalterlichen Menschen*, München.
—— 1986, Tiden som kulturhistoriskt problem, *Häften för Kritiska Studier* 19, 13–28.
Hald, Kristian 1971, *Personnavne i Danmark I: Oldtiden*, Dansk historisk fællesforenings håndbøger, København.
Helgi Þorláksson 1989, *Gamlar götur og goðavald. Um fornar leiðir og völd Oddaverja í Rangárþingi*, Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar, Reykjavík.

Helle, Knut 1974, *Norge blir en stat 1130–1319*, Handbok i Norges historie [1]:3, Bergen.
—— 1988, The Organisation of the Twelfth-Century Norwegian Church, *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-century Renaissance*. Ed. by Barbara E. Crawford, Aberdeen, 46–55.
—— 1995, *Under kirke og kongemakt: 1130–1350*, Aschehougs Norgeshistorie III, Oslo.
—— 2001, Hovedlinjer i utviklingen av den historiske sagakritikken, *Leiv Eriksson, Helge Ingstad og Vinland: kjelder og tradisjonar*. Ed. by Jan Ragnar Hagland and Steinar Suphellen, Trondheim, 13–37.
—— ed. 2003, *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*. Cambridge.
Hjalti Hugason 2000, *Frumkristni og upphaf kirkju*, Kristni á Íslandi I, Reykjavík.
Hjardar, Kim 2001, *Det sakrale kongedømmet i Heimskringla. Om fyrstemakt i vikingtid og middelalder*, [Oslo].
Hoyt, Robert S. 1976, *Europe in the Middle Ages*, New York.
Hultgård, Anders 1993, Altskandinavische Opferrituale und das Problem der Quellen, *The Problem of ritual*. Ed. by Tore Ahlbäck, Åbo, 221–259.
Ifrah, Georges 1994, *Histoire universelle des chiffres. L'intelligence des hommes racontée par les nombres et le calcul*, Paris.
Jakob Benediktsson 1974, Landnám og upphaf allsherjarríkis, *Saga Íslands I*. Ed. by Sigurður Líndal, Reykjavík, 153–196.
Jón Jóhannesson 1956, *Íslendinga saga I*, Reykjavík.
Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1989, *Frá goðorðum til ríkja: Þróun goðavalds á 12. og 13. öld*, Sagnfræðirannsóknir B. 10, Reykjavík.
—— 1999, *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*, trans. Jean Lundskær-Nielsen. The Viking collection 12, [Odense].
—— 2003a, Island og Nidaros, *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537. Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*. Ed. by Steinar Imsen, Trondheim, 121–140.
—— 2003b, *Kristninga i Norden 750–1200*, Utsyn and innsikt, Oslo.
—— 2005, Noen hovedtrekk i diskusjonen om det islandske middelaldersamfunnet etter 1970, *Collegium Medievale* 18, 106–143.
—— 2007a, The Appearance and Personal Abilities of Goðar, Jarlar, and Konungar. Iceland, Orkney and Norway, *West over Sea, Studies in Scandinavian Sea-Borne Expansion and Settlement Before 1300*. Ed. by Beverly Ballin Smith et al., Leiden, 95–109.
—— 2007b, Changing Layers of Jurisdiction and the Reshaping of the Icelandic Society *c.* 1220–1350, *Communities in European History: Representations, Jurisdictions, Conflicts*. Ed. by Juan Pan-Montojo and Frederik Pedersen, Pisa, 179–193.
—— 2008, *Det norrøne samfunnet. Vikingen, kongen, erkebiskopen og bonden*, Oslo.
Koht, Halvdan 1967 (1914), Sagaenes opfatning av vår gamle historie (Opprinnelig trykt i Historisk tidsskrift 5. R. II, 1914), *Rikssamling og kristendom. Norske historikere i utvalg 1*. Ed. by Andreas Holmsen and Jarle Simensen, Oslo, 40–55.
Krag, Claus 1991, *Ynglingatal og Ynglingesaga en studie i historiske kilder*, Studia humaniora; 2, Oslo.
—— 1995, *Vikingtid og rikssamling: 800–1130*, Aschehougs Norgeshistorie II, Oslo.
Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder I–XXII. Ed. by Finn Hødnebø et al., Oslo, 1956–1978 (2. opl. 1980–1982).
Le Goff, Jacques 1988, *Medieval civilization 400–1500*, Oxford.
Loescher, G. 1980, Zeit und Raum in den Isländersagas, *Germanisch-Romanische Monatschrift* 30, 257–270.
Lúðvík Ingvarsson 1986–1987, *Goðorð og goðorðsmenn I–III*, Egilsstaðir.
Magnús Stefánsson 1975, Kirkjuvald eflist, *Saga Íslands II*. Ed. by Sigurður Líndal, Reykjavík, 55–144.

—— 1978, Frá goðakirkju til biskupskirkju, *Saga Íslands III*. Ed. by Sigurður Líndal, Reykjavík, 109–257.
Maurer, Konrad 1874, *Island von seiner ersten Entdeckung bis zum Untergange des Freistaats*, München.
—— 1882, *Upphaf allsherjarríkis á Íslandi og stjórnarskipunar þess*, trans. Sigurður Sigurðarson. Reykjavík.
McTurk, Rory W. 1975–6, Sacral Kingship in Ancient Scandinavia. A Review of Some Recent Writings, *Saga-Book* 19, 139–169.
—— 1994, Scandinavian Sacral Kingship Revisited, *Saga-Book* 24, 19–32.
MedSca = *Medieval Scandinavian an Encyclopedia*. Garland encyclopedias of the Middle Ages 1. Ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf, New York, 1993.
Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben 1991, Om eddadigtenes alder, *Nordisk hedendom: et symposium*. Ed. by Gro Steinsland et al., Odense, 217–228.
Mickeviciute, Venta 2003, *Rígsþula. Diktets fortolkning i mytologisk, samfunnshistorisk og religiøs kontekst*, MA oppgave, Universitetet i Oslo, Oslo.
Miller, William Ian 1990, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking. Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland*, Chicago.
Narikawa, Takahiro 2008, *Innovations and Conservatism: Foundation of the Metropolitan Authority and the Effective Control within the Church Province of Nidaros in the Thirteenth Century.*, MA-oppgave, Universitetet i Oslo, Oslo.
Nederman, Cary J. and István Bejczy 2007, Introduction, *Princely virtues in the Middle Ages 1200–1500*. Ed. by István Bejczy and Cary J. Nederman, Turnhout, 1–8.
Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1964, *Studier i kronologisk metode i tidlig islandsk historieskrivning*, Bibliotheca Historica Lundensis 13, Stockholm.
Ólafur Lárusson 1932, *Yfirlit yfir íslenska rjettarsögu*, Reykjavík.
Olsen, Olaf 1966, *Hørg, hov og kirke: historiske og arkæologiske vikingetidsstudier*, Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie 1965, København.
Orning, Hans Jacob 2008, *Unpredictability and Presence. Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages*, The Northern World. North Europe and the Baltic *c.* 400–1700 AD. Peoples, Economies and Cultures, Leiden.
Schjødt, Jens Peter 1991, Fyrsteideologi og religion i vikingetiden, *Mammen. Grav, kunst og samfund i vikingetid*. Ed. by Mette Iversen, Århus, 305–310.
Schulze, Hans K. 1985, *Grundstrukturen der Verfassung im Mittelalter I*, Stuttgart.
See, Klaus von 1981, *Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung. Aufsätze zur skandinavischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, Heidelberg.
Sommer, Bettina Sejbjerg 2007, The Norse Concept of Luck, *Scandinavian Studies* 79, 275–294.
Spearing, Anthony Colin 2005, *Textual Subjectivity and the Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics*, Oxford.
Steinsland, Gro 1991, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi. En analyse av hierogami-myten i Skírnismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal og Hyndluljóð*, [Oslo].
Sundqvist, Olof 2002, *Freyr's Offspring. Rulers and Religion in Ancient Svea Society*, Historia religionum 21, Uppsala.
—— 2005. Aspect of Rulership Ideology in Early Scandinavia—with Particular References to the Skaldic Poem Ynglingatal. *RGA-E Band 49*, 87–124.
Sveaas Andersen, Per 1977, *Samlingen av Norge og kristningen av landet 800–1130*, Handbok i Norges historie 2, Bergen.
Svenningsen, Beate 2002, *Gamle frasagn om høvdinger. En studie av høvdingbegrepet i sentrale kilder om Norge 1160–1280*, Hovedfagsoppgave, Universitetet i Oslo, Oslo.
Syvertsen, Bjørn Olaf 1997, *De ga hverandre gaver og skiltes som venner. Gaveutveksling som politisk middel i Norge i vikingtiden* Universitetet i Bergen, Bergen.
Thomson, William P. L. 2008. *The New History of Orkney*, Edinburgh.

Turner, Victor W. 1971, An Anthropological Approach to the Icelandic Saga, *The Translation of Culture. Essays to E.E. Evans-Pitchard*. Ed. by T. O. Beidelman, London, 349–374.
Vadum, Kristoffer Mathias 2004, *Dom og straff i Kongespeilet: en analyse av verkets rettslære i forhold til en norsk og europeisk bakgrunn*, Skriftserie. Senter for studier i vikingtid og nordisk middelalder 7, Oslo.
Vésteinn Ólason 1987, Norrøn litteraratur som historisk kildemateriale, *Kilderne til den tidlige middelalders historie. Rapporter til den XX nordiske historikerkongres Reykjavík 1987*. Ed. by Gunnar Karlsson, Reykjavík, 30–47.
Whitelock, Dorothy 1972, *The Beginnings of English Society*. The Pelican History of England 2, Harmondsworth.
Weibull, Lauritz 1911, *Kritiska undersökningar i Nordens historia omkring år 1000*, Lund.
—— 1913, *Historisk-kritisk metod och nordisk medeltidsforskning*, Lund.
Wærdahl, Randi Bjørshol 2006, *Norges konges rike og hans skattland. Kongemakt og statsutvikling i den norrøne verden i middelalderen*, Doktoravhandlinger ved NTNU, 2006:107, Trondheim.

CHAPTER THREE

JARLA SǪGUR ORKNEYJA. STATUS AND POWER OF THE EARLS OF ORKNEY ACCORDING TO THEIR SAGAS

Ian Beuermann

In 1195 the Norwegian crown put an end to the special status which the Earldom of Orkney had enjoyed until then.[1] *Jarla sǫgur*, now better known as *Orkneyinga saga*,[2] and *Sverris saga* report that Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson of Orkney (*c*. 1138–1206) had backed a competitor for the Norwegian crown in opposition to King Sverrir (1177–1202). However, Earl Haraldr's *Eyarskjeggjar* ("Island-Beards") were beaten in the battle of Florevág in 1194, and Haraldr had to surrender unconditionally to Sverrir. Sverrir used the opportunity to bring earldom and ruler to heel. Shetland was detached and taken under direct control by the Norwegian crown; Orkney itself was restored to Haraldr, but only as a fief, and after Haraldr had sworn a vassal's oath of allegiance to Sverrir. Haraldr's personal status was thus equally affected. He and his successors stopped being semi-independent rulers. Instead, the earls became members of the Norwegian royal *hirð*, the king's retainers, and with that, members of the Norwegian aristocracy. In 1195 therefore, the Norwegian king established his overlordship of Orkney.[3]

However, Norway's crown was not the only one whose power inched ever closer to the earls of Orkney. From the twelfth century on, Scottish kings showed growing interest in the northern areas of the British mainland, eventually claiming overlordship of Caithness.[4]

---

[1] The Earldom of Orkney comprised the Shetland and Orkney Isles, and Caithness. This area is denoted as "Orkney".

[2] On the names Sigurður Nordal 1913: 36–7, cf. below n. 7.

[3] Earl Haraldr's son-in-law Óláfr Jarlsmágr had brought the pretender, Sigurðr son of the late King Magnús Erlingsson, to Orkney, where he was proclaimed king. *Orkneyinga saga* (OS) ch. 112; *Sverris saga* chs. 124, 125; *Early Sources of Scottish History* ii: 331–341. Thomson 2008: 120–2, Chesnutt 1981: 33–54, Imsen 2000, Crawford 1976–77: 97–117.

[4] The wording "northern Scotland" has been avoided since these areas were only gradually incorporated into the medieval kingdom of Scotland. At the earliest, the

Matters came to a head during the reign of the just mentioned Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson, who was also fighting King William of Scotland (1165–1214). Haraldr had employed the same technique against the Scottish as against the Norwegian crown: throwing in his lot with dynastic rivals, the Uí Uilleim, who posed a dangerous threat to the Scottish crown.[5] In 1196–1202, William campaigned against Haraldr, who submitted twice and was imprisoned in Edinburgh until his son Þorfinnr replaced him as a hostage. Haraldr only eventually managed to make peace with William by appealing to King John of England, whose diplomatic pressure made William call off his army in return for a hefty fine from Orkney.[6]

At precisely this time, probably after 1192 and not long after 1200, the decision was made to bring together a collection of different stories about the Orkney earls and some other notable Orcadians: the *Jarla sǫgur*, now known as *Orkneyinga saga*. This first collection of sagas, extant in a Danish translation made before 1570, recounts the period from pre-history to 1171 (chs. 1–108).[7]

---

northern British mainland was *de lege* defined as Scottish in 1098 by Kings Magnús berfœttr and Edgar; *de facto* Scottish control was not established there before the 13th c.

[5] The Uí Uilleim (also: Mac Williams), descend from Uilliam son of Donnchad, King Máel Coluim III's eldest son with his Orcadian wife Ingibjǫrgr. The Scottish crown, however, passed to King Máel Coluim's younger sons by his English wife Margaret: Edgar, Alexander I, and David I. King William was a grandson of David's. How dangerous the Uí Uilleim were for the ruling segment can be seen in the fact that William's son Alexander II ordered the last Ua Uilliam, a baby girl, killed in 1230, and in the consistent attempts to bastardise Donnchad. Discussion within the Orcadian context Beuermann 2007: 199–202.

[6] *OS* chs. 109–112; Fordun, *Chronica:* 256–257, 270; Howden *Chronica* iv: 10–12; *Early Sources of Scottish History* ii: 331–341. Beuermann 2007: 199–211; Thomson 2008: 117–127; Clouston 1932: 130–140; Crawford 1976–7: 97–117; Topping 1983: 105–120; Oram 2004: 89–110, esp. 100–102; Duncan 1975/1996: 191–198, Jesch 1995: 222–239.

[7] Cf. introductions in the editions by Sigurður Nordal (SN); Finnbogi Guðmundsson (FG); Alexander Taylor (AT); Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (HP/PE); KLNM 12: 699–702 and Medieval Scandinavia: 456–7. The Saga was definitely written after 1171 (ch. 108, when the first version ends, cf. below 5.), probably after 1192 (Earl Rǫgnvaldr mentioned as a saint), and certainly before 1241 (Snorri's death, cf. in his *Óláfs saga helga* ch. 103 "*þá er þó sagt í Jarlasǫgunum*", FG: v). The Danish translation made before 1570 is extant in one manuscript from 1615, overview Sigurður Nordal 1913: 31–2. *Jarla Sǫgur* was the name under which Snorri knew the text, and also the name Finnur Jónsson proposed. The original name may have been *Orkneyinga* or *Orkneyja jarla sǫgur*. We owe the modern title *OS*, and the present shape of the text which includes later revisions, to Sigurður Nordal 1913: 36–7; cf. FG: vi-vii. Although

The timing seems striking. At first glance one instinctively assumes that the writing of *Orkneyinga saga* must have been influenced by the dramatic events of the 1190s. Or is this an assumption based on the benefit of historical hindsight? Would Haraldr have known that he had lost the earldom's semi-independence forever? The fact that he killed the Norwegian royal representative in Shetland as soon as King Sverrir had died, and that he at the last minute managed to evade King William by playing the trump card King John might speak against this. If we assume that the compilers of *Orkneyinga saga* appreciated the importance of the political developments of the 1190s, there is the additional problem that neither their identity nor their political affiliations are known. Scholars are still debating whether the first version of *Orkneyinga saga* is merely based on excellent Orcadian information, whether it was compiled by an Orcadian, or by an Icelander in Orkney, or in Iceland. Whose friend or foe these elusive compilers would have been is even more open to speculation.

Matters are not made any easier by the fact that *Orkneyinga saga* was revised in the 1230s, although here at least scholars agree that this happened in Iceland. Chapters 108–112 covering the period until 1214 were added at this time. Especially the praise of Sigurðr Eysteinsson, Þorfinnr Sigurðarson, and Haraldr Maddaðarson as the three most powerful earls in chapter 112 is interesting, since it partly contradicts the earlier descriptions. Do Icelandic developments, the internal conflicts exploited by the Norwegian crown, provide the historical context for evaluations in these chapters? Would they have been influenced by the fact that the Scottish ruling house finally asserted its position in the north in 1230, by killing the very last representative of their dynastic opponents with whom Haraldr had been allied? Unfortunately, since *Orkneyinga saga*'s narrative stops in 1214, we have no sources to assess the Orcadian background.

Lastly, in the late fourteenth century *Orkneyinga saga* was again revised and copied into the manuscript known as *Flateyarbók*, giving us the most complete surviving version of the text. By then, both Orkney and Iceland had long been under Norwegian dominion. But in 1387, in the very year when work began on *Flateyarbók*, the Norwegian royal dynasty ended with the death of the boy-king Óláfr Hákonarson.

---

the medieval name is more appropriate, this chapter uses the commonly known modern title.

His mother, Margareta of Denmark, who had been ruling in his name but who had no legal right of succession, managed to become ruler of Norway in her own right. Margareta seems to have been unwelcome to the Icelanders. Would these developments also have had an impact on the outlook of *Orkneyinga saga* as it appears now?

The question "what is *Orkneyinga saga* about?" has hardly even been asked, and even less been answered. Edward Cowan raised it at a conference twenty-five years ago, and three years ago an article of mine examined one aspect.[8] Otherwise, for most of the twentieth century political agendas, linguistic problems and methodological limitations stood in the way of scholars attempting to interpret the meaning of *Orkneyinga saga*. This is connected to the general question of whether sagas are literary texts or historical sources. The Icelandic school following Sigurður Nordal claims adamantly that sagas are literary texts. But their near-monopolisation of Old Norse philology creates a linguistic problem for interested scholars who do not read Icelandic. The additional problem for *Orkneyinga saga* is that since its literary value has for a long time been seen as low, there are not too many of these philological studies to whom Icelandic-reading scholars could refer. On the other hand, as a historical source *Orkneyinga saga* has been mainly of interest for British scholars. They have mostly been interested to distil the history of events of the Orcadian Viking Age from the thirteenth and fourteenth century text. Unfortunately, in the case of *Orkneyinga saga* the fact that this approach is now seen as highly problematical means that recent historians tend to disregard the text (also) as a source of (other) information. And for the older scholars, the historical context of the time of writing—the non-viking Middle Ages—was of no interest, neither was the historiographical intention behind the text.[9]

---

[8] Cowan 1973; Beuermann 2006. A number of articles address individual points with ideological connotations. Several of Jesch's works on *OS* are relevant, as is Haki Antonsson 2005b for Earl Hákon Pálsson's lack of status; Foote 1988 especially for St Magnús as a *rex iustus*; Bibire 1988 on Earl Rǫgnvaldr. Berman 1985 and Ciklamini 1970 attempt a wider look, seeing the Saga as part of an Icelandic debate on politics and morals, but their discussions are rather superficial.

[9] See Hollander's comment on the Saga that it "gives little satisfaction either to the historically inclined mind or to the aesthetic sense". Hollander 1940/1: 226. More recently however, Jesch 1992, 1996, 2006a, and Phelpstead have argued for "a high degree of sophistication on the part of both the author and the audience of the saga", Phelpstead 2007: 115.

Thus *Orkneyinga saga* still awaits a modern scholarly examination which takes into account what philological discussions there are, combines this with recent methodological approaches in history, and includes the Nordic and British thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The present chapter cannot attempt all this. What it shall do is to analyse aspects of the ideologies of rulership—and it is probably several—that we see in the compound text which is *Orkneyinga saga*, and (for St Magnús) in two complementary Icelandic-Orcadian texts, the Shorter and Longer *Magnús sagas*. The focus in this Orcadian-Icelandic-Norwegian set-up is on two big themes: (in)dependence and (in)equality within the Scandinavian world (sub-chapters 1–4), and the style of rulership (sub-chapter 5).

1. *The origin story: Fornjótr to Earls Rǫgnvaldr and Sigurðr*

"Seine Geschichte zu schreiben bedeutet, sich Vorfahren auszusuchen."[10]

Orkneyinga saga begins with stories about the origins of the earls: with a genealogy of their mythical, legendary and historical ancestors, and a description of some of their deeds.[11] This is a very common beginning. Old Norse literature is full of genealogical lore; especially so in the sagas, where genealogy serves three main functions: firstly, the degree of kinship simply had practical consequences for everyday life. Secondly, an impressive genealogy, whether correct or 'improved', showed high social status. Thirdly, the choice of real or invented links as they appear in a genealogy provides an indication of the prevalent historical interpretation and, possibly, mythological thinking.[12] In the present context, points two and three are of interest.

The Saga opens with the mythological ancestor of the Orkney earls (Fig.1). *Fornjótr hefir konungr heitit; hann réð fyrir því landi, er kallat [er] Finnland ok Kvenland; þat liggr fyrir austan hafsbotn þann, er gengr til móts við Gandvík; þat köllu vér Helsingjabotn.*[13] In the geographical

[10] Tomany 2007: 71.

[11] *OS* chs. 1–3. The expression "origin story" denotes all mythical, legendary and historical elements in these chapters. Also known as *Fundinn Noregr* ("The Finding of Norway"), chs. 1–3 are quite different from the rest of the Saga.

[12] Meulengracht Sørensen 1995: 213. Cf. for this "imaginative art" Turville-Petre 1978–81: 7. Thornton 2006: 83–98 for genealogical schizophrenia.

[13] *OS* ch. 1 (FG: 3); "*There was a king called Fornjot; he ruled over the land that is called Finnland and Kvœnland. It lies to the east of the sea-gulf that leads towards the White Sea; we call it Helsingjaland.*" (AT: 136).

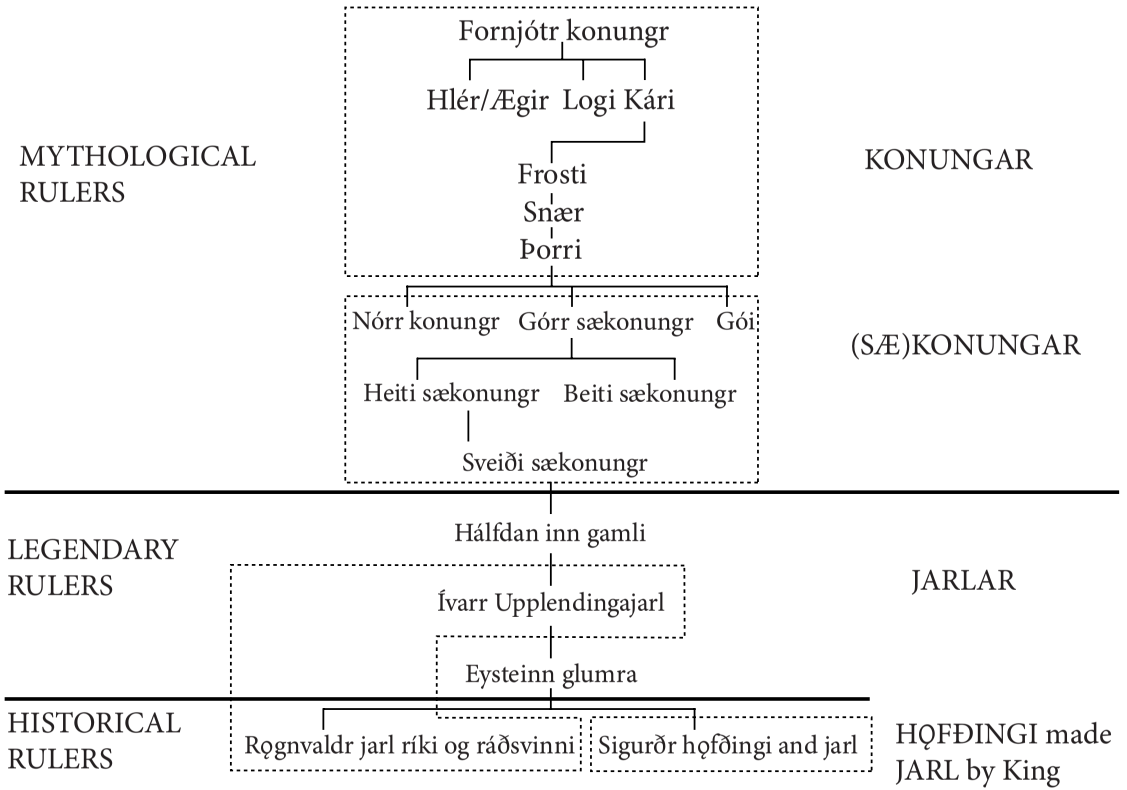


Figure 1. Ancestors of the Earls of Orkney: Fornjótr—Rǫgnvaldr and Sigurðr, *Orkneyinga saga*.

conception of the time, Fornjótr's realm was placed in the extreme north, and according to the classification found in Snorri, Fornjótr is listed among the names for giants.[14] However, attempts to explain his name are inconclusive, with proposals ranging from "the old Jute", to "the old destroyer", "the old howler, i.e. the storm", "the old owner", and "the receiver of sacrifices".[15] Fornjótr may have been identical with the primeval giant Ymir (Aurgelmir), making him "both the progenitor of giants and the anthropomorphic figure from whom the material world was created", since the primeval giant was made of the elements fire (*hiti*), air (*blær*), and water (in the form of melted *hrím*).[16] The names of Fornjótr's three sons are then also clearly associated with these elements: Hlér/Ægir is a sea-god or -giant, thus representing water, Logi means "flame" and Kári "the north wind".[17] Kári's descendants are Frosti ("frost"), Snær ("snow") and Þorri ("draught"). Clunies Ross notes that "in Snorri's representation of the world's genesis the frost-giants are the original giant-race",[18] and a glance at the names of Fornjótr's mythological descendants leaves no doubt about Sørensen's view that Fornjótr's line "personif[ies] the Nordic winter and northern nature".[19] Thus *Orkneyinga saga* gives the earls a very northern-orientated origin myth. It is exclusively Nordic, yet its characters are not stationary. These two elements shall be taken up in the following three sub-chapters.

1.1. *The north and the giant*

The purely Nordic origin myth exclusively going back to a giant is, in fact, unusual. Old Norse origin myths usually involve gods, and an

---

[14] Cf. for Fornjótr as a giant the *þulur* (name-lists) which were incorporated into some manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda*. Discussion of Fornjótr's four sons by Clunies Ross 1983: 47–66; Meulengracht Sørensen 1995: 213, 214 for the meanings.

[15] Meulengracht Sørensen 1995: 212–14. Cf. Clunies Ross 1983: 49–51, 56 for a detailed discussion of Fornjótr.

[16] Clunies Ross 1983: 49–51, quote at 51, with reference to Snorri's *Gylfaginning* ch. 5 for Ymir and Aurgelmir as one and the same. Clunies Ross also notes the hypothesis that Fornjótr's name (**Fjǫrnjótr*?) refers to the plant *Fornetes folm* ("the plant of Fornet"), supposed to have aphrodisiac properties, which would "support the view that he was associated in some way with virility and procreation" (50).

[17] Clunies Ross 1983: 56 for Logi and Kári, 56–61 for Hlér/Ægir. Hlér may be the same as the Irish Manannán mac Lir, due to a learned borrowing in Orkney or Oddi (60).

[18] Clunies Ross 1983: 51.

[19] Meulengracht Sørensen 1995: 212.

element of immigration from the south. For example, at the beginning of the twelfth century, the Icelander Ari Þorgilsson let the Yngling genealogy begin with the Turkish king Yngvi and linked it with the Norwegian royal dynasty of historical times. The lost *Skjǫldunga saga* from the end of the twelfth century has an account of the descent of the Danish kings from Óðinn, and of the immigration of the Æsir from Asia. And at the beginning of the thirteenth century Snorri in his *Heimskringla* combines the myth of *Ynglingatal* with the immigration theory from Asia, placing Óðinn and his three sons at the top of the Norwegian and Swedish royal genealogies.[20] Continuing his account with the intermarriage between the 'immigrant' gods and wives of the native Nordic population, Snorri provided the authoritative version.

It would easily have been possible to incorporate the Orkney earls into this prevalent model—the Norwegian earls of Hlaðir for example did, claiming descent from Sæmingr, Óðinn's son. But neither Snorri nor *Orkneyinga saga* make any attempt to construct a link between Óðinn and the ancestors of the Orkney earls.[21] Instead, the Saga picks up another element: that there existed in the north a native population long before the immigrant gods, Óðinn and his followers, arrived. With their descent from Fornjótr, the ancestors of the earls of Orkney are shown to be exclusively Nordic. They stem from an ancient native race hailing from a mythical past, and—to put it in somewhat racist terms—their blood had not been diluted by southern immigrants. In addition, as if the point needed to be pressed, *Orkneyinga saga* chooses for the part of the Orcadians' non-human ancestors not the gods of the Hárfagri-dynasty, the 'official' Norwegian royal line, but their arch-enemies, the giants.

By eschewing the prevailing thirteenth-century origin myth of descent from immigrated southern gods, in favour of a direct male line which goes back to native northern giants, *Orkneyinga saga* seems to convey a sense of the Orkney earls' self-esteem and pride, together with an impression of distinctness. To go even further, this account propagates not only that the origins of the earls of Orkney are distinct from those of the Norwegian, Swedish and Danish kings, but also that

[20] *Ynglingasaga* chs. 1–3., *Heimskringla* I.
[21] In *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar* Rǫgnvaldr's father Eysteinn glumra descends from Sæmingr, Meulengracht Sørensen 1995: 218.

they are more deeply rooted in Nordic history. The earls of Orkney are, so to speak, more 'Norwegian' than the kings of Norway.

Viewed in this light, *Orkneyinga saga*'s extraordinary origin myth might be quite a powerful statement of (at least) equality with and independence of the kings of Norway. With developments of the 1190s in Orkney in mind, this could have been a political bomb.[22] Is it possible that the compiler of *Orkneyinga saga* defused it elegantly? While in Old Norse mythology giants are on the one hand more 'native' than gods, they are also in general of lower social standing. Claiming descent from gods, especially Óðinn, was prestigious—see the Hlaðir-earls who joined Scandinavian royalty. Eschewing 'foreign' gods in favour of 'native' giants was therefore a double-edged sword: the earls of Orkney might have paid for being more Nordic by being less noble than the kings of Norway.

1.2. *Conquest and immigration in myth and legend*

While *Orkneyinga saga* does not share in the Scandinavian theme of Óðinn's immigration and conquest, this chapter shall argue that we nevertheless find ample evidence for the typical early Scandinavian ideology of conquest and settlement in both the mythic and the legendary sphere. Fornjótr and his descendants may not have arrived from Troy, but they are by no means stationary characters, in more than one sense.

Regarding the mythical sphere, consider the very names of the mythological ancestors. They invoke power combined with aggressiveness and mobility. A destroyer or a storm, flame and north wind, frost, snow and draught are aggressive and mobile phenomena. They are unpleasant for soil and people exposed to them, and they are not permanent in terms of time or space: not land-bound, but moving. Characters with such names do not conjure up an image of rulers who enjoy permanent or amicable relations with their native lands. Rather, they point to powerful rulers who arrive and subject the areas they pass through. This ideological interpretation can be supported by Clunies Ross' work on mythology. There, as discussed above, the very elements

[22] Cf. the comment "It is a commonplace of modern anthropology that origin stories are influenced by current realities, even if they are not simply 'charters' to justify them." Sims-Williams 1985: 102. Cf. SN: xlvi–xlviii for Sigurður Nordal's view that chs. 1–3 are not a later addition.

that make up Ymir/Aurgelmir/Fornjótr—fire, air and water—later reappear as the names of Fornjótr's sons (which recalls the myth of the dismembered body of the primeval giant distributed over the world). Clunies Ross notes that "it was principally the destructive or harmful qualities of these natural phenomena that were translated into human form as the sons of Fornjótr". And in mythology we see these male giants arriving and spreading out over female earth.[23] By making the Orkney rulers into descendants of such aggressive and mobile characters, *Orkneyinga saga* clearly chooses an ideology of immigration and conquest for the earls, also if they did not start their journey in Troy.

Regarding the legendary ancestors (Fig. 1), it is not their names, but their deeds that evoke this ideology. Initially, the brothers Nórr and Górr and their descendants are very mobile, and not bound to any particular land. They travel around, fighting battles, so that Nórr has recently been called "a wandering hero or roving viking".[24] It is only eventually that these characters start conquering areas here and there. *Orkneyinga saga* says about Nórr for example, that "*Fór Nórr um allan fjǫrðinn ok lagði undir sik ok gerðisk konungr yfir þeim heruðum*".[25] This is the immigrant conquering hero par excellence! The later rulers of Orkney descend from Górr (in an all-male line[26]), who "*hafði ok undir sik lagt land allt it ytra* […] *ok þá skiptu þeir lǫndum með sér brœðr*".[27]

In short, while *Orkneyinga saga* eschews the model of conquest and immigration from the south via Óðinn, the saga retains the idea of powerful rulers from abroad—the north—carving out new territories

---

[23] Clunies Ross 1983: 49. Water, fire and air are obviously three primal elements. The forth and immobile one, earth, is female in Norse mythology. But Clunies Ross underlines that the sons of Fornjótr are "destructive or rigorous natural phenomena and not…three of the four natural elements" (62).

[24] Ashman Rowe 2000: 445. Her analysis of the development of *Flateyarbók* (Ashman Rowe 2005), focussing on "the editorial projects of the two priests who compiled *Flateyarbók*" and on the interrelationship of their contributions (pp. 25, 27) says hardly anything on *OS* and is not relevant here.

[25] *OS* ch. 1 (FG: 4); "*went round the whole fjord and subdued all the inhabitants and made himself king over the districts that lay there round the fjord*" (AT: 136).

[26] Lincoln 1995: 25–6 underlines that Nórr marries, which makes his land into a "pacified, heterosexual space" where however "peace and sexuality […] lead to an overproduction that is its undoing" because of numerous territorial divisions. By contrast, Górr rules a "war-like and seemingly all-male realm seemingly associated with the homosocial experience of shipboard life" which may be a more viable polity.

[27] *OS* ch. 2 (FG: 5); "*had also subdued all the outermost land* […] *And therefore the brothers divided the land between them*." (AT: 137).

for themselves. It is an image of warriors-turned-rulers; and, importantly, they are free to decide where to turn to, whom to attack, which lands to take, and how to divide them. These are the elements which are underlined by descent from such characters. The model of conquest and immigration (from the north) presents the Orkney rulers as independent warriors-turned-rulers on a par with the Norwegian kings.

1.3. *Conquest and immigration in history*

If we turn to the two historical ancestors, Rǫgnvaldr and Sigurðr Eysteinnson (Fig. 1), we note that here the motifs of immigration and conquest are split.[28] *Orkneyinga saga* says explicitly that King Haraldr hárfagri sailed to the west and that "*Hann lagði undir sik Hjaltland ok Orkneyjar ok Suðreyjar; hann fór allt vestr í Mǫn ok eyddi Manarbyggðina. Hann átti þar margar orrostur ok eignaðisk lǫnd svá langt vestr, at engi Nóregskonungr hefir lengra síðan.*"[29] A close reading of *Orkneyinga saga* shows that Rǫgnvaldr and Sigurðr seem to have accompanied King Haraldr on the expedition. However, the Saga does not accord them any, let alone any prominent role in the conquest of Orkney. Orkney is conquered by the Norwegian king, not by its future rulers: they only immigrate.[30]

---

[28] Rǫgnvaldr appears in chs. 3, 4, and also in Snorri's *Haralds saga hárfagra* in *Heimskringla* (chs. 12, 22–24). Rǫgnvaldr and Sigurðr are classified as 'ancestors' since the real first earl of Orkney is Einarr (see below). The traditional division into legendary and historical characters (see Fig. 1) is questionable.

[29] *OS* ch. 4 (FG: 8); "*He subdued Shetland and the Orkneys and the Hebrides and sailed right west to the Isle of Man and laid waste the Manx homesteads. He fought there many battles and annexed the land farther west than any Norwegian king has done since*" (AT: 138). *Haralds saga hárfagra* wants to show that Haraldr fought a *bellum iustum*, punishing the western vikings who attacked Norway and bringing order to those lands.

[30] *Historia Norwegie*, thought to refer to Orcadian traditions, knows nothing of King Haraldr's involvement in the Orkneys. In *Historia Norwegie* "*pirate*" of earl Rǫgnvaldr's family "*cum magna classe Solundicum Mare transfretantes de diuturnis sedibus exutas ex toto deleuerunt ac insulas sibi subdiderunt*" *("crossing the Solund Sea with a large fleet; totally destroyed these peoples after stripping them of their long-established dwellings and made the islands subject to themselves")*, to use the Orkneys as a winter-base for raids. Crawford comments "it is possible that within the islands there was no memory of King Harald's involvement in the establishment of the earldom, whereas the saga-writer (probably an Icelander) is recording a tradition which liked to think that the Orkney earldom was tied to the Kingdom of Norway from the very beginning. However, the saga account of the many bloody battles which went on between Earl Rognvald's sons and the sons of King Harald of Norway suggests that the Møre family and the Vestfold dynasty did conflict in their attempts to get control over these islands." Crawford 1983: 98, 99.

In fact, the story of the arrival of the first earls of Orkney is rather convoluted. *Orkneyinga saga* says that King Haraldr "*gaf* [Rǫgnvaldr] *yfirsókn om Mœri hváratveggju ok Raumsdal*" in Norway, and that "*þá gaf hann Rǫgnvaldi jarli í sonarbœtr Hjaltland ok Orkneyjar.*"[31] This seems a logic continuation within the model that the Norwegian king conquers, while his earls immigrate.

I see an ideological message in this split between conquest and immigration. As outlined above, conquering *and* immigrating is what the northern dynasty of Fornjótr and the southern one of Óðinn do. Both are dynasties of independent kings. In *Orkneyinga saga* chapter 4 however, the independent king (Haraldr) conquers, and then freely decides what to do with some of the new lands: giving them to a dependent earl for 'immigration'. Haraldr's grant of Møre, Romsdal and Orkney to Rǫgnvaldr sends a clear message that the ruler of these lands is subject to the King of Norway.

Yet immediately the clear picture becomes foggy. Rǫgnvaldr does not keep Orkney, but gives it to his brother Sigurðr. Is this merely a 'sub-letting' which makes Sigurðr dependent on Rǫgnvaldr, who is in turn subject to Haraldr? Or does this act break the initial link of dependence; does *Orkneyinga saga* imply that Orkney and its rulers are after all more independent of the Norwegian crown than an earl of Møre and Romsdal? Such a view might find support in the fact that with Sigurðr the motif of conquest returns. Sigurðr and Þorsteinn rauðr "*unnu þeir Katanes allt ok mikit annat af Skotlandi, Mærhœfi ok Ros*". Thus here we again see independent warriors establishing themselves as rulers.[32]

Orkneyinga saga therefore sends a mixed message regarding conquest and immigration of historical ancestors. It paints a clear picture of the Norwegian king's acts in, and consequently rights over one part of the earldom, the islands of Orkney and Shetland.[33] This picture *may*

---

[31] *OS* ch. 4 (FG: 7–8); "*granted* [Rǫgnvaldr] *the two Møre and Romsdalen to rule over*"; "*as compensation for his son he gave to Earl Rognvald Shetland and the Orkneys*" (AT: 138–9). Contrary to *OS* where Rǫgnvaldr's son Ívarr fell in the British Isles, *Haralds þáttr* and *Vatnsdœla saga* say that Ívarr fell in the battle of Hafrsfjord, raising the question of whether *OS* 'created' a link, and if so, why. *Heimskringla* I: 122 n. 1.

[32] *OS* ch. 5 (FG: 8); "*conquered all Caithness and much more of Scotland, and Moray and Ross*" (AT: 139).

[33] Historically, Haraldr's conquest of lands in the west is unlikely. In *Historia Norwegie* ch. 6 Orkney is conquered by *robustissim*[us] *princ*[eps] *Rogwald*[us]—Earl Rǫgnvaldr alone. Cf. n. 30. Other Norse sources disagree on whether there were one or two campaigns (see for the second one below 2.2.) and who led them (Ketill flat-

be weakened by the story of Rǫgnvaldr's gift to Sigurðr. The latter's acts in Caithness and further south again evoke independence, presenting Caithness as (even) 'more independent' of Norway than the Shetland and Orkney isles. Historically, Caithness' greater independence from Norway is as anachronistic in a historical ninth/tenth century context, as equal semi-independence of the Orkney and Shetland isles is after 1195, as pointed out in the beginning. Taken together, *Orkneyinga sag*a's ideology would also not correspond to the historical situation during any of the periods of compilation or revision. The presentation of conquest and immigration seems to carry a political message which, on the whole, underlines Orcadian equality with and independence of Norway.

1.4. (Sæ-)konungr, jarl, hǫfðingi

The mythological, legendary and historical ancestors of the rulers of Orkney appear with different titles in *Orkneyinga saga*. In the first four chapters, we note a development from *konungr* and *sækonungr* to *jarl* and *hǫfðingi* (Fig. 1).[34] One truism is that the use of titles is never accidental; another that in the world of humans, descent from kings is the most honourable genealogy to claim. The appearance of kings early in genealogies is therefore common. The interesting elements in *Orkneyinga saga* thus concern the appearance of *sækonungr* and the acquisition of the title *jarl*.

With the appearance of Nórr, the eponymous founder of the Kingdom of Norway, the title *konungr* is discontinued in the Orcadian genealogy. Nórr's brother Górr and his descendants are *sækonungar*. It is unclear whether this title is lower than *konungr*. Taylor explained that *sækonungr* might have been "an old title given to one who ruled

---

nefr?); and Insular sources report earlier royal expeditions (e.g. Turgéis) but nothing which could refer to Haraldr. Recent discussion Thomson 2008: 24–7, Thomson 2005: 1–10, and cf. Sigurður Nordal's comment 1913: 44–5, "senere har da Snorre syntes, det var urimeligt, at kongen gav øerne bort uden først at have erobret dem. […] Det vilde riktignok være en af hans dristigste kombinasjoner, men langt fra utænkelig." ("and later Snorri thought it unfitting that the king should have given the isles away without first having conquered them. […] Admittedly, this would have been a very bold conjecture of Snorri's, but it is by no means impossible.").

[34] For titles see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson in this volume. He notes that *OS* calls Fornjótr a king, and proposes that the Saga therefore accords to the earls of Orkney a lower position than to the Norwegian kings and to the earls of Hlaðir who descend from a god. More comparative work into the appearance of euhemerised non-human characters in Nordic texts is required here.

over armed hosts on board ship but held no lands".[35] This view could imply that they were mere leaders of warriors, not proper rulers in the medieval view, and hence inferior to *konungar*. *Orkneyinga saga* would then make the descendants of the *sækonungr* Górr, the rulers of Orkney, inferior to the descendants of the *konungr* Nórr, the rulers of Norway. However, the Saga-text seems quite neutral: "*Górr hafði eyjarnar, ok var hann því kallaðr sækonungr; hans synir váru þeir Heiti ok Beiti; þeir váru sækonungar ok ofstopamenn miklir.*"[36] This seems to imply that the title *sækonungr* was coined because Górr ruled over islands, not because Górr was inferior to Nórr. Matters *may* be different with Heiti and Beiti. Their characterisation as *ofstopamenn* with its associations of arrogance and aggressiveness in *Orkneyinga saga* might make thirteenth-century readers associate them with the sea-rovers (*vikingar*) who are described as a plague in *Haralds saga hárfagra*, and whom King Haraldr punished in a just war.[37] This would imply that Heiti's and Beiti's status as *sækonungar* is inferior to that of a *konungr*. It would however also lead to the conundrum that by installing Heiti's descendants in Orkney, King Haraldr replaced *vikingar* with *vikingar*. Such acts might have been political reality, but would this really have been propagated in a genealogy? The question of whether a *sækonungr* is of lower rank than a *konungr* in *Orkneyinga saga* remains unanswered.[38]

In contrast to *sækonungr, Orkneyinga saga* does not give any explanation for the change to the title *jarl*. It appears first with Rǫgnvaldr's grandfather Ívarr, while Rǫgnvaldr's father Eysteinn and great-grandfather Hálfdan are without title. Hálfdan is the son of a *sækonungr*, Sveiði (Fig. 1). Rǫgnvaldr is the second *jarl* in the dynasty. His title seems to be personal; it is certainly not connected to Møre and Romsdal, let alone Orkney, all of which King Haraldr grants to him as

---

[35] *OS* (AT: 352). SN does not comment on the term.

[36] *OS* ch. 3 (FG: 6–7); "*Gor held the isles and thence was called a 'Sea-king'. His sons were Heiti and Beiti, who were Sea-kings, and very overbearing men.*" (AT: 137). *Eyarnar* here refers to the isles off the Norwegian coast, not to Orkney.

[37] Cf. n. 28.

[38] The discussion above concerned titles, not the persons of the brothers. For the latter the fact that Górr is named second, implying that he was the younger brother (*OS* ch. 1) might give the impression that Górr is the lesser character. This is however a medieval view influenced by the concept of primogeniture. If Górr's 'junior position' was intended as a subtle literary means of denoting the Orkney-rulers' lesser place this would point to a later date for this element.

an already 'titled' earl.[39] It is with Sigurðr that *Orkneyinga saga* makes plain that *jarl* is a lower title which is bestowed by the Norwegian king. After Rǫgnvaldr had passed Orkney on to Sigurðr, Haraldr "*konungr gaf Sigurði jarlsnafn*".[40] This description does two things. It makes plain that a *konungr*, who is higher, can make *jarlar*, who are lower. In the remainder of *Orkneyinga saga* we very frequently—yet not always—find Orcadian rulers travelling to the Norwegian (and to the Scottish) crown in order to get the title of *jarl*. Secondly, in addition to establishing hierarchy, the description also establishes dependence. Ideologically, all this may be particularly important in the case of Sigurðr if his link with King Haraldr is more tenuous since Sigurðr obtained the lands from his brother, and embarked on independent conquest (see above). Beginning with Sigurðr, Orkney rulers are inherently *hǫfðingi*—gone are the days of *konungar* and *sækonungar*.[41] These *hǫfðingi* of the Orkney-dynasty are then, with some exceptions, made into *jarlar* by kings, in comparison to whom they are of lower rank, and on whom they depend.

An inconsistency in this lies with Rǫgnvaldr and Ívarr. If *Orkneyinga saga* had claimed that they also owe their title *jarl* to a king, the saga would have used this title consistently to reduce the status of the dynasty with regard to royal *Hárfagri-dynasty*. But in the text as it stands, doubts remain whether *jarlar* had always been lower, or at least always dependent on *konungar*. There is an intermediary phase in the Saga's genealogy, with Ívarr and Rǫgnvaldr, who are neither (*sæ-*) *konungar* nor *konungr*'s *jarlar*, but something in between: *jarlar* not made by a king. In how far *Orkneyinga saga*'s understanding of *jarl* in the case of Ívarr and Rǫgnvaldr corresponds to possible Viking Age concepts of a *jarl's* position—as different from medieval concepts—cannot be discussed here.[42] The fragmentary transmission and revision

[39] *OS* ch. 4.

[40] *OS* ch. 4 (FG: 8); "*gave him the title of 'Earl'*" (AT: 139).

[41] Cf. *OS* ch. 5 *Sigurðr jarl gerðisk hǫfðingi mikill* (FG: 8); *Earl Sigurd became a mighty chief* (AT: 139). Cf. FG: 8 n. 8 for the version in *Landnámabók* where Þorsteinn rauðr, Sigurðr's companion, is a *konungr*. Cf. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson in the present volume for *hǫfðingi* used most frequently for the Icelandic chieftains and the earls of Orkney, although as a wider term it could refer to anybody from a leader of slaves to a king or God.

[42] While *Haralds saga hárfagra* strives to show that King Haraldr set up earls in various parts of Norway in the 9th century, this may represent 13th century attitudes. The pre-medieval relationship jarl-konungr is unclear and requires further research. In *OS*, Rǫgnvaldr is a *jarl* before he gets Møre and Romsdal from Haraldr. In some

of *Orkneyinga saga* could easily account for different ideologies in the present text. On the other hand, it cannot be excluded either that, yet again, a certain ambiguity had been intended: that *jarlar* are clearly inferior and dependent with regard to kings, but that this may not always have been the case in the past.

1.5. *Orcadian elements?*

Until now, the origin story has been discussed in its usual, Scandinavian, context. However, a fact apparently accepted as natural merits some attention: the origin story of the earls of Orkney includes nothing Orcadian at all. No attempt whatsoever is made to link the earls with Orkney, for example via fosterage with an Orcadian (mythical?) family, or via intermarriage with an Orcadian woman (goddess, heiress),[43] similar to the conquest-and-immigration myths of the Scandinavian kings to Scandinavia. As discussed above, we hear much about Nordic ancestors, but nothing about an Orcadian population or their rulers. Since this cannot be due to ignorance about these matters in a twelfth to fourteenth century Scandinavian context,[44] it must be intentional.

One reason for omitting anything Insular in the origin story may have been the need to underline that Orkney belonged to the Scandinavian sphere and not to the Scottish one, during the years before 1266. As already mentioned, the Scottish crown's influence in the far north had been growing for some time; Scottish kings—as *Orkneyinga saga* admits—more and more frequently gave members of the Orcadian dynasty the title of earl for Caithness; and there were serious clashes in

---

sources *jarl* seems to signify warrior, hero, noble man, prince, ruler, and (only later?) king's official. Cf. for the etymology and the status of *jarl* also Spurkland 2005: 50–51: "proto-Scandinavian *erilaR/irilaR* has also been linked to the word *jarl*…", first possibly meaning "rune-magician […] later 'rune-master in the sense of 'learned'.", denoting members of a secular upper class, an interpretation particularly interesting with regard to *OS*'s description of the poetic and rune-carving Earl Rǫgnvaldr Kolsson (below, 5.). *Konungr* is usually seen as 'son of a noble man', '*ættling*', based on *Rígsþula* (which poses problems of its own). There, *jarl* is the highest ranking son (the others in descending order are *Karl* and *Þræll*). *Jarl* marries Erna, daughter of *Hersir*, and their son is called *Konr*, or *Konr ungr*: So "king" the son of "earl" would turn the medieval view upside down—but "king" eventually outdoes his father, "earl", cf. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson in the present volume. Discussion also Bagge 2000, overview KLNM 7: 559–566 sub *jarl*; KLNM 9: 1–20 sub *konge*, Sundqvist in the present volume.

[43] Cf. above fn. 26 for the very male Orkney genealogy.

[44] *Historia Norwegie* ch. 6 describes *papae* and *peti, papar* and Picts. Overview Thomson 2008: 1–23, Gourlay 1995: 111–119.

the ecclesiastical sphere.[45] By eschewing any genealogical links whatsoever between the rulers and Orkney itself *Orkneyinga saga* underlines in the strongest possible way that Scandinavian rule meant a new beginning, a complete break with what might have been before, which is so irrelevant that it is not even mentioned. Orkney's rulers deal with, but have no common origins with Scotland.

Stressing the links between Orkney and northern Scandinavia and Norway would vindicate King Sverrir's re-organisation of the earldom in 1195, and please the Norwegian crown under Kings Ingi Bárðarson (1204–1217) and Hákon Hákonarson (1217–1263), who both conducted an active policy in the west. While Hákon's increasing involvement from Orkney to Man from the later 1220s until 1263 is well-known, Ingi's activities have been somewhat overlooked. Between 1208 and 1211 Ingi was in contact with both the Orkney earls and bishop, and the Manx kings and bishop-elect. He reminded Earls Jón and Davíð Haraldsson of Sverrir's terms, and he received the submission and tribute of King Rǫgnvaldr Guðrǫðarson and his son Guðrǫðr. The fact that Ingi turned his attention to matters in the west as soon as the treaty of Hvitingsøy in 1208 had reconciled the two warring factions in Norway and thus given him the necessary leeway, shows how serious also this king took Norway's relations with western Norse rulers.[46] A Saga which underlined Orkney's Norwegian links could thus have been known, and would have been very welcome at Ingi's and Hákon's courts. Yet stressing the greatness of the Norwegian kingdom by underlining the extent of its dominions could also be seen in the context of the later fourteenth century, when the Norwegian crown was in crisis because of the death of King Óláfr Hákonarson, last descendant in the male line of the Norwegian royal dynasty. In 1387 therefore, Margareta of Denmark's rule was looming, an unwelcome prospect for the Icelanders. Would the inclusion of *Orkneyinga saga*

[45] Discussion Crawford 1995b.

[46] *Bǫglunga Sǫgur* ii: 120–1, trsl. *Early Sources of Scottish History* ii: 380, 381. Cf. for Ingi Bárðarson Beuermann 2008a: 23–50; for the latter Beuermann 2007: 324–367. Also *OS*'s geography is that of the 13th century: there are no 9th century Northumbrians, Danes in the Danelaw, no Anglo-Saxons, no Strathclyde-British, no Picts or Gaels. Instead we find the medieval kingdoms of *Englalǫnd, Skotalǫnd, Nóregr, Danmǫrk, Írland*.

into *Flateyarbók* at that time contribute to making this manuscript a work against Danish and female rule?[47]

This discussion underlined that "origin stories had a more than antiquarian interest because they embodied and encouraged views about the equality or subservience and the friendship or enmity of peoples and their royal dynasties".[48] A look at the origin story in *Orkneyinga saga* yields a mixed result in this context. The exclusively Nordic origin myth seems to proclaim that the earls of Orkney are equal to and independent of the kings of Norway, in fact, that they are more 'Norwegian' than the kings of Norway. On the other hand the descent from a giant is not only native; it may also be less noble than descent from a god. Yet again, the theme of equality and independence with regard to the kings of Norway reappears with the model of conquest and immigration. The mythological ancestors of the Orkney earls are warriors-turned-rulers on a par with the Norwegian kings. Matters are however less clear for the historical ancestors, where conquest and immigration are to a certain extent split, denying independence and equality to the Orkney earls. Their dependent and lower status is also clearly stated in the creation of Sigurðr *jarl* by King Haraldr hárfagri. But in the sphere of titles, in turn, a *jarl* may not always have been dependent and lower than a *konungr*, and we find the latter in the Orkney earls' genealogy as well. On balance, it appears that in the parts referring to pre-historic events the position of the Orkney earls is loftier than in the more historic parts. The latter may be due to Snorri's revisions.

2. *From ancestor to progenitor: Earls Sigurðr and Einarr*

The theme of (in)equality and (in)dependence shall be further analysed concerning the death of the last ancestor, and the attributes of the progenitor proper, of the earls of Orkney.

2.1. *Máel Brigte's tooth*

Earl Sigurðr's establishment in Orkney has been discussed above. What is of interest here is his death. Sigurðr is probably most commonly

[47] Cf. Tomany 2007: 84, 166. Cf. Ashman Rowe 2000, 2005 for the connection between the Norwegian crisis and *Flateyarbók*.
[48] Sims-Williams 1985: 102.

remembered for his somewhat embarrassing demise. After a victorious battle in which he killed his adversary Earl Máel Brigte, Earl Sigurðr was riding home, with Máel Brigte's head strapped onto his saddle. "*þá vildi Sigurðr keyra hestinn við fœti sínum, ok lýstr hann kálfanum á tǫnnina, er skagði ór hǫfði Melbrikta, ok skeindisk; ok í þat sár laust verkjum ok þrota, ok leiddi þat til bana; ok er Sigurðr inn ríki heygðr á Ekkjalsbakka.*"[49] After introducing him in the first sentence of the chapter with "*Sigurðr jarl gerðisk hǫfðingi mikill*",[50] these two short, laconic sentences about the really rather silly death of the mighty first earl of Orkney destroy any impression of a noble, powerful ruler that the reader might have had.

It has been discussed whether this is a Scandinavian, or rather an Irish element in *Orkneyinga saga*. Severing heads of slain enemies and showing them as proof one one's own achievements was common amongst Celtic peoples, also in northern Britain.[51] Almqvist then argued that the particular motif where the head of the enemy avenges its former bearer recalls the Old Irish story about King Conchobar Mac Nessa who died through the conserved brain of a slain enemy. Almqvist concludes "One need not assume that the tale about Mesgegra's brain is the direct source for the Máel Brigte episode in *Orkneyinga saga*, but some such Gaelic story, perhaps in a more primitive form and without the hagiographic ingredients, seems likely to lie behind it."[52] But the question of whether this episode in *Orkneyinga saga* (also[53]) shows Irish influence or not can remain open: wherever the story

---

[49] *OS* ch. 5 (FG: 9); "*tried to spur on his horse with his foot, and he knocked his calf against the tusk which stuck out from Maelbrigte's mouth, so that the skin was broken. The sore grew into a painful swelling, so that he got his death of it. And Sigurðr the Mighty is buried in a barrow on the banks of the Oykell.*" (AT: 139–40); HP/PE: 27–28 have a more "racy" translation: Sigurðr "*went to spur his horse, he struck his calf against a tooth sticking out of Maelbrigte's mouth and it gave him a scratch. The wound began to swell and ache, and it was this that led to the death of Sigurd the Powerful.*" The (dis)qualification "racy" is Crawford's 1979: 194. Taylor's translation is closer to the original and more formal, although Hollander 1940/1: 228 also criticised him for colloquialisms. Gaelic (and Christian) Máel Brigte means "follower of St Bridget".

[50] *OS* ch. 5 (FG: 8); "*Earl Sigurd became a mighty chief*" (AT: 139).

[51] For Ireland see the entries in the *Annals of Ulster* s.a. 865, 926, 933, for northern Scotland the severed heads on the 9th–10th c Sueno's Stone in Moray. Skene argued that Sueno's Stone actually depicts the battle between Sigurðr and Máel Brigte; more recently however the Pictish-Gaelic struggle has been has been proposed. Cf. Sellar 1993, Jackson 1993.

[52] Almqvist 1978–81: 99. Discussion of whole episode 97–99, with further references.

[53] For another possible Irish element in *OS* cf. above 1.1. on Hlér/Manannán mac Lir.

comes from, we are still left with the fact that it has been chosen to be included in *Orkneyinga saga*. Earl Sigurðr *inn ríki* is presented as dying a silly death.

So far, we are on safe ground. But if we now put *Orkneyinga saga*'s description of Sigurðr's death into a Scandinavian context we enter a research debate which has recently been infused with new controversial ideas. Gro Steinsland underlines that in Nordic mythology rulers are subject to a specific and unusual fate, one element of which is that they frequently die a dramatic honourless death.[54] The clearest examples are found in the skaldic poem *Ynglingatal*, now incorporated into Snorri Sturluson's first Kings' Saga of *Heimskringla*, *Ynglingasaga*. Viewed in the light of Steinsland's model, the description of Sigurðr's death in *Orkneyinga saga* could therefore express that Sigurðr is a proper ruler who follows the Nordic pattern, or, in more politico-ideological terms, a ruler on a par with the *Ynglingatal*-kings, and with their descendants, the kings of Norway. However, Bergsveinn Birgisson has recently argued convincingly that *Ynglingatal* was neither composed as a genealogy of any Ynglingar or Norwegian kings, nor that it is a praise-poem: on the contrary, while not fully *níð*, the poem is certainly derisory, especially regarding the deaths of the numerous kings.[55] With this, *Ynglingatal* can no longer serve as unequivocal evidence for underlining the ruler's special status through his special death. And in particular here, *Ynglingatal* cannot be used to support an interpretation of *Orkneyinga saga* that Sigurðr's death was in the mould of a proper Nordic ruler.

Nevertheless, it would be premature to discard this interpretation completely at this stage. This is because of the meaning which *Ynglingasaga*—that is, Snorri in the 1230s—gives to the material. Unfortunately though, Snorri's full intentions are debated.[56] What is safe to say is that Snorri presents a genealogy of *Ynglingar*-rulers, ancestors of the Norwegian kings. But did he realise that he was using a derisory poem? If so, did he think to adapt its meaning, especially regarding the deaths in line with Norse mythology, re-interpreting the descriptions of ignoble deaths as appropriate rulers' demises? If one assumes all this, or if one assumes that Snorri simply did not see any

[54] Steinsland 1991, 2000.
[55] Bergsveinn Birgisson 2008.
[56] Most recently at a special *Ynglingatal* seminar at the University of Oslo, 12.12.2008, discussing newest points of research.

derision in *Ynglingatal*, then the poem in its *Ynglingasaga*-wrapping may still proclaim that the appropriate death for a ruler in Norse mythology is dramatic and honourless. And then Sigurðr's death in *Orkneyinga saga* may be modelled on this, Snorri's, pattern. On the other hand, Sigurðr's death could also not follow any noble mythological pattern of Snorri's—if Snorri was aware of the derision in *Ynglingatal* and incorporated it knowingly in *Ynglingasaga*. (Then historians and philologists would also face the interesting possibility that the very first saga of *Heimskringla*, the praise-work on the Norwegian kings, pokes fun at them.)

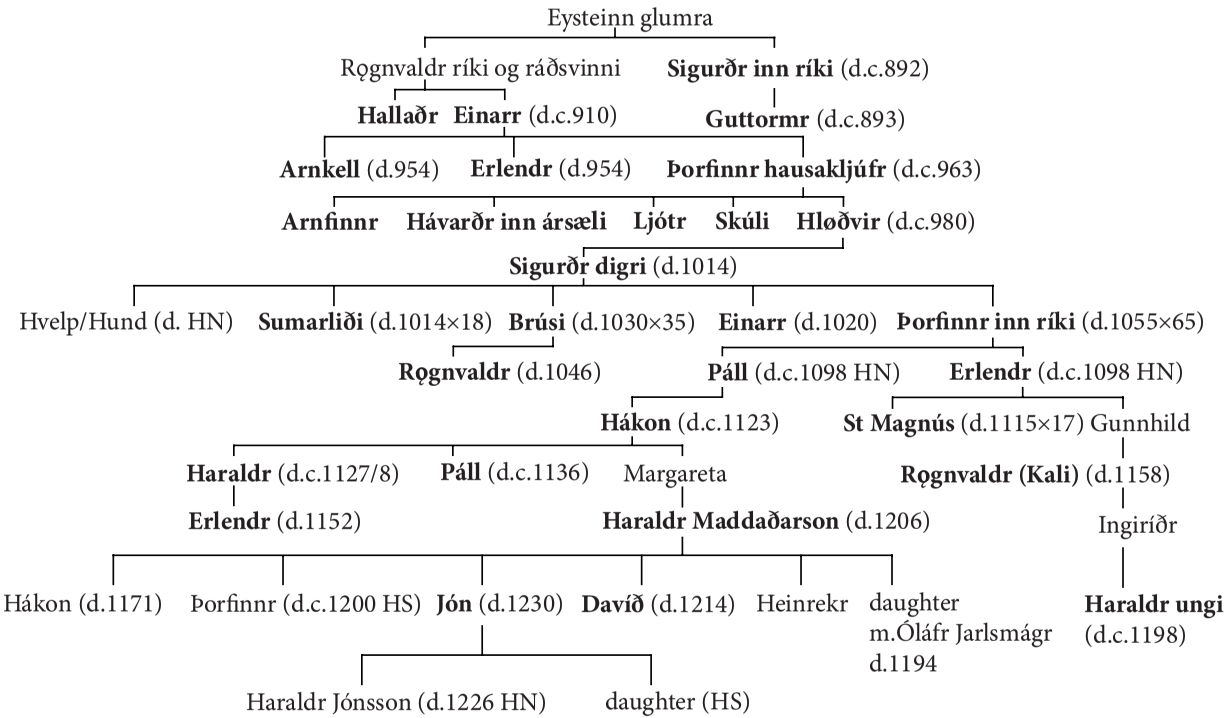
In short, while it cannot be excluded that the description of Sigurðr's death in *Orkneyinga saga* was meant to show him as a classic ruler of Norse legend who died an ignoble death (albeit *not* based on *Ynglingatal*), this reading is far from well-supported. If one does not take the episode as simply a good story, then rather than proving equal status with the Norwegian kings, Sigurðr's death through blood-poisoning after a tooth of Máel Brigte's severed head scratched him could just as well criticise the Orkney earl. Sigurðr died in this way when he was conquering, and because he adopted a foreign custom. If one searches for ideological meaning in this episode, an earl (rather than a king, see above) who conquers, and a Scandinavian who behaves like a Celt (cutting off heads) may be shown to suffer his just reward.[57]

2.2. *The son of a slave*

After Earl Sigurðr's demise misfortune dogs the line (Fig. 2), before the Orkney Islands finally received another earl, if in a rather inauspicious way. Earl Rǫgnvaldr apparently faced a difficult task when he had to decide which of his remaining sons should take up the challenge. Rǫgnvaldr's eldest son, Hrólfr, was gone on viking expeditions—he was to earn lasting fame by conquering Normandy—and Rǫgnvaldr's second son, Ívarr, was dead. To his third son, Þórir þegjandi, Rǫgnvaldr said "*hér mun þinn þroski mestr, ok liggja vegir þínir eigi heðan*",[58] and Rǫgnvaldr also discouraged his illegitimate son Hrollaugr "*Eigi mun*

[57] I am grateful to Jan Erik Rekdal for suggesting the second possibility.

[58] Þórir þegjandi, the silent. *OS* ch. 6 (FG: 10); "*here at home will be the most honourable career for thee. Thy path lies not abroad*" (AT: 140).



bold: earls of Orkley; HN: hostage in Norway; HS: hostage in Scotland

Figure 2. Earls of Orkney: Rǫgnvaldr and Sigurðr—Jón and Davíð, *Orkneyinga saga.*

þér jarldóms auðit, ok liggja fylgjur þínar til Íslands".[59] Then Einarr, Rǫgnvaldr's youngest son asked: "'*Villtu, at ek fara til eyjanna? Ek mun því heita, er þér mun mest veitt í þykkja, at ek mun aldrigi aptr koma þér í augsýn; á ek ok við lítit gott hér at skiljask, ok ørvænt um, at minn þroski verði annars staðar minni en hér.' Jarl segir: 'Ólíkligr ertu til hǫfðingja fyrir sakar móður þinnar, því at hon er í allar ættir prælborin, en satt er þat, at því betr þætti mér, er þú ferr fyrr á braut ok kemr seinna aptr.'*"[60] After this kind exchange between father and son, Einarr leaves for Orkney. Are we now to understand that Orkney got the least promising of Rǫgnvaldr's sons?

One interpretation of the episode is that earl Rǫgnvaldr was reluctant to hand over real power to those of his sons who showed too much initiative.[61] Hence, he favours the younger Þórir as his successor in Møre, and the older and more dangerous Hrólfr embarks on an overseas career in Normandy. Of the illegitimate sons, the disqualified Hallaðr would not pose any threat to his father; neither would Hrollaugr whose future lies in farming, eventually indeed in Iceland. This leaves Einarr the troublemaker. What better solution than to send him abroad as well, on a mission that provides an outlet for his warlike temper, but where his likely failure would not do any lasting harm.

However, one should be careful with taking at face-value the father-son conversation in the Saga, as well as with accepting that Rǫgnvaldr despised his youngest son Einarr, as the descendant of a slave-mother. An entirely different interpretation sees this conversation as a provocation-scene. Usually, in Old Norse literature, women and old men provoke young men to avenge the death of a kinsman, or to make them restore social order, especially when the family honour is sullied. The

---

[59] *OS* ch. 6 (FG: 10); "*This earldom will not fall to thy lot, for thy guardian spirits point towards Iceland.*" (AT: 140).

[60] *OS* ch. 6 (FG: 10, 11); "'*Wilt thou that I go to the Isles? I shall promise thee—what must seem to thee the most fitting service I can do thee—that I shall never again come in thy sight; for here I have little luck to lose; and it is unlikely that my career elsewhere will be less honourable than here'. The earl said, 'Unlikely art thou to become a great chief by reason of thy mother; for she was thrall-born in all her forebears. Indeed it seems to me that the farther away thou farest and the longer thou stayest the better.'*" (AT: 140). The story is also recorded in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 27, which uses *OS*, and in *Landnámabók* (*Sturlubók* ch. 309, *Hauksbók* ch. 270), apparently based on an older form of *OS*, cf. Mundal 1995: 248–9. Einarr has the byname *Torf*, traditionally because he supposedly taught the Orcadians use peat for fuel, FG: 11 n. 2. Cf. for the byname rather commemorating his territorial gains in the south Cheape 1984: 210; Crawford 1986: 33–46.

[61] *OS* introduction HP/PE: 13.

actual provocation lies in the—unfounded—accusation of not behaving as is expected of an honourable man. The scene involving Rǫgnvaldr and Einarr partly differs from this standard set-up in that Rǫgnvaldr provokes his son by reminding him of a fact, his descent from a slave-mother. But it also contains the classic element, the reproach that Einarr would not behave as befits an honourable man, but would only act like the son of a slave. The "*ólíkligr ertu til hǫfðingja*", Rǫgnvaldr's unfriendly words to his son, should therefore not be taken literally, but as the "sort of provocation which women and old men in Old Norse society were entitled to use in order to make their sons act according to the standards of honour".[62] This means for the Orkney earls succeeding Einarr—for he of course proves to be perfectly able to gain and hold the earldom—that in Rǫgnvaldr's eyes Einarr's descent from a slave-mother provided an effective lever to spur him on to great deeds, and that it need not be seen as a lasting stain on their family honour.

At least that, for one might push the interpretation further: "In literature a provocation is usually directed to the most promising of the men in question, where there is most hope for a positive response. Such a provocation in fact proves that the person who provokes has faith in the young man in spite of what he or she says."[63] Einarr not as the least, but as the most promising of Rǫgnvaldr's sons—what else could he claim to recommend himself, apart from the legend-worthy fact of being the youngest? It is in fact Einarr's very descent that might single him out, but in a positive way.

It seems to have been not only acceptable but even desirable to have a slave-mother if the father belonged to a princely house. Þóra, mother of the Norwegian king Hákon inn góði (943–961), is called "*konungs ambátt*", "the king's slave", although she was probably not slave-born at all. Snorri explains that even women of good family were called *konungs ambátt*.[64] Apparently, in Old Norse society an alliance between a man of princely family and a slave woman was not only acceptable; on the contrary, it might even be a lucky combination for the ensuing offspring. This runs counter to the general rule of equal social status

---

[62] Mundal 1995: 248. Cf. for women egging men to act Jochens 1998.

[63] Mundal 1995: 250, following Steinsland 1991.

[64] *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 37; cf. Mundal 1995: 250. Hollander translated "*konungs ambátt*" as "the king's handmaid", with the explanation "There were many at that time who did service at the king's court, even though they were of noble birth, both men and women." *Heimskringla* Hollander: 91.

of husband and wife, where the union of free or high-born man and slave woman would have constituted a serious misalliance—as far as the general population is concerned. Here, however, we consider royal families. And in Old Norse mythology, the prototype of a king descends from opposite parties. As Steinsland pointed out, the royal founding-father stems from the mythic alliance of opposites, the *hieros gamos* between god and giantess. This union of opposites is continued when the royal descendants marry slave-women; the offspring of these alliances is born to rule.[65]

And alone among Rǫgnvaldr's sons it is Einarr who meets this criterion. He is the born ruler. Moreover, it is only fitting that he is introduced in such a dramatic way, and that he quickly makes a name for himself, for Einarr is of course the real ancestor of the Orkney earls. His uncle Sigurðr's line had died out. The Saga of the earls of Orkney proper begins with Einarr, a man destined to be ruler.

Orkneyinga saga can now not resist a side-swipe at the Norwegian royal house: Hálfdan háleggr, son of king Haraldr hárfagri, together with his brother Guðrøðr ljómi, kills Einarr's father Rǫgnvaldr.[66] Afterwards Hálfdan flees, of all places, to Orkney.[67] Einarr can now be shown to conform completely to society's demands of honourable behaviour: he kills Hálfdan, avenging his father's death. Some very derisive skaldic verses about his brothers' failure to do so are composed to praise Einarr's model behaviour.[68] Thus again Einarr is presented as the leading one among his brothers, underlining that he is the most promising of Rǫgnvaldr's sons.

---

[65] For *hieros gamos* and the ideology of kingship Steinsland in this volume and 1991, 2000; discussion of *jafrœði* Mundal 1995: 250, 251. Thomson 2008: 30–1 sees these chapters as establishing Einarr's status in a different way. He accepts the Saga's claim that Rǫgnvaldr did not think highly of Einarr. In Thomson's view this, together with the descent from a slave, serves the purpose of allowing Einarr to be depicted as a self-made-man, "owing nothing to anyone". Thomson then (mis)applies Steinsland's model of the prototype of a new ruler born of opposites, to solve the problem of how Einarr can be dependent and independent of the Norwegian king at the same time.

[66] *OS* ch. 8.

[67] In *OS*, Haraldr hárfagri does not condone his sons' behaviour, and Hálfdan háleggr flees his wrath. Guðrøðr ljómi surrendered to his father, and Haraldr hárfagri compensates Þórir son of Rǫgnvaldr with his daughter Alof and the title 'earl', *OS* ch. 8.

[68] *OS* ch. 8., Mundal 1995: 252–255. Since Þórir, Einarr's brother and successor to Møre, had married Haraldr's daughter, he could not take revenge. Poole 1991: 161–172 for an analysis of the poetry on Einarr, concluding that the verses were not composed by Einarr himself.

With regard to the royal house of Norway, Einarr's attitude is arrogant, to the point of being abusive. It is now that the famous incident of blood-eagling is described in *Orkneyinga saga*. The Saga claims that Einarr "*lét Einarr rísta ǫrná baki honum með sverði ok skera rifin ǫll frá hrygginum ok draga þar út lungun ok gaf hann Óðni til sigrs sér.*"[69] Else Mundal commented that this ceremonial killing of Hálfdan's "must have been an even greater provocation to the victim's family than an ordinary killing."[70] We should read this comment not as referring to the historical accuracy of events, but to their depiction in the Saga. The important point is that *Orkneyinga saga* describes the Orkney Earl Einarr as sacrificing King Haraldr's son Hálfdan to Óðinn.[71] In fact, the whole encounter between earl and king's son had been used to deride Hálfdan: after Einarr's victory in the sea-battle, we are given to understand that Hálfdan spent the whole night hiding from his enemies, since *Orkneyinga saga* records that the next morning Einarr and his men looked for Hálfdan, until Einarr says: "*'Eigi veit ek, hvat ek sé í Rínansey, hefsk stundum upp, en stundum leggsk nídr; annathvárt er þat fogl eða maðr'* […] *Þar fundu þeir Hálfdan hálegg*".[72] When Einarr then picks up Hálfdan, he refers to him not by his usual nickname, *háleggr*, but he uses the feminine form of this "long-legs", *háfœta*. Olsen discusses this form as a common name for a sheep, or even worse, a goat. According to Old Norse custom, such usage is "det rene nid".[73] This verbal insult is connected to Hálfdan's "burial": after Hálfdan's death, Einarr asks his men to throw stones at his body. Olsen points out, that burial under a heap of stones was a quick and indifferent way of getting rid of unwanted bodies, for example of men having committed suicide, or of worthless animal carcasses like those of goats.[74] The Saga combines this ultimate humiliation of

---

[69] *OS* ch. 8 (FG: 13); "*carved the bloody eagle on his back by laying his sword in the hollow at the backbone and hacking all the ribs from the backbone down to the loins, and drawing out the lungs; and he gave him to Odin as an offering for his victory.*" (AT: 142).

[70] Mundal 1995: 252–255.

[71] In Mundal's view, 1995: 257, in order to get Óðinn's help for the next step in the attack, on someone higher than Hálfdan—the king himself.

[72] *OS* ch. 8 (FG: 12, 13); "*I see something or other on North Ronaldsay, now standing up, and now lying down. It is either a bird or a man, and we shall go to it. There they found Halfdan Long-legs.*" (AT: 142).

[73] Olsen 1942a: 40–4 (quote at 40. "pure *níð*"); Olsen 1938 [1936]: 192; Olsen: 1942b: 152. For *níð* in general Meulengracht Sørensen 1980.

[74] Olsen 1942a: 40–4.

Hálfdan's with a political message. In the skaldic verse composed to commemorate the story Einarr calls the stones they throw at Hálfdan *harðan skatt*, "hard taxes".[75] It is possible that Hálfdan was claiming taxes from Rǫgnvaldr of Møre and from Einarr earl of Orkney. This would then have been a right which Einarr categorically denied to the son of the king of Norway.[76]

Lastly, *Orkneyinga saga* enhances Einarr's status through his association with Óðinn. While, as discussed above, Óðinn is conspicuously absent in the origin myth, he appears forcefully with the person of Einarr. Already his very name may hint at Óðinn's warriors, the *einherjar*.[77] "*Einarr var mikill maðr ok ljótr, einsýnn ok þó manna skyggnstr*" then runs the Saga's description;[78] recalling Óðinn's offer of one eye in return for wisdom. And as just discussed, it is Einarr who spots Hálfdan Haraldsson; the Saga lets Einarr compose poetry, and lets him make the gift of the blood-eagled Hálfdan to Óðinn. Olsen points to another possible element connected to wolves—Óðinn's animals—when he analyses the threatening verses directed against King Haraldr by Earl Rǫgnvaldr's wife (Ragn)Hildr in defence of her son Hrólfr, Einarr's half-brother. Hildr warns King Haraldr that it is dangerous to bare wolf's teeth against another wolf: "*Illt 's við ulf at ulfask, * Yggr valbrikar, slikan*", which Olsen sees as a reference to Ragnarǫk, where Óðinn dies fighting the wolf Fenrir. Olsen then fits Einarr into this category of dangerous and vengeful wolves when Einarr's verse boasts that he has hacked into the king's shield like an *úlfheðinn*, an Óðinn's

---

[75] *OS* ch. 8 (FG: 15).

[76] Cf. Mundal 1995: 255. Einarr does in the end pay taxes to *Haraldr*—i.e., only to the king, but not to a son of his. Cf. *OS* chs. 7, 8 for Einarr paying the fine or tax due to Haraldr hárfagri, thereby acquiring the odal rights of all Orcadians. The significance of this passage reminiscent of Haraldr hárfagri's supposed claims in Norway is doubtful, cf. Imsen 2000: 176. Thomson 2008: 34–5 reads it to mean "that whatever Harald Fairhair could do in Norway, Torf Einar was powerful enough to do in Orkney.…a story designed to enhance Torf Einar's status by likening him to the Norwegian king", and points to a possible historical context: Earl Rǫgnvaldr Kolsson's taxation for the building of St Magnús Cathedral in Kirkwall in the 1130s.

[77] *Einarr* with the elements *ein* "one" and *arr* "warrior/army" derives from **ainaharja*, with the same etymology as *einheri* sg., *einherjar* pl. "he/they who belong to one and the same army", *Svensk Etymologisk Ordbok* http://runeberg.org/svetym/0203.html. Cf. Schjødt in this volume for Óðinn and his warriors: the *einherjar*, an army of the dead, and their human or cultic equivalents, the *úlfheðnar* and *berserkir*. Poole 2009 for Irish influences on the ideology of rulership connected to Einarr.

[78] *OS* ch. 7 (FG: 11); "*Einarr was a tall man and ugly, one-eyed, yet of all men the most keen-sighted*" (AT: 141).

warrior. Einarr "har som en *ulfheðinn* hugget i skjold, i *kongens skjold*, da han felte Háfœta og utførte det som Hild på Rolvs vegne bare hadde truet med".[79] In various places in the saga, Einarr, the first real earl of Orkney, is an Óðinn-like figure.

The question is how being an Óðinn-like figure compares to the Norwegian kings who are said to *descend* from Óðinn. On balance, I would argue that Einarr's *association* with Óðinn in the specific Saga-context is intended as a warning to King Haraldr not to meddle with Orkney. It also makes up for the one missing element conferring status in the origin myth: the link to a god. In this way, *Orkneyinga saga* proclaims the independence of the earls via the specific origin myth, yet still adds the prestige of a connection with Óðinn father of the gods in the next appropriate place.

In sum, Einarr's descent and deeds—Sigurðr's death less so—seem to weigh in heavily on the side of an Orcadian ideology of equality and independence vis-à-vis the Norwegian kings. *Orkneyinga saga* depicts Earl Einarr as the perfect ruler. He assumes control in the Orkney Islands, and rises to the challenge posed by Hálfdan son of King Haraldr hárfagri, repelling the latter's claims to taxes and superiority. According to the Saga, the Óðinn-like Einarr is the worthy progenitor of the new ruling house of Orkney who refutes Norwegian claims.

3. *Earls and kings in conflicts*

The description of twelfth century events makes up the bulk of *Orkneyinga saga*. Chapters 1 to 43 take the reader from the mythical beginnings and the first three hundred years of Norse Orkney to the death of King Magnús berfœttr during his expedition to the British Isles in 1103. The rest of the Saga, chapters 44 to 112, deals with the following one hundred years only, with the rivalry between the two lines of the family stemming from the two sons of Earl Þorfinnr *inn ríki*, Páll and Erlendr, in the course of which Orkney got its saint, Magnús Erlendsson, around 1116. A large part of the Saga recounts the reign of Rǫgnvaldr Kolsson and the exploits of Sveinn Ásleifarson.

[79] "*It is dangerous against such a wolf to show a wolf's tooth, oh shield of Yggr*". *Shield of Yggr* (Óðinn) denotes Haraldr. Olsen 1942a: 1–4 with further references. quote at 1. (Einarr "hewed like an *ulfheðinn* into the shield, the king's shield, when he killed Háfœta. He thereby did what Hild in Rolv's name had merely threatened.")

Finally, the Saga finishes with events from the latter days of Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson's reign—he died in 1206. This chapter shall focus on one aspect of the conflicts described at such length in *Orkneyinga saga*: the role of the Norwegian kings during the disputes of the earls of Orkney.

3.1. *King Óláfr Haraldsson and Earls Þorfinnr* inn ríki *and Brúsi*

In the eleventh century, Earl Þorfinnr *inn ríki* (1014–*c.*1055x65) gained sole rule over Orkney only after a long struggle against his half-brothers Einarr and Brúsi and his nephew Rǫgnvaldr Brúsason. During the conflict, Brúsi turned to King, later Saint, Óláfr Haraldsson, for support. According to the Saga, the king duly exploited the situation, claiming that since Haraldr hárfagri's days the earls had had Orkney "*í lén, en aldri at eign*'". If Brúsi wanted help; indeed if he did not want Óláfr to take over all of Orkney himself, he had to accept being Óláfr's man (*maðr*) and holding Orkney in fee (*lén*) from him.[80] Brúsi's opponent Earl Þorfinnr did not want to lose out, followed Brúsi hard on his heels to Norway and ran into the same trap. Although the Saga depicts Þorfinnr as defending more strongly against King Óláfr's wishes, claiming the competing rights of the king of Scots, and his young age and inability to decide such matters without consulting people in Orkney, Þorfinnr was also forced to accede to King Óláfr's demands.[81]

This is as dramatic as it is classic: Addressing King Óláfr for help, the two competing earls find themselves turned from independent princes into subservient vassals, outmanoeuvred by a shrewd king who grants them in fee (*i len*, a non-heritable fief in the gift of the king) the lands they previously seem to have held as their ancestral property (*eign*, heritable property of their own).[82] However *Orkneyinga saga* explains this, it also proclaims to everyone that King Óláfr took full control of Orkney and then gracefully re-granted part of it (Þorfinnr did not get all he wanted) back to the earls. What should we make of this account of the Saga?

Firstly, we can attempt to judge the historical trustworthiness of Orkney's submission. Earl Þorfinnr had already some time before paid a visit to King Óláfr, which is described in different terms: Óláfr sent a

[80] "*in fief but never in absolute ownership*", *OS* ch. 17 (FG: 36) (AT: 157–8).
[81] *OS* ch. 18.
[82] *OS* ch. 19. Cf. AT's comments (AT: 359 n. 1, 2).

ship to Orkney inviting Þorfinnr to Norway, and promising his friendship (*vináttumál*). Þorfinnr sailed immediately, stayed the whole summer, and upon his return to Orkney "*gaf Óláfr konungr honum langskip mikitt og gott með ǫllum reiða.* […] *Skilðusk þeir konungr ok jarl inir beztu vinir með miklum kærleikum.*"[83] Regarding the language, this is a much more fitting description of an earl becoming the "friend"—follower—of a Norwegian king in the early eleventh century than the talk about fiefs and vassals in the other episode. The account of King Óláfr's judgement concerning Brúsi and Þorfinnr has therefore been criticised for applying the concepts of developed feudalism on a pre-feudal age when relationships were less formalised.[84] But is there some truth in *Orkneyinga saga*'s record of the terms of the agreement, in their contents if not their language? Norwegian kings in the eleventh century were in no position to exercise direct rule in Orkney—which can be seen from the fact that king Óláfr immediately entrusted the third of the earldom that he had initially claimed as forfeit to the crown, to the more pliable of the two earls, Brúsi. Lastly however, Earl Þorfinnr managed to gain two thirds of the earldom by relieving the less warlike Brúsi of the obligation of defence. This, obviously, ran completely counter to King Óláfr's arrangements. On the other hand it might be significant that this ultimate reversal of the king's judgement was only possible with Óláfr's exile and death in 1030. In short, historically, King Óláfr may at least have tried to establish Norwegian overlordship over Orkney, and *Orkneyinga saga* may be correct in noting the first visit of Orkney earls to the Norwegian crown.[85]

Orkneyinga saga does two things with this. On the one hand, the Saga clearly shows that Earls Brúsi and Þorfinnr were outmanoeuvred by King Óláfr. Arguably, the readers' and listeners' sympathy is directed towards the Orcadian earls, not towards the Norwegian king. On the other hand, the Orkney earls' submission to King Óláfr is very much underlined, whether in more contemporary eleventh century terms (Þorfinnr accepting the royal gift of a ship, owing friendship in

[83] *OS* chs. 15, 16 (FG: 32–3); "*King Olaf gave him a large and fine warship fully equipped.* […] *The King and the Earl parted on the most friendly terms.*" (AT: 154–5).

[84] Clouston 1932: 38.

[85] *OS* ch. 19, discussion Thomson 2008: 69–75; 71 for a map of possible divisions into thirds, and unlikely ones into sixths. Cf. Smith 1988: 26 for Óláfr's claim that his predecessors had owned the islands being highly unlikely; Crawford 1987: 76, 77 for the 11th century kings of Norway only slowly gaining control over their magnates. The record in the *Islandske Annaler* s.a. 1021 is no independent corroborating evidence.

return), or in anachronistic thirteenth century language (Óláfr granting fiefs in return for Þorfinnr and Brúsi becoming his vassals). Taken together, the impression is that the king's methods may not have been too gentle, but the result of his deeds stands. The chapters as a whole consequently elicit some understanding for the plight of the earls, but mainly flatter the Norwegian crown which was astute enough to profit from a windfall, the earls' quarrel, in order to establish its overlordship of Orkney.

One should however be careful reading the chapters as a whole, as just done. Sigurður Nordal, who examined the various manuscripts of *Orkneyinga saga*, pointed out that "Det billede, man faar af kongen under forhandlingene med jarlerne, stemmer paafaldende godt med den opfattelse af ham, som man har al grund til at tro, at Snorre har været den første til at slaa fast, og some man næppe kan tro, at Orkneyingasagas forfatter har haft. […] Jeg mener saaledes, at Snorres andel i skildringen af jarlernes underkastelse er meget betydelig."[86] In Nordal's view, the lines stressing Orkney's submission to King Óláfr were superimposed by a revisor who followed Snorri, in order to stress King Óláfr's, the *rex perpetuum Norwegie*'s role and rights regarding Orkney. Since this original part of the Saga is lost, we cannot prove anything, but it is a fair guess that it was not quite as outspoken on this matter. It is therefore highly likely that the ideological message of inequality and dependence vis-à-vis Norway was enhanced after the 1230s.

---

[86] Sigurður Nordal 1913: 41; 38–40 for the assumption that *OS* chs. 14–21 are based on *Heimskringla*, but also retain original material (e.g. on Þorkell fóstri). Cf. SN: xlvi: "stykket om Orknøyjarlernes underkastelse under den norske trone som findes næsten ordret overensstemmende i Orkn. s. […] og Hkr., […] var en senere interpolation i sagaen, idet stykket fra Heimskr. havde fortrængt sagaens oprindelige fortælling om disse begivenheder. Under min fortsatte beskæftigelse med sagaen er jeg kun yderlige bleven bestyrket i denne opfattelse…" ("The picture of the king which we get during the negotiations with the earls, corresponds suspiciously well to the image of Óláfr which we quite safely believe Snorri to have established. It is an image which is unlikely to have been shared by the author of *OS*. […] I therefore think that the description of the earls' submission is to a very large extent influenced by Snorri." "The paragraph on the Orkney earls' submission to the Norwegian crown which has almost exactly the same wording in *OS* […] and *Heimskringla* […] is a later interpolation in the Saga: the version of *Heimskringla* has replaced the Saga's original description of these events. My continuing work on the Saga more and more confirms this view.")

3.2. *King Magnús berfœttr and Earl Hákon Pálsson*

In addition to the Saint-King Óláfr Haraldsson in the early eleventh century, *Orkneyinga saga* includes more examples of Norwegian kings intermittently claiming authority over Orkney. Another, arguably even more dramatic one from the beginning of the twelfth century exemplifies which consequences the conflicts of the earls had for their relationship with the Norwegian kings: Earl Hákon Pálsson (*c.* 1103–1123), youthful troublemaker and arch-enemy of his cousin, Earl Magnús Erlendsson (*c.* 1105–1116) was in the interest of peace prevailed upon to leave Orkney for a time.[87] He travelled widely in Sweden and Norway,[88] and eventually received the disturbing news that the Orcadians were not too keen to see him return at all. Determined not to have to yield control of Orkney to his cousin, Hákon turned to King Magnús berfœttr for help.[89] What follows shows the worst-case scenario such an appeal by an earl of Orkney to the Norwegian king might entail. According to *Orkneyinga saga*, Hákon proposed a military expedition, enticing King Magnús with the prospect of plundering in the Hebrides, Ireland and England, and—here the Saga's wording is ambiguous—reminding Magnús of how Haraldr hárfagri had taken control of the "isles" (*Eyjar*—including Orkney?!).[90] Does the Saga insinuate that wily Earl Hákon was no match for a king with the comment "*Hákon var vitr maðr, ok þóttisk hann skilja á rœðum Magnúss konungs, er þeir rœddusk við, at konungr myndi vera stórráðr ok ágjarn á ríki annarra* [!] *høfðingja.*"?[91] There is a warning which makes Hákon wonder whether his encouragement had been wise: "*'en þat skaltu hugsa, Hákon,' segir konungr, 'ef ek geri þetta fyrir orð þín ok áeggjan, at fara með her vestr um haf, at þér skal ekki á óvart koma, þótt ek borak frekan atsúg til ríkja þeira, er liggja verstr þar, ok gera ek at því engan mannamun'.*"[92]

---

[87] *OS* ch. 35.

[88] *OS* chs. 35, 36. *OS* depicts Hákon as a not particularly strict Christian: he consults a pagan Swedish soothsayer to find out about his future, where he is told that he and his descendants shall rule in Orkney. The soothsayer's predictions come true.

[89] *OS* ch. 37.

[90] *OS* ch. 38.

[91] *OS* ch. 38 (FG: 93); "*Hakon was a shrewd fellow and he thought he could read in King Magnus' mind, when he talked to him, that the King was becoming ambitious and eager to attack the realms of other* [!] *chiefs.*" (AT: 197).

[92] *OS* ch. 38 (FG: 94); "'*But this shalt thou remember, Hakon,' says the King, 'that if I do this at thy prompting and persuading and go out west with an army, thou must not be surprised if I lay vigorous claims to realms that lie there in the west and make no distinctions of men in the matter.*'" (AT: 198).

But by then also without any further prodding of Hákon's, things had been set in motion, King Magnús had decided on the expedition. It brought the peaceful joint rule of Hákon's father Earl Páll and Páll's brother Earl Erlendr to an abrupt end. In Orkney, Magnús "*tók* […] *jarla, Pál ok Erlend, ok sendi þá austr til Nóregs, en setti Sigurð, son sinn, yfir Eyjar ok fekk honum ráðuneyti*".[93] Pál and Erlendr's sons, Magnús, Erlingr and also Hákon, had to accompany the king further south to the Irish Sea. *Magnúss saga skemmri* still lets King Magnús declare "*at jarlarnir skyldi aldri hafa ríki í Orkneyjum, meðan hann væri konungr í Nóregi*".[94]

King Magnús berfœttr's expeditions are well attested in many sources, and the basic historicity of these events is not in doubt. Various motives have been proposed for Magnús' two expeditions to the west between 1098 and 1103; and Magnús does in fact deal with several other rulers in the area.[95] Understandably, *Orkneyinga saga* is less interested in these activities. What is interesting in the present context is that *Orkneyinga saga* depicts Orcadian events in a somewhat slanted way. While making plain that King Magnús was warlike and greedy, the Saga lays a great part, if not most of the blame on Earl Hákon. He is the ambitious troublemaker, who cannot accept that his uncle's line rules in Orkney, although the land is at peace, its people

[93] *OS* ch. 39 (FG: 95); "*seized the earls Paul and Erlend, and sent them east to Norway, but set his son Sigurd over the Isles*." (AT: 198–9). This recalls Eiríkr Bloodaxe's final expedition to Orkney in 954, where he collected the earls Arnkell and Erlendr, who were then both killed alongside Eiríkr at the battle of Stainmore. The surviving Norse established themselves in Orkney afterwards. Discussion Crawford 1983: 99.

[94] *Magnúss saga skemmri*, ch. 3, *OS* (FG: 312, 313); "*King Magnus declared that the earls would never rule in Orkney as long as he was King of Norway.*" *Shorter Magnús' Saga*, 23. A chapter which examines the ideology of rulership of Orkney-Sagas does well to consider *Magnúss saga skemmri* (*Shorter Magnús Saga*) and *Magnúss saga lengri* (*Longer Magnús Saga*) together with *OS*. Not only were the *Magnús Sagas* composed during the same period (*Magnúss saga skemmri* in *c.* 1250 and *Magnúss saga lengri* after 1298), we also remain within the same north-west Atlantic cultural zone which produced *OS*. The texts have an Orcadian subject-matter, and while the Saga was revised and possibly also originally compiled in Iceland, the Magnús Sagas were certainly written in Iceland. *Magnúss saga skemmri* 'Texts and Sources': 45, 46, cf. Brunsden 1997: 130, and most recently Phelpstead 2007: 11–15.

[95] Seeing in them simple raiding expeditions, efforts to reaffirm Norwegian control over the Hebrides, the Norse-Irish towns, the northern Welsh coast, and even attempts to destabilise England, the revenge for King Haraldr hardráði's death at Stamford Bridge in 1066 that earl Hákon talks about. King Magnús captured the Manx/Hebridean king, made a treaty with the high-king of Ireland, and interfered in Gwynedd in north Wales, possibly in order to restore Gruffydd ap Cynan as a Norse puppet king, cf. Beuermann 2002a: 37–48.

are happy, and Hákon is not missed at all. He is determined to press his claims to the earldom, and, in the absence of Orcadian support, turns to the king of Norway. It is the rivalry within the ruling family of earls, the failure to come to an acceptable agreement, which opens the door for the Norwegian king to step in, and, in this very dramatic case, to put the Earldom of Orkney under direct Norwegian royal rule, for the first time in its history.

Thus *Orkneyinga saga*—correctly in this case—records Magnús taking control of Orkney. But what the saga-account also stresses is that this is a self-inflicted disaster. If we remember the episode involving Earls Þorfinnr and Brúsi, *Orkneyinga saga* sends a clear message that quarrels between competing co-earls over the division of the islands and the resulting appeals to royal authority make it possible for the kings of Norway to get a foot into the door. And, as both the King Magnús episode and the account of Brúsi's and Þorfinnr's contacts with King Óláfr Haraldsson underline, earls of Orkney on the lookout for an ally might get rather more than they had asked for. The Norwegian king might—in twelfth- and thirteenth-century language—force them to become his vassals, or, worse, replace them with a representative of his, thereby putting Orkney under direct royal control.

In short, the discussion of conflicts shows that the revised version of *Orkneyinga saga* which follows Snorri's *Heimskringla* (according to Sigurður Nordal) underlines the rights of the Norwegian crown in Orkney.[96] But *Orkneyinga saga* also contains a warning that internal strife in north-west Atlantic lands carries the danger of stronger-than-desired Norwegian royal interference. Should this not ring a very loud alarm bell for an Icelandic audience in the first half of the thirteenth century?[97]

4. *Orcadian-Norwegian-Icelandic Christianity*

Also with regard to 'Christianity' there are contradicting ideologies concerning Orcadian (in)equality with and (in)dependence from Norway.

---

[96] Nordal's work on the chapters recounting St Óláfr has been quoted above, 3.1. He concludes that the Saga's account of Magnús expeditions underwent later revisions, also in all likelihood based on *Heimskringla* (Sigurður Nordal 1913: 48–9).

[97] While Icelanders generally showed "no clear-cut hostility to foreign oppression", individual Norwegian kings get a bad press in the sagas, Callow 2004: 331, cf. for Icelanders' attitudes to Norwegian kings also Andersson 1994: 55–78.

4.1. *The conversion*

Orkneyinga saga's depiction of the conversion of Orkney is famous: King Óláfr Tryggvason, himself newly baptised, arrived in Orkney with five warships, and invited Earl Sigurðr Hlǫðvirsson on board. There the King told Earl Sigurðr "*Det er min Vilje, at du skalt lade dig døbe oc det gantske folck som dig tiener, eller skalt du dø strax her, men ieg vil siden drage offuer alle Øerne met Ild oc brand.*"[98] Not surprisingly, Earl Sigurðr agreed, and "*Da bleffue oc alle Øerne christnede*".[99] This supposedly happened while King Óláfr Tryggvason was on his way home to Norway, in 995. *Orkneyinga saga* also recounts the epilogue to this dramatic event: as soon as Sigurðr's son, taken hostage by King Óláfr, had died, Sigurðr renounced the Christian faith, together with his allegiance to Óláfr.[100]

This story of Norse Orkney's conversion is blatantly unhistorical. What is interesting here is that it is not only wrong regarding the manner of conversion, but also regarding the agent. Whenever and however the Norse started settling in Orkney, they encountered native organised Christianity (depicted clearly on the "Pony-Rider Stone" from Papil), which they may not have stamped out immediately, or indeed at all. Historians might still be sceptical about the *Vita Findani*'s claim that Findan, a slave in Orkney, escaped, and found sanctuary with a bishop sometime after the arrival of the Norse yet long before Óláfr Tryggvason, indicating the survival, toleration, or even acceptance of Christians in Norse Orkney. But also archaeology has dented the neat picture of Christian Picts replaced by pagan Norse until the latter's conversion, for example through evidence of continuing Christian stone sculpture after 800 AD, or through finds of Christian and most likely Norse burials long before the appearance of Óláfr Tryggvason.[101]

---

[98] *OS* ch. 12 (FG: 26); "*It is my will that thou have thyself baptised and all those under thee, else thou shalt die on the spot and I shall bear fire and flame through all the Isles.*" (AT: 149).

[99] *OS* ch. 12 (FG: 26); "*Then all the Orkneys became* Christian." (AT: 150).

[100] *OS* ch. 12.

[101] Morris 2004; Owen 2004 for the surprisingly low number of Norse pagan graves; Barrett 2007; outline Thomson 2008: 1–23; esp. 13–22 for Christianity, 50 for Findan. Cf. also Crawford 1983, 1998, 2002, (ed.) 2002, and 2005a; Radford 1978 and 1983. Also an attempt to interpret the Saga's account as referring to the enforcement of Roman Christianity and the eradication of 'Celtic' practices as by de Geer 1985: 76 is misguided. Orcadian Christians in the eighth century also had links with the Romanised Pictish and Northumbrian churches, Lamb 1993: 260–71, Lamb 1998: 41–56, Thomson 2008: 17–19, Morris 2004: 183.

In short, the important point is that contrary to what other sources tell us, in *Orkneyinga saga*'s version, there is no word about *papar*, no stories about native Christian wives or slaves of Norse settlers. In *Orkneyinga saga* Christianity arrives with a Norwegian king.

Yet while the Saga is critical of the forced conversion, Christianity as such is clearly a 'good thing' at the time of composition. Thus, what is attributed to Óláfr Tryggvason is not only the negative manner, but also the positive religious faith, although this is unhistorical, and although this could easily have been presented differently. It seems that care is taken not to link the positive, Christianity, with what it should (also) have been linked with: the British Isles. Would this, similarly to the absence of any Orcadian elements in the genealogy discussed above (1.5.), again point to an ideology which seeks to disown any British factors in Orkney? An ideology that firmly places Orkney in the Scandinavian cultural orbit, to the extent that the earldom also had to share the Scandinavian way of conversion to Christianity?

On the other hand, the Norwegian king is criticised and shown to lose the struggle in the end. The set-up of Earl Sigurðr having to agree to King Óláfr's demands recalls the enforcement of Norwegian overlordship by Óláfr Haraldsson over Earls Þorfinnr and Brúsi, analysed above (3.1.). In Sigurðr's case, however, the king is depicted as employing even more brute power, which is very short-lived. In the text as it stands now this episode may therefore serve as a preparation for the establishment of Norwegian overlordship by Óláfr Haraldsson—or it may be a warning to Norwegian kings not to be too blunt in their methods of coercion.

4.2. *St Magnús*

Orkney's native saint, St Magnús (Earl Magnús Erlendsson, *c.* 1105–1115×17) is the subject of a recent monograph,[102] which does however not say much on the ideological aspects of interest here.

After King Magnús berfœttr's death the Orkney earls regained power and *Orkneyinga saga* notes how rivalry flared up again between Earl Hákon Pálsson and his cousin Earl Magnús Erlendsson. Hákon played false at a peace-meeting, and Magnús was killed. *Orkneyinga saga* describes in detail Magnús' refusal to hide from and defend

[102] Haki Antonsson 2007; cf. idem 2004; 2005a. Cf. also Thomson 2003: 46–64, for ideological questions also Phelpstead 2007: 77–113 and Foote 1988.

against Hákon, his pious last words, how he forgave the cook who was forced to do the deed, how he prayed, and how he received the blow.[103] Magnús' cult was then actively promoted by his nephew Earl Rǫgnvaldr Kolsson, to the great benefit of both.[104]

But created in Orkney, Magnús would come in very useful as an envoy for ideological aims in another part of the Norse world.[105] A glance at the distribution of church dedications to St Magnús reveals some oddities. One notes a very high concentration in Shetland (connected to the political manoeuvres of Earl Rǫgnvaldr's to establish the cult and his rule[106]), and ten dedications in Iceland, but none in Norway.[107] In other words, apparently Magnús' cult did not spread in Norway—although the paternal family of Magnús' nephew Rǫgnvaldr were long-established *lenðrmenn* in Agder, pure Norwegians, so to speak. Instead, we find St Magnús popular in Iceland.

There he is on record with some miracles. *Magnúss saga skemmri* describes how the farmer Eldjarn Vardason became sick during a famine. After Easter, Eldjarn asked to be carried to church, vowing that if he was cured he would fast for six days and before St Óláfr's and St Magnús' masses. Eldjarn then had a vision in the church: a bright light appeared, and St Magnús addressed him thus: "*Óláfr konungr inn helgi heyrði bœn þína ok heit þat, er þú hézt á okkr til heilsubótar þér. Er hann sendi mik hingat at gefa þér heilsu, því at kona hét á hann vestr í Fjǫrðum, ok fór hann þangat at gera hana heila'*".[108] St Magnús duly restored Eldjarn's health, and "*allir lofuðu guð fyrir þá miskunn, er hann*

---

[103] *OS* chs. 49, 50. Brothwell 2004 www.orkneydigs.org.uk/dhl; for an examination of the skull found in Kirkwall Cathedral in 1919 see http://www.orkneyjar.com/history/stmagnus/relics.htm.

[104] Details in Beuermann 2006, Cf. also Cant 1995; Cant (ed.) 1989; Crawford (ed.) 1988; Brunsden 2002, Callaghan 2003, Jesch et al. 2005.

[105] Full overview of sources on St Magnús in Haki Antonsson 2007. In *OS* cf. "miracle-book", ch. 57.

[106] Details in Beuermann 2006.

[107] There is one church dedicated to St Magnús in London in the 'Scandinavian quarter', not far from a church dedicated to St Óláfr, and one in the Faroe Islands, while in Norway there is merely one altar dedicated to St Magnús, in Niðaróss Cathedral, Crawford 1984: 73, 74. For Iceland cf. Cormack 1994: 119–21, who ascribes the growth of his cult to the arrival of his relic at Skálholt in 1298. Discussion of Shetland in Beuermann 2006.

[108] *Magnúss saga skemmri*: 331; " '*King Olaf the Saint heard your prayer, and the vow you made to both of us for the recovery of your health. It was he who sent me here to make you well, as he himself had gone west in the fjords to cure a woman there who had made a vow to him.*'" (*Shorter Magnús Saga*, 42).

(hafði) þeim veitt fyrir verðleika ins helga Magnúss jarls".[109] *Magnúss saga lengri* relates a different miracle. Two Norwegian brothers seducing a woman were punished by her relatives: one was killed and his body devoured by wolves, the other was broken, muted and blinded. This surviving brother prayed to God for mercy, and St Magnús was sent to intercede. St Magnús mended the bones, restored speech and eyesight to the one brother, and, a remarkable feat even for a saint, summoned the wolves to disgorge the flesh and bones of the other brother, bringing him back to life, too. Not surprisingly, they "*gerandi guði þakkir ok inum heilaga Magnúsi jarli fyrir svá ódvalda miskunn sem þeim veittist*".[110]

Arguably, these miracles carry an ideological message. In the case of Eldjarn, the Orcadian St Magnús came to the rescue where the Norwegian St Óláfr could not. St Óláfr's cult was spreading rapidly, and it had arrived in Iceland by the 1250s when *Magnúss saga skemmri* was composed. Does its author put up St Magnús as a counterweight to St Óláfr—see here, St Magnús is also there, and at least as powerful?[111] On the other hand, St Magnús was *sent* by St Óláfr: is this a none-too-subtle hint at celestial hierarchy mirroring the earthly one? However, in the second miracle, St Magnús distinctly infringes upon 'foreign territory', curing Norwegians in Norway, and very extravagantly so. Yet there was no popular or official cult of St Magnús in Norway; it was an Icelandic author going on the 'offensive', stressing St Magnús' power there.[112]

When the Norwegian kings intensified their control over wider areas of *Norgesveldet* during the twelfth and thirteenth century, a process which culminated with the incorporation of Iceland in the kingdom of Norway, one milestone had been the establishment of the church province of Niðaróss in 1153, with authority over Norway, Iceland, Greenland, the Faeroes, the Orkneys and the Hebrides and

---

[109] *Magnúss saga skemmri*: 332; "*Everyone praised God for the mercy he had shown, to honour the Holy Earl Magnus.*" (*Shorter Magnús Saga*, 43).

[110] *Magnúss saga lengri*: 383; "*gave thanks to God and to the holy Magnus for so marvellous a mercy as had been granted them.*" (*Longer Magnús Saga*, 363). Cf. Brunsden 1997: 131.

[111] Cf. Frank 2001: 234, arguing that rivalry was the main reason for the "reportorial detail" of shrine miracles. Esp. 237ff for English propagandistic examples of St Thomas, St Cuthbert and St Godric telling each other to intercede.

[112] These miracles do not figure in *OS*, and they are also highly unlikely to have been part of the first Latin passio of St Magnús written by 'master Robert'. The Saga's miracles (ch. 57) take place in Orkney (especially in Shetland), and England.

Man.[113] The preceding century had witnessed the birth or creation of several Scandinavian saint kings, Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway (died in the battle of Stiklestad in 1030), Knútr of Denmark, (murdered in the church of Odense in 1086), and Eiríkr of Sweden (died in the battle of Uppsala in 1160). Barbara Crawford comments: "All three saint-kings of Scandinavia symbolise the growing identity of their new Christian kingdoms, only recently converted to Christianity, and their cults are closely connected with the development of national entities and national monarchies."[114] St Magnús of Orkney might be called the fourth Scandinavian saint-king, or—earl, serving similar needs and aims for Orkney—and for a wider north Atlantic community on the defence. Is it possible that some Icelandic apprehension over the gradual encroachment of the Norwegian church and crown could have found a literary expression in a rivalry between St Óláfr and St Magnús, adopting the Orcadian to a certain degree as an anti-Norwegian saint?[115]

In sum, this look at Christianity reveals an ideology that firmly places Orkney in the Scandinavian cultural orbit; in fact, not only regarding the manner of conversion but also the phenomenon of a royal (sic!) martyr.[116] Yet this shared concept of saintly rulers also opens for the idea that the kingdom of Norway had St Óláfr, the north-west Atlantic St Magnús. This, yet again, could also be an expression of equality and independence.

5. *Admonition or model: Earl Rǫgnvaldr and Sveinn Ásleifarson*

The question of (in)equality and (in)dependence with regard to Norway has been the overruling theme so far. This last chapter has a different theme: it addresses the *type* of rulership.

---

[113] Beuermann 2002a, 2002b discusses the repercussions for the British Isles. Cf. the articles by Bagge, Crawford, Imsen, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson in Imsen (ed.) 2003.

[114] Crawford 1984: 65, 66. "They were all warrior-kings who saw it as their pious duty to impose Christian laws and establish the Church as a formalised institution of their kingdoms. They were not therefore particularly popular with all sections of society during their life-time, and their downfall was caused by political factions associated with other claimants to their thrones…" Cf. also Jexlev 1988: 192–207, and Skórzewska, this volume.

[115] Diff. Thomson 2003: 57. Iceland had three saint-bishops in the 12th and 13th centuries, but obviously never a saintly ruler.

[116] To this common Scandinavian phenomenon, the single exception was the Kingdom of Man and the Isles. Beuermann forthcoming 2009b discusses the reasons.

Earl Rǫgnvaldr Kolsson has been seen as a favourite character of *Orkneyinga saga*: the first, now lost, version of the saga was probably written after 1192, when Rǫgnvaldr was proclaimed a saint.[117] *Orkneyinga saga*'s interest in Rǫgnvaldr is also obvious from the fact that nearly half of the Saga is concerned with his life.[118] Yet this is only part of the story. Rǫgnvaldr's career is closely intertwined with another famous Orcadian, Sveinn Ásleifarson, whose activities take up a quarter of *Orkneyinga saga*.[119] In fact, the Saga's first version ended its account with Sveinn Ásleifarson's death in 1171.[120] Thus, Earl Rǫgnvaldr and the chieftain Sveinn are highly important characters in the Saga, and it is worthwhile looking at the possible reasons for this.[121]

Orkneyinga saga strains to depict Sveinn as the ultimate Orkney viking. He drinks and murders, raids and plunders, helps friends and takes revenge on enemies. He also makes and unmakes earls, since his support is decisive. Earl Rǫgnvaldr (and his contemporaries Earls Haraldr Maddaðarson and Erlendr) owe their very rule to this chieftain. Sveinn also blackmails Rǫgnvaldr into supporting his private warfare. Yet Sveinn dies—on another private expedition—with the words "*Viti þat allir menn*, […] *at ek em hirðmaðr ins helga Rǫgnvalds jarls*…"[122] Rǫgnvaldr is a man of many warlike and peaceful talents, as accomplished with sword and shield as with pen and lyre. He is particularly famous for his crusade, or cruise, to Jerusalem, enjoying seabattles and troubadour-life in equal measure.[123] *Orkneyinga saga* might therefore simply romanticise Sveinn and Rǫgnvaldr as epitomising the good old viking way of life.

---

[117] *OS* (HP/PE) 10.

[118] Not counting the 'miracle book' (ch. 57) and the information about Rǫgnvaldr's ancestry in chs. 39, 41, 42, chs. 58–104 deal with Earl Rǫgnvaldr and his reign, i.e. 46 chs. out of a total of 112 chs.

[119] Sveinn is an important actor in 27 out of 108 chapters (chs. 66, 73–84, 92–101, 105–8).

[120] *OS* ch. 108. Cf. above n. 6. Smith's appreciation (1988: 37) is "when Earl Rǫgnvald dies […], the OS is complete. […] As far as the saga-writer is concerned his task was discharged when he completed the saga of Rǫgnvald Kali Kolsson."

[121] Detailed examination of Sveinn's career in Beuermann 2009a; also Beuermann 2008b.

[122] *OS* ch. 108 (FG: 288); "*Be it known to all men* […] *that I belong to the bodyguard of Saint Rognvald the Earl*…" (AT: 342).

[123] Cf. most recently Crawford 2005b.

5.1. *The failure of the ruler*

Or is this a wrong understanding of the Saga? Does it overlook hidden criticism? In his many dealings with Sveinn, Rǫgnvaldr frequently gives in to the chieftain's demands, frequently re-extends his friendship and receives Sveinn back into his peace after yet another outrageous escapade.[124] One cannot help thinking that Sveinn gets away rather cheaply, and that Rǫgnvaldr fails to put the foot down. This may thus be an aim of *Orkneyinga saga*: to show Rǫgnvaldr's, the earl's, inability and lack of inclination to control the unruly Sveinn, the chieftain. If so, then nearly half of the Saga would be "an essay in failure". The Saga might thus be read as a "treatise on the good ruler",[125] stressing the need to dispense good justice and to control the unruly men of the realm—a duty Rǫgnvaldr apparently spectacularly failed at during his whole reign, to the bitter end: the earl was murdered by another outlawed chieftain. Is *Orkneyinga saga* therefore an admonition to the earls that they should rather keep order in their own house and control their chieftains?

5.2. *The golden age of Nordic culture and rulership*

Or is it not wrong, but rather too superficial, to read *Orkneyinga saga*'s account of Rǫgnvaldr and Sveinn as simply describing the good old viking way of life? This sub-saga may have an ideological message, concerning both culture and politics.

Rǫgnvaldr the poet-earl does not make any bones about his achievements—he proudly claims "*Tafl emk ǫrr at efla, --- íþróttir kannk níu, --- týnik trauðla rúnum, --- tíð er mér bók ok smíðir. --- Skríða kannk á skíðum, --- skýtk ok rœ'k, svát nýtir, --- hvárt tveggja kannk hyggja --- harpslǫtt ok bragþǫttu.*"[126] Whether Rǫgnvaldr sits drinking with friends, explores a cave, sees something unusual, flirts with a woman, is nearly shipwrecked, and during his cruise to Jerusalem, he himself is

---

[124] *OS* chs. 72, 84. Thomson 2008: 109–112, 116–7, 119–121 for a short account on Sveinn. Cf. Ciklamini's (1970: 52) comment "Rǫgnvaldr's rehabilitation of Sveinn [after Sveinn had kidnapped and possibly killed Earl Páll] was morally an ambiguous act."

[125] Quotes from Cowan 1973: 20.

[126] *OS* ch. 58 (FG: 130); "*I'm a master of draughts, * And of nine kinds of sport. * I am adept at runes, * And in letters a scholar. * Glide I on ski; * Shoot and row well enough, * Play the harp and make verses, * Or toil in the smithy.*" (AT: 225). For the harp Crawford 1995a.

"liberally reciting scaldic poetry on every possible occasion",[127] and his court seems to be teeming with skalds.[128] Together with the Icelander Hallr Þórarinsson Rǫgnvaldr composes *Háttalykill*, a poetological work intended to demonstrate five different metres.[129]

But does not the idea to write down a key of metres imply that one finds it necessary to record such poetry for the future, because one has the feeling that it would otherwise be, or has already partly been, lost? And if skaldic art to a certain extent needed to be safeguarded or revived, might not the great number of verses contained in *Orkneyinga saga*'s chapters on Rǫgnvaldr serve the same function? One has the impression that there is something artificial about the viking and skaldic mannerisms of the earl. At the time of writing, it seems, this was chic. A devotion to Norse skaldic art seems to have been both a passion and fashionable. One might explain this as a counter-reaction to central European troubadour influences. In describing Rǫgnvaldr's journey to Jerusalem and Byzantium, *Orkneyinga saga* shows him as one of the Orkney earls most closely in contact with this outside world. We also think that Rǫgnvaldr imported stone-masons from Durham in England to build his Romanesque cathedral at Kirkwall. Does *Orkneyinga saga* then deliberately show off the Nordic cultural achievements, lest they become forgotten or undervalued?[130]

It may not only have been culture that needed to be preserved in the face of change. Above, *Orkneyinga saga*'s account of relations between Rǫgnvaldr and Sveinn Ásleifarson has been discussed as an essay in failure on the part of the ruler—one should specify: the *strong* ruler. But what if the strong ruler is not the model? The Saga could also be said to describe Rǫgnvaldr's reign as a golden age where the earl does not only engage in poetic competitions with the skalds, but where he also owes his very position to the support of chieftains, and where he then rules together with his worthy warriors.

Orkneyinga saga's epitaph on Rǫgnvaldr runs "*Rǫgnvaldr jarl var mjǫk harmdauði, því hann var allvinsæll þar í eyjunum ok víða annars*

---

[127] Bruhn 1995: 240. Cf. for drinking: *OS* ch. 60; cave: ch. 61; unusual procession of 16 men: ch. 72; Ragna: ch. 81; shipwreck: ch. 85; pilgrimage: chs. 86–90.

[128] *OS* chs. 62, 73, 78, for Hallr ch. 81. Cf. Whaley 2003: 18–32.

[129] *OS* ch. 81; cf. Clouston 1932: 192ff; Bruhn 1995: 241.

[130] A need to preserve one's own cultural background in the face of European influences might also have arisen earlier, e.g. after Earl Þorfinnr had travelled to Rome in the 11th century and built a fine stone church in Orkney—but this was before the saga-writing-period.

staðar. Hann hafði verit hjálparmaðr mikill mǫrgum mǫnnum, ǫrr af fé, hógværr ok vinhollr, íþróttamaðr mikill ok skáld gott."[131] This lists classic viking virtues for a ruler, most importantly *allvinsæll*, "very popular". Rǫgnvaldr is thus praised as the epitome of a successful Viking-Age ruler—far from a failure.[132] But this was a different type of rulership from that gaining ground in contemporary Norway. Taken together, *Orkneyinga saga's* account of Rǫgnvaldr-Sveinn events and its epitaph for the earl seem to acclaim the reign of a *primus inter pares*, in an idealised viking society where earls (or kings) rule in conjunction with chieftains (or the aristocracy).[133] Not a society with kings by God's grace, and exchangeable ennobled functionaries, as it appeared in Norway.

This reading would make this part of *Orkneyinga saga* into a text that is highly critical of twelfth and thirteenth century developments in Norway, forcefully contradicting the official royal ideology there. For that one need only look at *Konungs Skuggsjá*, the *King's Mirror* from *c.* 1250, with its king by God's grace, written for a ruler, Hákon Hákonarson, who was busy expanding his influence in the north-west Atlantic.[134] Or this part of *Orkneyinga saga* may be an even earlier reaction to Norwegian royal acts and propaganda, pre-dating King Hákon. In the traditional historical account, the king who did not at all rule in conjunction with the aristocracy was Sverrir. What was left of the Norwegian aristocracy after the wars of succession was stripped of their privileges, and replaced by a new class of royal agents dependent on the king. Sverrir's ideology of kingship—in essence the same as Hákon's—is clearly expressed in his *Oratio contra clerum Norvegiae* from around 1200 and in *Sverris saga*, the writing of which he initiated

---

[131] *OS* ch. 104 (FG: 283); "*Earl Rognvaldr was much mourned, for he was very popular there in the Isles and far and wide elsewhere. He had been a friend in need to many a man, liberal in money matters, equable of temper, steadfast in friendship, skilful in all feats of strengths, and a good skald.*" (AT: 338).

[132] Cf. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson in this volume. Interestingly, physical prowess is listed rather late.

[133] Cf. for Rǫgnvaldr's 'gentle rule' in conjunction with 'the people' *OS* chs. 76, 85. Phelpstead 2007: 96–111, esp. 101–3, 107, 110–1 discusses in how far Rǫgnvaldr's political astuteness (recognising the benefits of co-operation with Sveinn) was a moral problem for his sainthood, and the possible connection to Rǫgnvaldr's pilgrimage. This is contrary to Ciklamini 1970: 51, 57, de Geer 1985: 101, and Foote 1988: 197, who see Rǫgnvaldr's political successes vis-à-vis Sveinn as the very reason for his sainthood.

[134] *Konungs Skuggsjá* ed. Olsen 1983. Discussion Bagge 1987, 1996, 2000, and most recently Orning 2008.

himself.[135] And, it will be remembered, it was Sverrir who in 1195 abolished the independent earldom of Orkney.

Thus from the late twelfth century on the Norwegian crown formulated and propagated a new European-influenced royal ideology of a single king by God's grace aiming to be a *rex iustus*, which was at variance with traditional Scandinavian concepts of sometimes several joint rulers made by and dependent on their chieftains. This 'viking' style of rulership, conversely, seems to be what the many chapters on Rǫgnvaldr and Sveinn glorify. Viewed in this light, these chapters in *Orkneyinga saga* could therefore be read as a defence of traditional Scandinavian against new-fangled European rulership. In a battle also fought in the literary sphere, this part (note: not all[136]) of *Orkneyinga saga* would then defend the 'good old viking' age of the aristocracy in the face of the looming 'new medieval' age of the monarchy.[137]

Conclusions

"Die Dastellung und Deutung von Geschichte, ob sie als historiographischer oder unterhaltender Text rezipiert wird, [ist] niemals unpolitisch […]. Jede Erzählung über die Vergangenheit einer Gruppe wird als Aussage über den Charakter und die Identität dieser Gruppe gelesen.

---

[135] *En tale mot biskopene*, (*Oratio contra clerum Norvegiae*) ed. Holtsmark 1931; *Sverris saga* ed. Indrebø 1920, repr. 1981. Discussion Bagge 1996, Gunnes 1971.

[136] It would be wrong to read a "viking" anti-monarchic ideology of rulership into the whole Saga. Other parts also propagate the new type of ruler, e.g. with St Magnús, a *rex iustus* in the mould of the Norwegian crown: "*harðr ok óeirinn við ránsmenn ok víkinga, lét drepa mjǫk þá menn, er herjaðu á bœndr ok landsmenn. Lét hann taka morðingja ok þjǫfa ok refsaði svá ríkum sem óríkum rán ok þýfskur ok ǫll oknytti*." *OS* ch. 45 (FG: 103); "*hard and unsparing towards robbers and vikings. He put to death many men who plundered the bonder and common people. He had murderers and thieves seized, and punished rich as well as poor for robbery and theft and all misdeeds.*" (AT: 205). Cf. Foote 1988; Phelpstead 2007: 82, 84–5 n. 26 calls St Magnús "a model ruler". Both discuss the relationship between Sveinn and Rǫgnvaldr in the context of Rǫgnvaldr's (near-) sainthood. Foote 1988: 196–7, 202 sees Sveinn as respected but not praiseworthy: Sveinn dies by the sword pursuing earthly glory and greed, versus St Magnús and Rǫgnvaldr who die as sacrificial victims.

[137] Bruhn 1995: 240–247. Cf. Thomson 2008: 120 on the political background to the events of the 1190s "Harald Maddadson drifted into involvement in Norway's civil wars as part of the aristocratic opposition to King Sverre." This interpretation does not exclude that the chapters had a special appeal to the Icelanders who compiled *Flateyarbók* in the 14th century: one wonders whether the all male Norse viking society glorified in the Sveinn chapters of OS would also particularly have appealed to Icelanders, who for the first time faced the prospect of a Danish queen.

Der Rekurs auf die Geschichte ist dabei immer mit einer Intention für die Gegenwart verbunden, heute wie im Jahr 1200."[138]

While it would be wrong to search for a single consistent ideology, or several clear 'party'-ideologies in the compound text of *Orkneyinga saga*, certain recurring strands can be discerned.[139] This chapter, choosing a limited number of episodes, had two aims: analysing ideologies of rulership in the Saga under the two themes (in)equality and (in)dependence while belonging to the Scandinavian world, and style of rulership; and then proposing some possible historical contexts for the views discerned from the text.

Regarding the first theme, *Orkneyinga saga*'s chapters on Nordic origins, conquest and immigration, on the titles and on Sigurðr's death less (1.1.–1.4., 2.1.), but again on Einarr's descent and deeds (2.2.), on the conflicts with their warning that internal strife opens the door to Norwegian royal interference (3.1, 3.2.), and on St Magnús versus St Óláfr (4.2.), would seem to argue for an ideology of equality and independence vis-à-vis the Norwegian kings. At the same time, utmost care is taken to place Orkney firmly into the Scandinavian (i.e., not British), and possibly Norwegian (i.e., not Danish) cultural zone, as the lack of Orcadian elements, the conversion and the royal saint show (1.5., 4.1., 4.2.).[140] Regarding the second theme, the chapters on Rǫgnvaldr and Sveinn may on the one hand be intended as a warning to earls to control their chieftains. However, an interpretation which sees them as expressing an idealised 'viking' style of rulership where earls (or kings) co-operate with their chieftains (or aristocrats) seems more convincing (5.1., 5.2.). So the balanced impression gained from some episodes of *Orkneyinga saga* as we know it now—which, as has been pointed out repeatedly, is not the same as any medieval version of the text—is of Orkney as an equal and near-independent polity which is however thoroughly Scandinavian and has close links to Norway. Secondly, half the Saga seems to prefer an aristocratic to a monarchic style of rulership.

---

[138] Tomany 2007: 7–8.

[139] Foote 1988: 196, focussing on the Saga's depiction of St Magnús, comments "it is clear that the author had an overview and saw large themes in his history". But cf. Bagge 1992 for denying class or party adherence and stressing personal links of Icelandic writers instead, and Bagge 1991.

[140] Cf. Tomany 2007: 81–81: *OS's* "im 13. Jahrhundert beabsichtigte propagandistische Wirkung, die Einbindung der schottischen Inseln in den nordischen Kulturraum, hat sie also im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert erreicht."

The discussion of this second theme together with the dating of this part to the 1190s may have implications for the question of where and for whom *Orkneyinga saga* was written.[141] Mundal has recently reopened the debate, arguing for an Orcadian origin on the basis of philological considerations.[142] I would tentatively support this—at least for the chapters on Rǫgnvaldr and Sveinn—from a historical point of view. A detailed description of the 'good old viking' way of life of earls and chieftains which forcefully contradicts Sverrir's new royal ideology would have been particularly appropriate in an Orcadian historical context in the aftermath of 1195, much more so than in an Icelandic one: then, Orkney was reorganised; Iceland was not (yet). Also the praise for Haraldr Maddaðarson as one of the three most powerful earls might support an argument in favour of an Orcadian target audience: how successful Haraldr's reign was can be debated, but he certainly made a name for himself by opposing Sverrir.[143] Orkney around 1200, in conflict with Sverrir, would have had a prime interest in propagating an alternative ideology by literary means.

This chapter could not attempt a full analysis of the ideologies expressed in the extant text of *Orkneyinga saga*. Descriptions of Orkney's relations with the other more and more assertive crown, Scotland, have not been examined to judge the earls' relative (in)dependence

[141] For this first version Iceland and Orkney are the two candidates. Most scholars prefer Oddi in Iceland as the most likely place of composition. Einar Olafur Sveinsson 1937 underlined the links between the Oddaverjar and Orkney, including family connections with Haraldr Maddaðarson and Sveinn Ásleifarson. Phelpstead 2007: 95 sums up scholarly opinion "Einar Óláfur's case cannot be proven beyond all doubt, but it is a compelling one." The Icelanders would have had Orcadian and Caithness-informants. Einar Olafur Sveinsson proposes Þorkell rostungr, Chesnutt 1981 Hrafn lǫgmaðr. Holtsmark 1937: 14–17 argued for an Orcadian origin, proposing Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson (also with close family links with Sveinn Ásleifarson) as dictating the Saga to Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, following the model of Sverrir and Karl Jónsson. Overview *Medieval Scandinavia*: 456–7.

[142] Mundal 2007, 2008. Jesch's narratological analysis 1992: 336–355 argues that the role of the extra-diegetic narrator in the Saga is much greater than usually assumed. She concludes that the Saga required "an intellectual, educated, independent-minded audience who amused themselves by engaging in the activity of interpretation. […] Whether the community addressed by the saga was primarily an Icelandic one (as is usually supposed the main audience of *OS* was) or an Orcadian one may still be a matter of debate. There is however no evidence to exclude the latter possibility and if it is admitted, the possibility of an Orcadian author also needs to be considered." (350).

[143] *OS* ch. 112. Discussion Chesnutt 1981. Sigurðr Eysteinsson was the first earl; Þorfinnr Sigurðarson brought good governance, Christianity and influence beyond the core earldom. The three earls also 'cover' the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries.

or (in)equality vis-à-vis kings. For the style of rulership a discussion of the making of earls and of their leadership, considering more than just Rǫgnvaldr and Sveinn, would also be profitable. Thus, the Saga's defence of the 'viking' style of rulership discerned here is contradicted elsewhere by its praise for Saint Magnús as a *rex iustus*. Only if we combine a thorough examination of the ideological messages with what we know of the exact dates of the various compositions and revisions of the text, can we discern more fully the various themes and consider them in their historical context. Then we can attempt to establish an overview of which chapters of the Saga are characterised by which ideologies of which different historical periods of composition or revision from the late twelfth to the late fourteenth century. This should allow a more informed answer to the question of what *Orkneyinga saga* is about.

Bibliography

Sources

Annals of Ulster, http://www.ucc.ie/celt/publishd.html accessed 15 June 2009.

Böglunga sögur. Söga om Birkibeinar og Baglar, 2 vols. Ed. by Hallvard Magerøy, Solum 1988.

Early Sources of Scottish History, AD 500–1286. Ed. by Alan O. Anderson, Stamford 1990.

En tale mot biskopene (*Oratio contra clerum Norvegiae*). Ed. by Anne Holtsmark, Oslo 1931.

Historia Norwegie. Ed. by Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, trsl. by Peter Fisher, Copenhagen 2003.

Islandske Annaler indtil 1578. Ed. by Gustav Storm, Christiania 1888.

John of Fordun *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, 2 vols. Ed. by William F. Skene, Edinburgh 1871.

Konungs Skuggsjá. Ed. by Ludvig Holm-Olsen, Oslo, 1983.

Magnus' Saga. The Life of St Magnus, Earl of Orkney 1075–1116. Trsl. by. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, Kirkwall 1996.

Magnúss saga lengri. *Íslenzk Fornrit* 24. Ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson, Reykjavík 1965.

Magnúss saga skemmri. Íslenzk Fornrit 24. Ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson, Reykjavík 1965.

Orkneyinga saga. Íslenzk Fornrit 24. Ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson, Reykjavík 1965.

——. Ed. by Sigurður Nordal, Copenhagen 1913–16.

——. Trsl. by Alexander B. Taylor, Edinburgh 1938.

——. *The History of the Earls of Orkney*. Trsl. by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, London 1978.

Roger of Howden *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houdene*, ed. Wiliam Stubbs, 3 vols, Rolls Series London, 1868–70.

Snorri Sturluson *Heimskringla. Íslenzk Fornrit* 26–28 (*Heimskringla I-III*). Ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík 1941–51.

—— *Heimskringla*. Trsl. by Lee M. Hollander, Austin 1999.
Sverris saga etter Cod. AM 327 4to. Ed. by Gustav Indrebø, Oslo 1981.
The Life of St Magnus. Trsl. by William M. Metcalfe in *Ancient Lives of Scottish Saints*, Felinfach 1998.

Studies

Adams, Jonathan; Holman, Katherine (eds.) 2004. *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350: Contact, Conflict and Coexistence*, Turnhout.
Almqvist, Bo 1978–81. Scandinavian and Celtic Folklore Contacts in the Earldom of Orkney, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 20, 80–105.
Andersson, Theodore M. 1994. The Politics of Snorri Sturluson, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 93, 55–78.
Ashman Rowe, Elizabeth 2000. Origin Legends and Foundation Myths in Flateyjarbók, *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society. Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference, 2–7 July 2000, University of Sydney*. Ed. by Geraldine Barnes et al., Sydney, 441–454.
—— 2005. *The Development of Flateyarbók. Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389*, Odense.
Bagge, Sverre 1987. *The Political Thought of the King's Mirror*, Odense.
—— 1991. *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*, Berkeley and Oxford.
—— 1992. From Sagas to Society: The Case of Heimskringla, *From Sagas to Society. Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*. Ed. by Gísli Pálsson, Middlesex, 61–75.
—— 1996. *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed*, Odense.
—— 2000. Old Norse Theories of Society. From Rígsþula to Konungs Skuggsiá, *Speculum regale. Der altnorwegische Königsspiegel (Konungs skuggsiá) in der europäischen Tradition*. Ed. by Jens Eike Schnall et al., Wien. 7–45.
—— 2003. Den heroiske tid—kirkereform og kirkekamp 1153–1214, *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537. Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*. Ed. by Steinar Imsen, Trondheim, 51–80.
Baldwin, John R. (ed.) 1986. *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland*, Edinburgh.
Barnes, Geraldine et al. (eds.) 2000. *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society. Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference, 2–7 July 2000, University of Sydney*, Sydney.
Barrett, James 2007. Christian and Pagan Practice during the Conversion of Viking Age Orkney and Shetland, *The Cross Goes North. Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300–1300*. Ed. by Martin Carver, Woodbridge: 207–226.
Batey, Colleen et al. (eds.) 1995. *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*, Thurso and Kirkwall.
Bergsveinn Birgisson 2008. *Inn i Skaldens Sinn. Kognitive, Estetiske og Historiske Skatter i den Norrøne Skaldediktningen*. Doctoral Dissertation University of Bergen 2007, Bergen.
Berman, Melissa A. 1985. The Political Sagas, *Scandinavian Studies* 57, 113–129.
Beuermann, Ian 2002a. *Man Amongst Kings and Bishops. What was the Reason for Godred Olafsson's Journey to Norway in 1152/53? Occasional Papers Series* 4, Oslo.
—— 2002b. Metropolitan Ambitions and Politics: Kells-Mellifont and Man & the Isles, *Peritia* 16, 419–434.
—— 2006. Orkneyinga Saga: 1195 And All That? *Nordistica Tartuensia* 14, 113–152.
—— 2007. *Masters of the Narrow Sea. Forgotten Challenges to Norwegian Rule in Man and the Isles 1079–1266*. Doctoral Dissertation University of Oslo 2006, *Acta Humaniora* 286, Oslo.
—— 2008a. King John's Attack on Man in 1210, *Northern Studies* 40, 23–50.

—— 2008b. A Chieftain in an Old Norse Text: Sveinn Ásleifarson and the Message behind Orkneyinga Saga, *Transgressions. Interdisciplinary Communications 2007/2008*. Publications of the Senter for Grunnforskning ved Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, Oslo.
—— 2009a. Sveinn Ásleifarson and the Irish Sea. Mestan ójafnaðarmann í Vestrlöndum, *Scandinavian Scotland—Twenty Years After. Proceedings of the Dark Age Studies Conferences*. Ed. by Alex Woolf, St Andrews, 131–168.
—— forthcoming 2009b. No Soil For Saints. Why Was There No Native Royal Martyr in the Kingdom of Man & the Isles? *The Irish Sea and the Norse World*. Ed. by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson et al., Leiden.
Bibire, Paul 1988. The Poetry of Earl Rognvald's Court, *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth Century Renaissance*. Ed. by Barbara Crawford, Aberdeen, 208–240.
Brothwell, Don 2004. *One Hundred and Fifty Years of Human Skeletal Studies in Orkney*; www.orkneydigs.org.uk/dhl; summary http://www.orkneyjar.com/history/stmagnus/relics.htm accessed 20.11.2005.
Bruhn, Ole 1995. Earl Rognvald and the Rise of Saga Literature, *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*. Ed. by Colleen Batey et al., Thurso and Kirkwall, 240–247.
Brunsden, George M. 1997. Politics and Local Tradition Within the Cult of Saint Magnus of Orkney, *Northern Studies* vol. 32, 129–139.
—— 2002. Earls and Saints: Early Christianity in Norse Orkney and the Legend of Magnus Erlingsson, *History, Literature, and Music in Scotland, 700–1560*, Ed. by R. Andrew McDonald, Toronto, 60–92.
Callaghan, Steve 2003. St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall, *The Orkney Book*. Ed. by Donald Omand, Edinburgh, 167–174.
Callow, Chris 2004. Narrative, Contact, Conflict, and Coexistence: Norwegians in Thirteenth-Century Iceland, *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350: Contact, Conflict and Coexistence*. Ed. by Jonathan Adams et al., Turnhout, 323–331.
Cant, Ronald G. 1995. The Constitution of Saint Magnus Cathedral, *Northern Isles Connections. Essays from Orkney & Shetland Presented to Per Sveaas Andersen*. Ed. by Barbara E. Crawford, Kirkwall, 105–121.
—— et al. (eds.) 1989. *Light in the North. St Magnus Cathedral Through the Centuries*; Kirkwall.
Carver, Martin (ed.) 2007. *The Cross Goes North. Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300–1300*, Woodbridge.
Cheape, Hugh 1984. Recounting Tradition: A Critical View of Medieval Reportage, *The Northern and Western Isles in the Viking World. Survival, Continuity, and Change*, Ed. by Alexander Fenton et al., Edinburgh, 197–222.
Chesnutt, Michael 1981. Haralds saga Maddaðarsonar, *Speculum Norrœnvm: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*. Ed. by Ursula Dronke et al., Odense, 33–54.
Ciklamini, Marlene 1970. Saint Rǫgnvaldr and Sveinn Ásleifarson, the Viking, *Scandinavian Studies* 42, 50–57.
Clouston, J. Storer 1932. *A History of Orkney*, Kirkwall.
Clunies Ross, Margaret 1983. Snorri Sturluson's use of the Norse origin-legend of the sons of Fornjótr in his *Edda*, *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 98, 47–66.
Cormack, Margaret 1994. *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*. Subsidia Hagiographica 78, Brussels.
Cowan, Edward J. 1973. What is Orkneyinga Saga About? *Northern Studies* 1973:2, 19–22.
Crawford, Barbara E. 1976/77. The Earldom of Caithness and the Kingdom of Scotland, 1150–1266, *Northern Scotland* 2:2; repr. in *Essays on the Nobility of Medieval Scotland*. Ed. by Keith J. Stringer, Edinburgh, 1985, 25–43.

—— 1979. Review: *Orkneyinga saga. The History of the Earls of Orkney*, Translated, with an introduction, by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, p. 223, London: Hogarth Press 1978. *Scottish Historical Review* 58, 94–196.
—— 1983. Birsay and the Early Earls and Bishops of Orkney, *Birsay Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*. Ed. by William P. L. Thomson, Kirkwall, 99–118.
—— 1984. The Cult of St Magnus in Shetland, *Essays in Shetland History*. Ed. by Barbara E. Crawford, Lerwick, 65–81.
—— 1986. The Making of a Frontier: The Firthlands from the Ninth to Twelfth Centuries, *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland*. Ed. by John R. Baldwin, Edinburgh, 33–46.
—— 1987. *Scandinavian Scotland*, Leicester.
—— 1995a. An Unrecognised Statue of Earl Rognvald, *Northern Isles Connections. Essays from Orkney & Shetland Presented to Per Sveaas Andersen*. Ed. by Barbara E. Crawford, Kirkwall, 29–46.
—— 1995b. Norse Earls and Scottish Bishops in Caithness, *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*. Ed. by Colleen Batey et al., Thurso and Kirkwall, 129–147.
—— 1998. St Magnus and St Rognvald: the two Orkney Saints, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 28, 22–38.
—— 2002. The Historical and Archaeological Background to the Papa Stour Project, *Collegium Medievale* 15, 13–35.
—— 2003. The Bishopric of Orkney, *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537. Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*. Ed. by Steinar Imsen, Trondheim, 143–158.
—— 2005a. Thorfinn, Christianity and Birsay: What the Saga Tells Us and Archaeology Reveals, *The World of Orkneyinga saga. The Broad-Cloth Viking Trip*. Ed. by Olwyn in Owen, Kirkwall, 88–110.
—— 2005b. Earl Rognvald's Pilgrimage, *Orkney in the Sagas*. Ed. by Tom Muir et al., Kirkwall, 84–86.
—— (ed.) 1984. *Essays in Shetland History*, Lerwick.
—— (ed.) 1988. *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth Century Renaissance*, Aberdeen.
—— (ed.) 1995. *Northern Isles Connections. Essays from Orkney & Shetland Presented to Per Sveaas Andersen*, Kirkwall.
—— (ed.) 1998. *Conversion and Christianity in the North Sea World*, St Andrews.
—— (ed.) 2002. *The Papar in the North Atlantic: Environment and History*, St Andrews.
de Geer, Ingrid 1985. *Earl, Saint, Bishop, Skald—and Music. The Orkney Earldom of the Twelfth Century: A Musicological Study*, Uppsala.
—— 1988. Music and the twelfth-Century Orkney Earldom: A Cultural Crossroads in Musicological Perspective, *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth Century Renaissance*. Ed. by Barbara Crawford, Aberdeen, 241–263.
Duncan, Archibald A. M. 1975. *Scotland, the Making of the Kingdom*, Edinburgh (repr. 1996).
Einarr Óláfur Sveinsson 1937. Sagnaritun Oddaverja: nokkrar athuganir, *Studia Islandica* 1. Reykjavík.
Fenton, Alexander; Hermann Pálsson (eds.) 1984. *The Northern and Western Isles in the Viking World. Survival, Continuity, and Change*, Edinburgh.
Foote, Peter 1988. Observations on Orkneyinga Saga, *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth Century Renaissance*. Ed. by Barbara Crawford, Aberdeen, 192–207.
Frank, Robert Worth Jr. 2001. Shrine Rivalry in the North Sea World, *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages*. Ed. by Thomas R. Liszka et al., Dublin, 230–242.

Gísli Pálsson (ed.) 1992. *From Sagas to Society. Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, Middlesex.
Gourlay, Robert B. 1995. Before the Vikings. The Pre-Norse Background in Caithness, *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic.* Ed. by Colleen E. Batey et al., Edinburgh 1995, 111–119.
Gunnes, Erik 1971. *Kongens Ære. Kongemakt og kirke i "En tale mot biskopene"*, Oslo.
Haki Antonsson 2004. Two Twelfth-Century Martyrs: St Magnus of Orkney and St Thomas of Canterbury, *Sagas, Saints and Settlements*. Ed. by Gareth Williams et al., Leiden, 41–64.
—— 2005a. St Magnús of Orkney: Aspects of his Cult from a European Perspective, *The World of Orkneyinga saga. The Broad-Cloth Viking Trip*. Ed. by Olwyn Owen, Kirkwall, 144–159.
—— 2005b. The Kings of Norway and the Earls of Orkney: The Case of *Orkneyinga saga*, Chapter 36. *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 15, 81–100.
—— 2007. *St Magnus of Orkney: A Scandinavian Martyr-Cult in Context*, Leiden.
Hollander, Lee M. 1940–1. Observations on Taylor's Translation of the Orkneyinga Saga, *Scandinavian Studies* 16, 226–233.
Holtsmark, Anne 1937. Bjarne Kolbeinsson og hans forfatterskap, *Edda* 37, 1–17.
Imsen, Steinar 2000. Earldom and Kingdom. Orkney in the Realm of Norway 1195–1397, *Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift* 79:2, 163–180. Revised version repr. in *Stones, Skalds & Saints. The Faces of Orkney*. Ed. by Doreen J. Waugh et al., Edinburgh 2003, 65–80.
—— 2003. Nidarosprovinsen. *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537. Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*. Ed. by Steinar Imsen, Trondheim, 15–45.
—— (ed.) 2003. *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537. Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*, Trondheim.
Jackson, Anthony 1993. Further Thoughts on Sueno's Stone, *Moray: Province and People*. Ed. by W. David H. Sellar, Edinburgh 1993, 91–95.
Jesch, Judith 1992. Narrating *Orkneyinga saga*. *Scandinavian Studies* 64, 336–355.
—— 1995. England and Orkneyinga Saga, *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic.* Ed. by Colleen E. Batey et al., Edinburgh 1995, 222–239.
—— 1996. Presenting Traditions in *Orkneyinga saga*, *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 27, 69–86.
—— 2005a. Literature in Medieval Orkney, *The World of Orkneyinga saga. The Broad-Cloth Viking Trip.* Ed. by Olwyn Owen, Kirkwall, 11–24.
—— 2005b. *Orkneyinga saga*—A Work in Progress? Paper given at the conference *Creating the Medieval Saga—versions, variability and editorial approaches*, 13–15 April 2005, Dragefjellet, Jusbygget, Norway.
—— 2006a. Norse Literature in the Orkney Earldom'. *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* vol. I. Ed. by Ian Brown et al., Edinburgh.
—— 2006b. Norse Myth in Medieval Orkney. Paper given at the *Thirteenth International Saga-Conference*, 6–12 August 2006, Durham and York; text at http://www.dur.ac.uk/medieval.www/sagaconf/jesch.htm accessed 15/11/2008.
—— et al. 2005. The Death of Magnus Erlendsson and the Relics of St Magnus, *The World of Orkneyinga saga. The Broad-Cloth Viking Trip.* Ed. by Olwyn Owen, Kirkwall, 127–143.
Jexlev Thelma 1988. The Cult of Saints in Medieval Scandinavia, *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth Century Renaissance*. Ed. by Barbara E. Crawford, Aberdeen, 192–207.
Jochens, Jenny 1998. *Women in Old Norse Society*, Ithaca & London.
Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2003. Island og Nidaros, *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537. Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*. Ed. by Steinar Imsen, Trondheim, 121–140.

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson et al. (eds.) forthcoming 2009. *The Irish Sea and the Norse World*, Leiden.
Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder 1–22. Ed. by Finn Hødnebø et al. Oslo, 1956–1978 (2nd edn. 1980–1982).
Lamb, Raymond G. 1993. Carolingian Orkney and Its Transformation, *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*. Ed. by Colleen Batey et al., Thurso and Kirkwall, 260–71.
—— 1998. Pictland, Northumbria and the Carolingian Empire, *Conversion and Christianity in the North Sea World*. Ed. by Barbara E. Crawford, St Andrews, 41–56.
Lincoln, Bruce 1995. The Ship as Symbol. *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia*. Ed. by Ole Crumlin-Pedersen et al., Copenhagen, 25–33.
Liszka, Thomas R. et al. (eds.) 2001. *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages*, Dublin.
McDonald, R. Andrew (ed.) 2002. *History, Literature, and Music in Scotland, 700–1560*, Toronto.
Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopaedia. Ed. by Philipp Pulsiano et al., New York & London, 1993.
Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben 1995. The Sea, the Flame and the Wind, *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*. Ed. by Colleen E. Batey et al., Edinburgh 1995, 212–221.
—— 1980. *Norrønt nid: forestillingen om den umandige mand i de islandske sagaer*, Odense.
Morris, Christopher D. 2004. From Birsay to Brattahlið: Recent Perspectives on Norse Christianity in Orkney, Shetland, and the North Atlantic Region, *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350: Contact, Conflict and Coexistence*. Ed. by Jonathan Adams et al., Turnhout, 177–195.
Muir, Tom et al. (eds.) 2005. *Orkney in the Sagas*, Kirkwall.
Mundal, Else 1995. The Orkney Earl and Scald Torf-Einarr and his Poetry, *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*. Ed. by Colleen E. Batey et al., Edinburgh 1995, 248–259.
—— 2007. Orkneyinga Saga, *The Vikings and Scotland—Impact and Influence. Report of a Conference organised by the Royal Society of Edinburgh, 20–22 September 2006,* Edinburgh.
—— 2008. *Orkneyinga saga*. Paper given at the Centre for Advanced Study, February 2008, Oslo.
Olsen, Magnus 1938 (1936). Torv-Einar og Hamðismál, *Norrœne studier*, Oslo, 189–196.
—— 1942a. Hild Rolvsdatters vise om Gange-Rolv og Harald Hårfagre, *Maal og Minne*, 1–70.
—— 1942b. Torv-Einar og Kormak, *Maal og Minne*, 151–153.
Omand, Donald (ed.) 2003. *The Orkney Book*, Edinburgh.
Oram, Richard D. 2004. *David I. The King Who Made Scotland*, Stroud.
Orning, Hans Jacob 2008. *Unpredictability and Presence. Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages*, Leiden.
Owen, Olwyn 2004. The Scar Boat Burial—and the Missing Decades of the Early Viking Age in Orkney and Shetland, *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350: Contact, Conflict and Coexistence*. Ed. by Jonathan Adams et al., Turnhout, 3–33.
—— (ed.) 2005. *The World of Orkneyinga saga. The Broad-Cloth Viking Trip*, Kirkwall.
Phelpstead, Carl 2007. *Holy Vikings: Saints' Lives in the Old Icelandic Kings' Sagas*, Tempe.
Poole, Russell G. 1991. Torf-Einarr's Revenge, *Viking Poems on War and Peace. A Study in Skaldic Narrative*. Russell G. Poole, 161–172.

Poole, Russell G. 2009. The Power of the One. Irish Elements in the Ideology of the Early Orkney Earldom. Paper given at the conference *Between the Islands: Interactions with Vikings in Ireland and Britain in the Early Medieval Period*, University of Cambridge, 13–15 March 2009. http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/567/ for abstract, accessed 17/11/2008.

Ralegh Radford, C. A. 1978. *The Early Christian and Norse Settlements, Birsay*, Edinburgh.

—— 1983. Birsay and the Spread of Christianity to the North, *Birsay Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*. Ed. by William P. L. Thomson, Kirkwall, 13–35.

Schnall, Jens Eike et al. (eds.) 2000. *Speculum regale. Der altnorwegische Königsspiegel (Konungs skuggsiá) in der europäischen Tradition*, Wien.

Sellar, W. David H. 1993. Sueno's Stone and Its Interpreters, *Moray: Province and People*. Ed. by W. David H. Sellar, Edinburgh 1993, 96–116.

Sigurður Nordal 1913. Om Orkneyingasaga. *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie*, 31–50.

Sims-Williams, Patrick P. 1985. Some Functions of Origin Stories in Early Medieval Wales, *History and Heroic Tale: A Symposium*. Ed. by Tore Nyberg et al., Odense, 97–131.

Smith, Brian 1988. Shetland in Saga-Time: Rereading the Orkneyinga Saga, *Northern Studies* 25, 21–41.

Spurkland, Terje 2005. *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, Woodbridge.

Steinsland, Gro 1991. *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi: en analyse av hierogami-myten i Skírnismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal og Hyndluljóð*, Oslo.

—— 2000. *Den hellige kongen. Om religion og herskermakt fra vikingtid til middelalder*, Oslo.

Stringer, Keith J. 1985 (ed.). *Essays on the Nobility of Medieval Scotland*, Edinburgh.

Svensk Etymologisk Ordbok. Ed. by Elof Hellquist, Lund, 1922, http://runeberg.org/svetym/0203.html accessed 2/1/2009.

Thomson, William P. L. 2003. St Magnus: An Exploration of his Sainthood, *Stones, Skalds & Saints. The Faces of Orkney*. Ed. by Doreen J. Waugh et al., Edinburgh, 46–64.

—— 2005. Harald Fairhair, Torf Einar and *Orkneyinga saga, The World of Orkneyinga saga. The Broad-Cloth Viking Trip*. Ed. by Olwyn Owen, Kirkwall, 1–10.

—— 2008. *The New History of Orkney*, Edinburgh.

—— (ed.) 1983. *Birsay Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*, Kirkwall.

Thornton D. E. 2006. Orality, Literacy and Genalogy in Early Medieval Ireland and Wales, *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*. Ed. by Huw Pryce, Cambridge, 83–98.

Tomany, Maria-Claudia 2007. *Destination Viking und Orkneyinga saga. Probleme der Geschichtsschreibung und regionalen Identität in Orkney*. München (University of Munich Dissertation 2004).

Topping, Patrick 1983. Harald Maddadson, Earl of Orkney and Caithness 1139–1206, *Scottish Historical Review* 62: 105–120.

Turville-Petre, Joan 1978–81. The Genealogist and History: Ari to Snorri, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 20, 7–23.

Waugh, Doreen J. et al. (eds.) 2003. *Stones, Skalds & Saints. The Faces of Orkney*. Edinburgh.

Whaley Diana 2003. Arnórr, Earls' Propagandist? On the Techniques and Social Functions of Skaldic Eulogy, *Stones, Skalds & Saints.The Faces of Orkney*. Ed. by Doreen J. Waugh et al., Edinburgh, 18–32.

Williams, Gareth et al. 2004. *Sagas, Saints and Settlements*, Leiden.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN ARENA FOR HIGHER POWERS. CULT BUILDINGS AND RULERS IN THE LATE IRON AGE AND THE EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD IN THE MÄLAR REGION

Olof Sundqvist

1. *Introduction*

Religion, particularly in traditional societies, is integrated with social, political and cultural conditions. The construction of cult buildings is not only determined by religious motifs, but also by a deliberate choice of localities, architecture and rituals, intended to symbolise and legitimise the political power. Several studies in the history of religion have shown that myths and rituals in general were important for Viking Age and early medieval rulers in Scandinavia when it comes to express positions of power.[1] Few of them have, however, focused on the role of cult buildings in this context. In this chapter I will study how rulers used halls, cult houses and churches for expressing and maintaining their political power.[2] I intend to apply a long-term perspective, including both the late Iron Age and the early Middle Ages (400–1100). The purpose is to study continuity and change in connection with the conversion process in Scandinavia, when the pre-Christian halls and cult houses were replaced by churches. When historians of religion previously investigated the relation between power and religion, they often proceeded from the theory of a Scandinavian sacral kingship.[3] In these studies scholars reconstructed a religious ideology which was supposedly common for all of Scandinavia. In this chapter I apply a different

[1] See e.g. Steinsland 1991; 2000; Sundqvist 2002.

[2] In this chapter the analytic concept "hall" refers to a multi-functional building, where also cultic activities took place, while "cult house" designates a smaller, more specific cult building. The concept "cult building" comprises both "hall", "cult house" and "church".

[3] On this theory, see e.g. Sundqvist 2002.

perspective. The focus is on the people called the Svear (ON *Svíar* pl.), so as to be able to account for the specific historical contexts.[4]

The Svear lived in an area called Svetjud (ON *Svíþjóð*).[5] We do not know the geographic extent of this area, but it has been suggested that it comprised the Mälar region, Uppland, Södermanland, Västmanland and parts of Närke (Fig. 1). This area was delimited by a wide belt of forest towards the south and the south-west. On the other side of these woodlands was Götaland, i.e. the land where the people called Götar (ON *Gauta* pl.) lived. It is uncertain from when on the Svear constituted a political unit. Early society in Svetjud seems to have been divided into several tribes under independent rulers who had gained power by plundering and taking tributes abroad. The sources indicate that, at times, these rulers and tribes were united in a loose alliance under a federate leader or high-king.[6] Such a king or overlord could occasionally exercise domination and power (ON *ríki*) over several tribes and later also over a territory. As time went this alliance of tribes was stabilised and kingship developed in the region of Lake Mälaren,[7] with a royal and cultic site in Uppsala.[8] At the end of the tenth century the pagan elite in the Mälar region was challenged by a Christian king, apparently based in the provinces of the Götar. An episcopal see was founded early in Skara, approximately 1013–1014. A number of Romanesque churches were erected in Götaland. Later, such churches occur in the Mälar region. One exception however is Sigtuna, where the Christian royal power had an outpost and an episcopal see

[4] Since this chapter is part of a forthcoming wider project it has a preliminary character. In the forthcoming project, called "An arena for higher powers. A regional approach to rulers and cultic buildings in the Late Iron Age", financed by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond in Sweden, also other parts of Scandinavia will be investigated.

[5] On Svetjud and the Svear, see e.g. Sawyer 1991; Th. Andersson 2004; Ljungkvist 2006; Blomkvist et al. 2007.

[6] Evidence of a Viking Age High-King of the Svear may be seen in the expression *rex sueonum* in *Vita Anskarii* 19, 26. See Sundqvist 2002: 69. The concept *kunungR* is evidenced in Viking Age runic inscriptions (Ög 136; Sm 42; U11; Vg 40). We do not know what this concept exactly referred to in these early sources. See Brink 1990: 55. When I use the analytical concept "king" I refer to a person who was at the top of the ruling elite.

[7] See e.g. Vikstrand 2000.

[8] See e.g. B. Gräslund 1993; Arrhenius 1995; Duczko 1996; Sundqvist 2002; Ljungkvist 2006; Göthberg 2008. See also Rahmqvist's (1986) settlement historical analysis which indicates that the western part of Old Uppsala was a royal demesne also before the Middle Ages. The ancient name of the crown-lands, *Uppsala auðr* 'the wealth of Uppsala', suggests that Uppsala was the centre of these estates.

Figure 1. The Mälar region. The Landscapes around the lakes Mälaren and Hjälmaren. From Ljungkvist 2006.

(founded 1060) quite early. Several churches were built in Sigtuna (see below), from which the process of Christianising Uppland was launched. Sigtuna became a point of support for Christian kingship, and from there alliances were made with local rulers in the Mälar region. e pagan cult in Uppsala survived, however, until the end of the eleventh century.

It seems as if the political power in early Svetjud was legitimised through religious elements. Written sources report that the pre-Christian rulers in Uppsala were regarded as descendants of the gods (see 6.1 below). ey also legitimised their rule by performing ritual roles at public sacri ces (see 7 below). For both pagan and Christian kings and magnates it was important to appear at public gatherings, such as the religious feasts, the thing-assemblies and the fairs. e

beginning of the seventh century and stood there up to ca. 800.[32] It may have been intended as a symbolic-religious demarcation and could be compared with the *vébǫnd* 'bands which form the boundaries of the shrine', which seem to have occurred at cult and *thing* places. Since the hall burnt down during the Late Vendel Period or the Early Viking Age, it cannot be identical with the cult building mentioned by Adam. Post-holes and a stone-packing indicate that a hall was also erected on the spot of the present church. A fragment of a mould for a brooch (of the type JP 51), found in the first clay fill under the church, dated to the tenth century, indicates that activities took place there during the Viking Age.[33] Else Nordahl therefore carefully suggested that the hall should be dated to the Viking Age.[34] Recent excavations however indicate that the house is even older.[35] The remains of this building which pre-dates the hall in Uppsala are located in the area of the old royal demesne (*Kungsgården*). The whole assembly thus indicates that the ruling power had a certain influence on these houses. Some archaeological evidence of pre-Christian cult performed by elite groups may also be seen in the area around the church. During an excavation to the west of the church in 2005 two hearths (A1164, 1201) were found with wood and burned animal bones dating back to the Migration Period. Most of the bones belonged to pigs and they were interpreted as remains from sacrificial meals.[36] The consumption of pigs may be an indication of the presence of elite groups at this site.[37]

Archaeological excavations show that aristocratic halls in the Mälar region in general were used as a kind of cult buildings. On Helgö (Lillön), Uppland, a three-aisle hall building was erected on a terrace (Foundation IA) (Fig. 3).[38] The house was divided into two rooms, one *salr* and one "chamber". It was built during the Migration Period and remained there during several phases up to the Viking Age. In the *salr*-area several finds were made, such as gold foil figures and exclusive imported glass. They indicate that cultic activities have taken place

[32] Cf. Duczko 1996: 416; A.-S. Gräslund 1997: 111.
[33] Nordahl 1996: 63, 73.
[34] Nordahl 1996: 60–62.
[35] See Göthberg 2008. He has also shown that the houses indicated by means of "ground-penetrating-radar" (see Alkarp & Price 2005) cannot be confirmed by the archaeological investigations made at the church in 2005.
[36] Göthberg 2008: 66–67, 91–92.
[37] Frölund 2007: 368.
[38] See Herschend 1995; 1998.

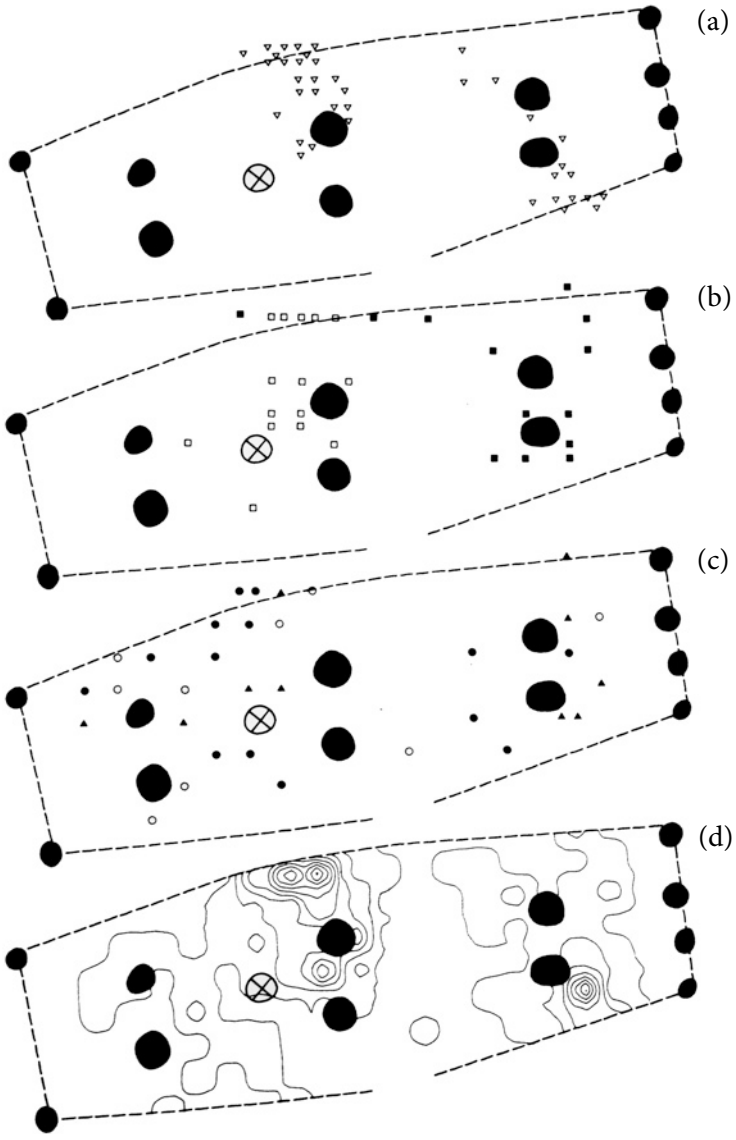


Figure 3. The hall at Helgö. Find distribution in the hall on Foundation Ia at Helgö. (a) Fragments of filigree glass claw and cone beakers = open triangle. (b) Guldgubbar = open square; weapons = filled square. (c) Knives = filled triangle; loom-weights and wetstones = a dot. (d) Density map of the kind of distribution. The first isarithmic curve marks areas with at least 1 find per m². The most dense square metre contains 8 finds, and the entire house (125 m²) contains 90 finds. The 'H' marks a presumed position of the high seat. After Herschend 1998.

at this area. In connection with this building also a Buddha figurine, an Irish crosier and a Coptic scoop was found, which all may have had a symbolic significance for the users of these objects. Besides the hall building, a sacrificial place was found at the foot of a bare rock. There, arrow-heads, ceramics and food were deposed under a Viking Age triangular stone-setting (Sw. "treudd").[39] There are no doubts that Helgö was an important cultic site. The name OSw. **Hælghø* 'the holy island' points in that direction.[40] Also Birka and Sanda have remains of Late Iron Age halls, appearing in contexts of finds indicating cult.[41] Similar Iron Age halls have also been found at several other central places in the Mälar region, for instance at Hovgården on Adelsö, at Fornsigtuna, Valsgärde and Vendel.[42] In these cases it is mainly the construction and locality of these buildings which indicate that they may have had a possible cultic or ceremonial function in connection with banquets. At the hall of Husby, Glanshammar, Närke, dated to the Migration and Vendel Periods, there was a demarcation or palisade, resembling the wall discovered in Uppsala.[43] This demarcation, and the gold foil figure discovered to the west of the hall, support the idea that this building may have had a ritual function. Perhaps also a hall was located at the same spot as the monastery in Eskilstuna. In connection with a row of stone-edged post-holes two gold foil figures were discovered dated to ca. 700.[44] A gold foil figure from the eighth or ninth century was also found at the hall of Svintuna, on the border between Svealand and Götaland.[45]

There is also slight evidence of more specific cult houses in the Mälar region. To the north of the Late Iron Age hall in Lunda, Södermanland, remains of a small building (3 × 6 m) were found together with two phallic figures.[46] A third figure was found in the yard, south of the hall. According to the archaeologists the small house should be interpreted as a specific cult house, comparable with the structures found

[39] See T. Zachrisson 2004.
[40] See e.g. Vikstrand 2001: 244.
[41] Holmquist Olausson & Kitzler Åhfeldt 2002; Åqvist 1996.
[42] Brunstedt 1996; Damell 1991; 1993; Norr & Sundkvist 1995; Arrhenius 2000.
[43] It should be noted that several halls ("hus II" and "hus III") may have replaced each other. Ekman 2000: 25.
[44] See S. Zachrisson 1963. The archaeologist Torun Zachrisson has orally suggested that there are reasons to interpret the finds in Eskilstuna as a hall.
[45] Herschend 1998.
[46] G. Andersson et al. 2004; Skyllberg 2008.

at Tissø and Järrestad. In the yard, to the north of the hall, several pits were discovered, probably intended for ritual cocking. In this yard also Þórr's hammers, amulets and miniature scythes were found. A grove was situated on a hill approximately 200 metres to the west of this ritual area. Archaeological finds show that rituals were performed also there.

The first church mentioned in the Mälar area was built in the surroundings of Birka, in the mid-ninth century. According to Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* (ca. 870), it was erected by Hergeir, the prefect of Birka, on his own hereditary estate (*hereditas*).[47] Wilhelm Holmqvist has suggested that Hergeir's estate was identical with Helgö.[48] It has also been proposed that the hall at Helgö might have been used for Christian ceremonies.[49] The oldest attested stone churches in the region are located in Sigtuna. At the assumed royal demesne,[50] a church was detected by archaeologists. It is today called St Gertrud's, but it is very uncertain to whom this early medieval church was dedicated when it was built. Due to its location and peculiar architecture it has been regarded as one of the first stone churches in the area, built perhaps at the end of the eleventh century.[51] Some scholars argue that it was the original bishop's church.[52] They support their suggestion with finds made on the churchyard, to the south of the subterranean ruin, where the remains of an individual, together with a crosier, were discovered. Fragments of a baptismal font and five so-called "bishop combs" also indicate the bishop' s church.[53] Between 1060 and 1120 St Per was built with an impressive central tower in connection with the new royal demesne in Sigtuna.[54] Most likely it was built by the king.

---

[47] *Vita Anskarii* 11.

[48] Holmqvist 1980: 60.

[49] Herschend 1998: 13–14. Halls may have been used for the Christian cult also at other places during the transition period, for instance in Sigtuna (see 7.3). It has been discussed whether the pagan cult building in Uppsala after the conversion was used for the Christian cult. For an overview of this discussion, see Sundqvist 2002: 298–301.

[50] Most scholars argue that Sigtuna had a royal demesne. See e.g. T. Zachrisson 1998; Tesch 2001. Critical Ros 2001.

[51] E.g. Bonnier 1987: 21; 1996: 192; Tesch 2001: 16. Critically considered by Ros 2001: 186–197.

[52] See Tesch 2001: 14–19. Critically considered by Ros 2001: 181–182.

[53] Tesch 2001: 17–18.

[54] Tesch 2001: 20, 30–31. Cf. Redelius 1975.

The first church in Old Uppsala was probably made of wood and erected at the same place as the current stone church. It is indicated by post holes and Christian graves.[55] This church was built in direct connection with the royal demesne ca. 1100. It is somewhat uncertain when the Cathedral was erected in Uppsala, but it was probably in existence there by 1164, when the archbishopric was founded. It was dedicated to St Lars and followed the same plan as St Per in Sigtuna. After 1150 Romanesque churches were built more frequently in Uppland, mostly in the southern part of the province, with Sigtuna as a centre.

3. *The owner and custodian of the cult buildings and sacred sites*

3.1. *The existence of proprietary churches*

During the early Middle Ages the so called proprietary church system (*Eigenkirchenwesen*) was developed in Europe.[56] Individual magnates erected churches on their own farms. The church builder (*patronus*) had a great influence on the spiritual activities of the church (*spiritualia*). He could for instance appoint priests to his church, who might even be his slaves. There were great economical interests behind this system. The land-owner disposed entirely over the *temporalia* of the church: he could use the church just as any other property. It could be bought or sold, inherited, substituted, divided, put in pawn, or even leased out. The church owner also disposed over the income of the church. We know from England that the owner had the right to collect parish tithes during the eleventh century.[57] Probably he also charged for baptism, marriage, and funeral. A similar system is evidenced at several places in Continental Europe.[58]

---

[55] Bonnier 1996: 203; Göthberg 2008. In general, however, the archaeological evidence for early wooden churches in the Mälar region is weak.

[56] See e.g. Stutz & Feine 1989; Smedberg 1973; Wood 2006.

[57] Smedberg 1973: 89.

[58] The Roman Church reacted early against this system. In the synod at Braga 572 it was stated that none should erect churches for pure profit, church building should only be motivated by religious reasons. Later the Gregorian reform opposed private churches and layman influence in ecclesiastic activities, by claiming *libertas ecclesiae*. The conflict was solved on an official level in the 12th and 13th centuries, when *ius patronus* was introduced. It comprised a compromise which reduced the church owner's possibility to exert influence on ecclesiastic matters. See Smedberg 1973: 89–97. See also Wood 2006.

It has been discussed in research whether this proprietary church system also existed in Sweden. According to Gunnar Smedberg, who has mainly studied this system from the perspective of the medieval provincial laws, the practice of proprietary churches existed in Sweden. However, the scope for it was considerably smaller there than in other places, since the position of the peasant congregation was very strong in eastern Scandinavia.[59] Smedberg's hypothesis has been contradicted by Olle Ferm and Sigurd Rahmqvist. Using other sources and methods, they have been able to show that such system was widely spread in the province of Uppland.[60] Ferm and Rahmqvist proceeded from those cases when the nobles can be attested to have owned an entire church village, indicating that the parish church was erected by the land-owner rather than by the tenants who were leasing his land. Seen from a settlement perspective, the parish churches in Uppland were located beyond the centre of the parish, often in connection with the manorial estates. In these cases, it is probable that the magnates themselves erected the churches, according to Ferm and Rahmqvist. Ann Catherine Bonnier argued in the same vein. She stated that almost all Romanesque churches in Uppland were built by private proprietors.[61] Several of them were so exclusive that one must assume that the proprietor was rich. More than half of them have, or have had, towers, apparently reserved for the king or his men. Moreover, some of these churches had galleries for the nobles, which also indicate the presence of magnates. Bonnier has also observed that more than one third of the Romanesque churches in Uppland show architectural details in sand stone. Such stone was rare in this area and probably expensive. Also this indicates that the proprietor was a rich magnate.

In my opinion there is clear evidence indicating that proprietary churches existed in the Mälar region. During the missionary period this type of churches must have been common.[62] The church erected by the prefect of Birka, Hergeir, for instance, was placed on his own hereditary estate (see above). This church was undoubtedly a proprietary church. When the building of churches intensified later in the late

[59] Smedberg 1973: 175, 184.
[60] Ferm & Rahmqvist 1985.
[61] Bonnier 1987: 219–221; 1996: 193–194.
[62] It is most likely, however, that also the *thing* congregation erected churches in the Mälar area in 12th and 13th centuries. Also ecclesiastic corporations, such as a monastery, could build churches as well as the Church itself (sometimes in collaboration with the royal power). Brink 1990: 80–87; 1996 and the literature referred to there.

eleventh and twelfth centuries, it seems as if several sanctuaries were erected by magnates in the Mälar region. One of the best examples of such a church is probably the one discovered at Viby, Uppland.[63] It was detected during archaeological excavations in 1997–2000. This apse church (made partly of wood, partly of stone) pre-dates the Cistercian "monastery" at the same site, which is believed to have been founded in the 1160s.[64] Architectural aspects connected to the choir and a *patronus*-grave, placed strategically under the opening of the triumphal arch, indicate that the early sanctuary was a proprietary church. The most important evidence is however a letter of conciliation written by Archbishop Stefan (ca. 1164–1167), mentioning that the female magnate Doter had donated the manorial estate at Viby (where the private apse church was erected), meadows, forests, and fishing waters to the monks.[65]

Place-names may also inform us about proprietary churches in the Mälar region. According to Thorsten Andersson the old name *Fastakirkia* (1317) 'Faste's church' in Uppland, clearly indicates that a magnate or a settlement chieftain in the neighbourhood had played a decisive role in connection with the building of the church.[66] It has been stated that the name *Karlungskirkia* in Roslagen also evidences a proprietary church. The name Karlung has been interpreted as 'the owner of Karlösa'.[67] Some of these churches were also erected by females. In Södermanland there are two churches, which in former times were designated *Ulfhildakirkia* and *Sighridakirkia*. Probably two noble women called Ulfhild and Sighrid built these churches.[68] During the excavation inside the church of *Botkyrka*, in the same province, a grave was found in the oldest floor layer in the western tower, containing remains of a female.[69] Perhaps she was the founder of the church. The name *Botkyrka* is derived from OSw. *Bothvidhakirkia* 'Botvid's church'. Botvid was the apostle of Södermanland and according to his *Vita* he was killed by a freed slave in 1120 and soon regarded as

[63] Karlsson 2006.
[64] Redelius (2006: 15–24) rejects the existence of a monastery at the place, but accepts that monks stayed there.
[65] DS I, 51.
[66] Th. Andersson 1991.
[67] See Brink 1996: 280.
[68] Wahlberg 1975.
[69] Bonnier 1987: 221, note 118.

a martyr and saint.[70] It says that he first was buried in a church at Säby (present Salem), which was erected by an honourable man called Hermund on his own hereditary estate (*in proprio patrimonio*). Later, Botvid's brother took his remains to another church at their hereditary estate (*in patrimonio ipsorum*) at Hammarby in 1129. In 1176 the stone church was built there. Most likely some of these churches could be regarded as proprietary churches.[71]

Apart from the magnates it seems as if also the king built churches in the Mälar region. These churches were sometimes erected at the royal demesnes.[72] Both the wooden and stone churches in Old Uppsala were erected at "Kungsgården".[73] Also the churches of St Gertrud's and St Per's in Sigtuna were probably raised at royal estates, as well as the church of Adelsö.[74] Many early churches appear at places called *Husaby*, for instance *Husby kyrka* in Bro parish, Uppland.[75] In this case the name indicates that these churches were built on crown lands. In the early Middle Ages the king had access to crown-lands called *Uppsala auðr*. It consisted of several estates (*husabyar*) scattered out in the Mälar region. There was one *husaby* in each hundred (*hundare*). When the ambulating king and his retinues (*hirð*) arrived at the *husaby* the *bryti* 'bailiff' arranged a feast.[76] Perhaps the king used the church there under his visitations.

We may thus assume that the system of proprietary churches has existed in the Mälar region during the early Middle Ages and perhaps also later. Kings and magnates there owned, controlled and managed many churches. Perhaps they themselves also appointed the priests at these churches.

3.2. *Continuity of the role of administrator?*

At the end of the nineteenth century the historian of law Ulrich Stutz argued that the system of proprietary churches was built on a

---

[70] *Vita sancti Botvidi*, SRS II: 377–382.

[71] Also the church in Västeråker, Uppland, has demonstrably been built by a private person. Bonnier 1987: 206–208; DMS 1.6: 155–156. Most likely the churches of Ängsö in Västmanland and Granhammar in Närke were built by private persons. Nisbeth 1982: 173–174.

[72] Brink 1996: 276–284.

[73] Rahmqvist 1986.

[74] On Sigtuna, see Tesch 2001. On Adelsö, see DMS 1.7: 218–236.

[75] Ferm & Rahmqvist 1985: 82; DMS 1.7: 44–113; Brink 1996: 278–279.

[76] Brink 2000.

continuation from a pre-Christian Germanic "Eigentempelwesen".[77] The Sagas of the Icelanders often mention that the chieftains themselves erected cult buildings (ON *hof*) on their farms. They controlled these buildings and the activities that took place there and charged taxes from the farmers for cultic activities performed there (*tolla gjalda, hoftoll til leggja*).[78] According to Stutz, the system of proprietary churches was based on these ideas. His entire theory was, however, questioned by Olaf Olsen: as outlined above, he argued that we have no clear evidence of pre-Christian Germanic temples at all.[79] Olsen and others also questioned the idea that the system of proprietary churches was unique for Germanic peoples. On the contrary, there are clear signs that this system also existed in Slavic and Celtic regions, as well as in Byzantium.[80]

Even if most scholars today are sceptical about "the Stutz-theory" in general,[81] it cannot be denied that the system of proprietary churches was very common in Germanic areas.[82] It has recently been argued that "the Germanic peoples were undoubtedly the propelling element in the development of the *Eigenkirche*".[83] One element that may have helped its spread there is that already in the pre-Christian period Germanic kings and magnates often seem to have had a specific relation to cult and cultic sites. In my opinion the fragmented source materials from the Mälar region indicate that such conditions existed also there. In *Ynglingatal*, for instance, the Uppsala-king Yngvi is called *vǫrðr véstalls*, which may be interpreted as "the custodian of sanctuary altar".[84] The term *vé* has the meaning 'cult place, sanctuary'. Most likely there were ritual constructions and/or buildings at such places, as indicated by the composition *véstallr* ('sanctuary stand, altar') The word *vǫrðr* signifies 'watchman, keeper, custodian, guardian'.

---

[77] Stutz & Feine 1989.

[78] E.g. *Eyrbyggja saga* 3–4; *Kjalnesinga saga* 2.

[79] See e.g. Olsen 1966. Cf. Schäferdiek 1986: 560.

[80] E.g. Olsen 1966: 80. Nowadays, scholars argue that the system of proprietary churches had its roots in Late Antiquity, see Landau 1982: 400. According to Susan Wood (2006: 11, 92–108) the specific power developed among Roman provincial landowners played an essential role for the development of this system. She states, however, that it is hard to find its exact origin.

[81] For a general criticism on Stutz' theories, see Wood 2006: 92–108.

[82] See e.g. Olsen 1966: 82; cf. Schäferdiek 1986: 560–561.

[83] Russel 1994: 154.

[84] On this kenning, see Sundqvist 2007: 94.

This type of ruler epithet appears quite often in Old Norse skaldic poetry.[85] Runic inscriptions from Sweden testify that such epithets also existed there. In the inscription of Rök from Östergötland (Ög 136) (ca. 800 AD), for instance, the sequence **sibi uiauari** appears. It may be interpreted as *Sibbi vīaværi*, i.e. "Sibbi, the custodian of the sanctuaries".[86] Sibbi was not only a great chieftain in the central settlement districts of Östergötland, he was also strongly connected to certain *vi*-sanctuaries. In a Viking Age runic inscription from Västergötland the name *Vīurðr* appears, which may be interpreted as a by-name or designation of a chieftain, ON **vévǫrðr* m. 'sanctuary custodian'.[87] In several Swedish runic inscriptions the personal name (or by-name) *Vīseti* (ON *Véseti*) appears. It may be connected with the appellation ON **véseti* m. 'the one who dwells at (or sits) or superintends a sanctuary'.[88] These nomenclatures probably originally designated chieftains who performed the double role of both political and cult leader at the *vi*-sites.

Archaeological sources also indicate that kings and magnates had a special relation to cult places and sanctuaries in the late Iron Age Mälar region. Several halls are located at places with archaeological finds and structures indicating high status.[89] At the halls of Uppsala and Adelsö/Hovgården there are royal and great mounds containing rich finds.[90] Some of these graves suggest that the people buried in them belonged to the highest social stratum in Svetjud.[91] In connection with the halls of Vendel, Valsgärde and Uppsala there are boat-graves indicating high status; the same goes for extraordinary finds discovered at the hall of Helgö, such as gold foil figures, bracteates and exclusive glass.

The theophoric place-names *Fröstuna, Ultuna*, and *Torstuna* also indicate that political power, organisation of society, and cult, were closely interrelated in pre-Christian Svetjud. The names in—*tuna* seem

---

[85] See e.g. Earl Sigurðr's epithet *vés valdr* "the custodian of the sanctuary" in *Sigurðardrápa* Skj. B1: 69–70.

[86] For interpretations of the sequence **uiauari**, see e.g. Peterson 1994 (1989): 73.

[87] Vg 73. See Peterson 2007: 257.

[88] See Peterson 2007: 257.

[89] See e.g. Damell 1993.

[90] The royal mounds of Uppsala are usually dated to the Migration Period. John Ljungkvist (2006) has, however, given good reasons for a later dating of the mounds, i.e. the Vendel Period. The halls in Uppsala may be dated to both the Migration and the Vendel Periods.

[91] Arrhenius 1995.

to designate places of central importance during the late Iron Age, probably abodes for distinguished and powerful families.[92] It is no coincidence that we in the Mälar area often find halls and/or gold foil figures at the *tuna*-sites, such as *Fornsigtuna* (and *Sigtuna*), *Eskilstuna, Tuna* in Vendel, *Ultuna* and *Svintuna*. A similar picture emerges when we consider the conditions of medieval ownership. The Iron Age halls in the Mälar region are frequently situated at places which in the Middle Ages reappear as crown lands and royal demesnes. This pattern can be seen for instance at Uppsala, Adelsö, Fornsigtuna, and Husby in Glanshammar.[93] Some of these places were probably old manorial estates, which during the Viking Age may have been taken over or confiscated by the king and made into crown lands.

We may thus carefully conclude that kings and magnates sometimes owned or controlled cult buildings in both pre-Christian and Christian contexts in the Mälar region. In my opinion, however, there are no traits of direct continuity from the Viking Age to the Middle Ages between the management forms in connection with these buildings in this region. The system of proprietary churches was common in almost all of Continental Europe and the British Isles, and was probably transferred from there to the Mälar region, where it appeared as something completely new. Most likely, the roles of administrator connected to this system, and the inducements for them, were transferred to Svetjud simultaneously as a novelty. But in a pragmatic sense there may have been a continuation of these roles from the pre-Christian to the Christian era. The proprietary church system was probably in one or another way adjusted to Germanic conditions before it arrived to Svetjud, and it may partly have fulfilled the same functions for the Christian magnates as the pre-Christian sanctuaries had for the pagan kings and chieftains in the Mälar region.

4. *Economic, military and other profane functions*

For European feudal magnates the proprietary churches and the activities connected to them were essential parts of their income. A similar situation probably also existed in Sweden in the twelfth and thirteenth

[92] See Vikstrand 2000.
[93] See Rahmqvist 1986; DMS 1.2: 180; DMS 1.7: 218–236; Damell 1991; Ekman 2000.

centuries. This can partly be seen in papal letters sent to Swedish kings during the twelfth century. In one letter dated to 1171 Pope Alexander III writes to "K. the King of Svear and Götar". It mentions that more reverence must be paid to the bishops, priests and monks. It is a sacrilege (*sacrilegium*) to deprive them of their goods, and to take into possession and profane usage materials that had been donated to the church. These warnings concern mostly magnates and royals.[94] The document indicates that Swedish magnates abused their rights over clerics and their property.[95] They probably drew benefits from the church and the clerical activities. Perhaps they also appropriated tithes in a "proprietary church manner".

In the Mälar region there are several early churches which may have been so-called "defence churches". For instance, it has been argued that the twelfth century churches in Spånga, Sollentuna and Vallentuna in Uppland, which all had wide western towers, were used for fortification.[96] Also the round-churches in Bromma, Solna and on Munsö, have been interpreted as "defence churches".[97] Based on the twelfth and thirteenth century church-materials from Möre, Småland and Öland in Sweden, Marit Anglert has discussed whether the concept of "defence churches" is appropriate in this context.[98] She shows that these buildings should rather be considered "multi-functional churches". It seems, for instance, as if the churches in her area of investigation served as storehouses where tributes and taxes were kept, often *in natura*. Anglert has also argued that the fortification structures appearing in church towers, e.g. shooting-floors, were erected in the first place to protect the goods stored there. By keeping tribute inside a church, economic exploitation was given a symbolic legitimacy. The churches were also used as residences for the elite. If we follow Anglert's line of reasoning also the so called "defence churches" in Uppland may have had similar functions besides the religious ones. It seems, however, as if both the churches and the political contexts around Kalmarsund on the thirteenth century were very specific and thus could not be compared with other areas. On the other hand, it is possible that churches in Östergötland had this "multi-functional"

---

[94] DS I, 41; ST I, 49.
[95] Smedberg 1973: 169.
[96] See Tuulse 1968: 49; DMS I.7: 238, 290.
[97] See Lindgren 1995: 95–96.
[98] Marit Anglert 1993.

character. Bjälbo church, for instance, has rooms in the second floor of the tower used as residences and consultation chambers, while the third floor may have been a storeroom for seed.[99]

In a strictly functional sense the profane aspects connected to the churches resemble the system associated with the pre-Christian cult at sacred sites in the Mälar region. The pre-Christian hall buildings were definitely multi-functional, and used as residences for the elite. It is possible that they also served military needs. For instance, the hall at the garrison in Birka was in some way related to the defence construction called Borg. Rich finds of weapons and arms indicate that this hall was used by warriors, perhaps the king's *hirð*. Also economic aspects may have been associated with these buildings. According to Adam tributes were collected at Uppsala in connection with the cultic feasts:

> *Solet quoque post novem annos communis omnium Sueoniae provintiarum sollempnitas in Ubsola celebrari. Ad quam videlicet sollempnitatem nulli prestatur immunitas. Reges et populi, omnes et singuli sua dona transmittunt ad Ubsolam, et, quod omni pena crudelius est, illi, qui iam induerunt Christianitatem, ab illis se redimunt cerimoniis.*[100]

Adam's indignation has been interpreted as an indication of the accuracy of his statements.[101] It seems here as if the cult was part of a redistribution system where chieftains of the settlements (or minor kings) and peoples were obliged to bring or send their gifts and tributes to the "temple" of Uppsala. Perhaps they contributed with the animals used at the sacrificial rituals. Adam mentions that they of every living thing that is of male sex, offer nine heads, "*quorum sanguine deos [tales] placari mos est.*"[102]

There are also archaeological indications of this economic system in connection with other cultic sites in the Mälar region. It has been argued that bread played an important role at the ceremonial feasts of Helgö.[103] Rotary querns have been found close to the hall as well

---

[99] See Redelius 1972; Sundqvist 2006: 20.

[100] "*It is customary also to solemnize in Uppsala, at nine-year intervals, a general feast of all the provinces of the Svear. From attendance at this festival no one is exempted. Kings and peoples all and singly send their gifts to Uppsala and, what is more distressing than any kind of punishment, those who have already adopted Christianity redeem themselves through these ceremonies*". Adam IV 27.

[101] Hultgård 1997: 29.

[102] "*…with whose blood it is the custom to placate the gods.*" (Adam IV 27).

[103] Zachrisson 2004.

as corn placed in a round store-house (Rutenberge). Moreover, in connection with the stone-setting at this site, bread was deposed probably as gifts to the gods. Also close to the hall of Sanda, wheat-corns and rotary querns have been discovered. Archaeologists have argued that the seed which had been ground there must have been brought in from somewhere else, since arable land in this area was limited.[104] Perhaps it came as tribute from the farmers who intended to participate in the cultic feast of Sanda. Perhaps also the grain at Helgö was collected as tribute in connection with a cult.[105]

At the halls of Helgö, Husby in Glanshammar, Svintuna and the assumed hall at Eskilstuna gold foil figures have been found. Several scholars have interpreted them as "temple coins".[106] In order to participate in the religious feasts and rituals people would have had to pay with these objects. In my opinion there are problems with this interpretation. The fact that some of these objects were discovered in post holes indicates rather that they were sacrificed in connection with the foundation of the house or that they had ideological implications (see below). The gold foil figure nr. 1186 at Helgö, for instance, was found in one of the post holes of the hall.[107]

In sum, clear economic and profane interests seem to have motivated both pagan and Christian kings and magnates to erect and control cult buildings and sanctuaries. Most likely there were additional incentives for them. The recently converted Svea kings, for instance, probably imitated Continental magnates when building churches, perhaps in order to express equality with them. It is possible that the great interest in building churches was connected to the medieval Christian ideology and doctrine of *rex iustus*, which seems to have reached Svetjud in the twelfth century. According to this ideology the kings should follow ideals of the Old Testament. Since the King of Israel had priestly functions, and took care of the temple cult, also the medieval ruler was regarded as "king and priest" (*rex et sacerdos*), as a custodian of the Christian cult and the Church.[108] In what follows we shall also see other motives for controlling cult buildings for both pagan and Christian rulers.

---

[104] Lamm & Åqvist 1997; Zachrisson 2004.
[105] See Zachrisson 2004.
[106] See e.g. Watt 2007.
[107] Lamm in Lamm 2004: 51.
[108] See e.g. Anton 2004.

5. *The topographical position and architecture*

5.1. *The elevated and imposing hall*

The halls discussed in this chapter are topographically located in the wide valleys with clay-sediment around Lake Mälaren, where conditions for agriculture are good. Most of them were erected at central places in connection with lines of communications, especially waterways. The halls were built on artificially made terraces or in topographic positions expressing loftiness.[109] The hall buildings were thus elevated in the landscape and visible from the public roads. A good example is the hall in Uppsala. At "Kungsgården" to the North of the church two plateaus are built of clay. The southern plateau is ca. 2.5 m high; on it stood the hall during the Vendel Period. There was probably also a hall on the northern plateau. The assumed hall, situated on the "church plateau", was in an exposed position within the surrounding landscape. Every traveller, particularly from the north, must have seen the hall(s) and the mighty royal mounds from far away.

The elevated position of the cult buildings may also be seen at Adelsö, Birka and Fornsigtuna. The terrace carrying the hall at Hovgården (Adelsö) was ca. 1–2 m high and located furthest out on an isthmus at Lake Mälaren.[110] Also the hall at Birka was exposed on the upper terrace at the "garrison".[111] This house must have been easily visible from the fairway at Björkö and must have been an impressive sight for people sailing by. The topographic position was also essential in Fornsigtuna.[112] The dominating plateau with the foundations of the house, the "King's hall", was situated furthest out on a cape close to the fairway at the Håtuna bay. The plateau carrying the largest hall, "the garrison", was situated in a strategic position, somewhat separate from the rest of the settlement.

The dwellings of the political and religious elite were thus associated with an elevated position. The majestic impression of these houses was also reinforced by means of architecture and size. These houses were large, had three aisles, and a roof carried by powerful posts erected in pairs. In Old Uppsala the hall on the southern plateau was ca. 40 m

[109] Cf. Herschend 1998: 39–40.
[110] Brunstedt 1996.
[111] Holmquist Olausson & Kitzler Åhfeldt 2002.
[112] Damell 1991; 1993.

long and 12 m wide. One of the post holes (G) was 1.47 m deep and at the surface ca. 50–90 cm in diameter.[113] This indicates that the house was not only long but also high. Two of the post holes (9 and 12), discovered by Sune Lindqvist under the present church, had a diameter of ca. 85 cm. Nr 12 was as deep as 1.25 m.[114] It has been suggested that these holes may have belonged to a hall, which thus must have been high. One of the largest halls in the Mälar region was found in Lunda. It was 50 m long and in a topographic position which must have overawed those who approached the building. Also one of the halls in Fornsigtuna (the Garrison) was huge, ca. 40 m long and 10 m wide.

The halls were probably not only large, they were also decorated. When Adam described the "temple" in Uppsala he stated "*…quod totum ex auro paratum est,…*".[115] In scholion 139 it is mentioned that a "*catena aurea templum circumdat*".[116] It hangs, shining, from the gables of the building, visible to all who approach it. However, Adam's description may have been "enhanced" (not to say distorted) by literary elements. Anders Hultgård has argued that the text may have been affected by two classical literary figures, *evidentia* and *ekfrasis* (Latin *descriptio*). Both sharpen a description. They would, for example, exaggerate the impression of a work of art, or of a building. Their purpose was to make the narrative vivid and clear, and to encourage the reader's imagination.[117] On the other hand, it is also conceivable that cult buildings were in fact decorated with gold and precious metals. There is archaeological evidence for this: for instance, molten gold was discovered in connection with one of the post-holes of the hall at Gudme, Fyn. According to Frands Herschend, the posts at Gudme might have been decorated with gold, but in connection with a fire, the gold melted and ran down into the post-hole.[118]

---

[113] Hedlund 1993: 66.

[114] Nordahl 1996: 47–50.

[115] *it was "all fitted out with gold"* Adam IV 26.

[116] *"a gold chain surrounds the temple"*.

[117] Also Solomon's temple in the Old Testament may have inspired Adam's description. See Hultgård 1997: 17–18. Gräslund (1997) argued that Adam's description of the "temple" may have been affected by "house shaped" reliquaries, which had a chain between the gables, in which they were carried.

[118] See Herschend in Gräslund 1997: 108–109.

5.2. *Cult buildings made of stone*

The Romanesque churches are located in almost exactly the same areas and places as the pre-Christian halls. However, only in Uppsala, and possibly at the monastery in Eskilstuna, we may see direct geographic continuity.[119] In a similar way as the halls also the stone churches dominated the landscape around Lake Mälaren. Many of these churches were in exposed positions, visible from the roads, and they were probably also important political and religious symbols of power. St Per in Sigtuna, for instance, was located on a hill on the west side of the town.[120] This church has a dominating position on a slope facing east. The big and powerful central tower must have been visible from a great distance, also for seafarers at Sigtuna Bay. Also St Gertrud in Sigtuna, which probably had a magnificent western tower, must have been seen from the sea-route. During the twelfth century this church was located close to the water-line. In some cases the churches were erected on artificial terraces. In Old Uppsala the church stands on a plateau where perhaps a hall was situated previously. Still today the church is visible from far away next to the royal mounds.

The Romanesque churches must have made an overwhelming impression on early medieval people. Tons of dressed granite and well carved corner-stone-chains reflected enormous wealth, organisation and technical knowledge. The artistic elements must have caused astonishment. Also the size of these churches must have given an impression of power and sovereignty. St Per was over 30 m long and built of granite. The high central tower must have overawed, with tower-walls measuring 140 cm in breadth. Also the central tower at Old Uppsala must have impressed people with its dimensions. This church was originally almost twice as big as it is at present. The inside dimensions of the nave were ca. 26 x 24 m. The architecture of the churches in Uppsala and Sigtuna shows that the builders had contacts with magnates and craftsmen from far away. The prototypes of them may be seen in Frankish, Anglo-Saxon and Norman areas.

---

[119] See DMS 1.2: 175; S. Zachrisson 1963.
[120] Redelius 1975: 28.

5.3. *From high seat to galleries for nobles*

The interiors of the cult buildings were equally impressive, with their large rooms and high roofs. In these rooms specific places were reserved for the rulers. The symbolic and ritual centre of the hall was the high seat.[121] It was intended for the owner of the hall: the king or chieftain. One of the best descriptions of the interior of a Viking Age hall is in *Fagrskinna* (ca. 1220).[122] According to this Kings' Saga it was an ancient custom in Norway, Denmark and Svetjud that banquet halls (*veizlustofur*) were erected at royal farms. In these buildings the king's high seat (*hásæti, ǫndvegi*) was in the middle of the long bench facing south. Opposite the king was a seat called "the lesser seat" (*óæðra ǫndvegi*) intended for the highest ranking guest. During the rituals and ceremonies the king took the high seat while other people were sitting on long benches according to rank: the higher ranking guests closer to the king, the poorer and humbler people closer to the doors at the gables. The value of this text as a source for Viking Age conditions can obviously be debated. It is inserted in a passage depicting how King Óláfr kyrri Haraldsson (1066–1093) moved the high seat (*hápall*) from the middle of the long-wall to the middle of the "crossway stool" (*á miðjan þverpall*) at the gable.[123] The distance of time between Óláfr kyrri's reign and the author of *Fagrskinna* is little more than a hundred years. Consequently, it is possible that *Fagrskinna's* description of the hall is reliable. The author also quotes a stanza contemporary with Óláfr in support of his description. This stanza was composed by Arnórr Þorðarson jarlaskáld in honour of Earl Þorfinnr, and it describes the drinking rituals which were supposed to be observed if sitting opposite to the ruler.[124] Since the content of the poem supports parts of the prose account, the latter may arguably be considered a trustworthy source for interiors of Viking Age halls in general. However, for conditions in the Mälar region in particular, the source value of *Fagrskinna's* written evidence is more limited.

On the other hand, high seats may be archaeologically attested in the halls of the Mälar region. Inside the hall building at Helgö there was an elevated position in the banqueting room. It has been interpreted

[121] See e.g. Birkeli 1932; Steinsland, 1991: 66–86; Herschend 1998: 25–31.
[122] *Fagrskinna* 79.
[123] Similar information appears in *Heimskringla* III, *Óláfs saga kyrra* 2.
[124] See Skj. B1: 316.

as the high seat.[125] Most of the gold foil figures and the expensive glass were concentrated in this place, indicating that it was a ritual space. In front of it was the hearth, which probably also had ritual significance. At the "garrison" in Birka there were high-status objects concentrated in the western parts of the hall house, e.g. a dragon's head, glass beakers and sword handles. Archaeologists have suggested that the "high seat" was located in this place. Also the hearth was situated close to the "high seat".[126]

Also some of the medieval churches had arrangements which made it possible for the ruler to look down on the other participators during the ceremonies, usually in the western towers. The floor above the ground level in these towers was often used as a so called *emporium*. These rooms had openings to the east, with galleries turning towards the nave. The functions of these rooms and their symbolism have been discussed.[127] Most likely they had ideological implications.[128] It has been suggested that the ruler appeared on the gallery at baptismal and marriage ceremonies, Holy Communions and in connection with Church Law judgements (see 7.4). During mass he sat there in majesty and looked towards the altar, separated from the congregation. The best preserved examples of such churches in Sweden are in Götaland. On the floor above the ground level in the western tower of Husaby there was an opening towards the nave. Next to it were holes for beams which carried a balcony facing east towards the altar. In the upper tower chamber of Örberga church there are remains of a round arch portal facing towards the nave. In the opening there is a gap into the masonry. Inside the tower there is a room for devotion. Also in the church of Hagebyhöga there is an opening in the *emporium* facing towards the nave. Inside the nave there are remains of a wooden balcony. It was accessible via a door in the eastern part of the *emporium*.[129]

Similar arrangements may be seen in western tower churches in the Mälar region. In Vaksala, close to Old Uppsala, a stone church with western tower was erected during the twelfth century. In the first level of the tower there were two openings facing towards the nave and a gallery. Perhaps the *patronus* of the church or the king was sitting in this

[125] See Herschend 1995.
[126] Holmquist Olausson 2001: 15; Holmquist Olausson & Kitzler Åhfeldt 2002: 16.
[127] See e.g. I.-M. Nilsson 2003.
[128] See e.g. Lindgren 1995; I.-M. Nilsson 2003; Mats Anglert 2006.
[129] Lundberg 1940: 374–375; I.-M. Nilsson 2003: 33.

elevated place during divine service.[130] Also the Romanesque church of Husby-Lyhundra probably had similar arrangements.[131] However, the access to it has not been discovered. In the church of Tillinge, to the west of Enköping, there was a gallery. In the east wall of the tower there is a door opening which still is visible.[132] At St Per in Sigtuna a tower was added to the western part of the church at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The two stairs flanking the tower probably lead to a level with a gallery facing the church room, intended for the king or the magnates.[133] A gallery may also have been situated at the western part of the church in Old Uppsala, at St Gertrud in Sigtuna, and in Håtuna church.[134]

The political elite thus seems to have physically taken up an elevated position inside the cult buildings, both before and after the conversion. The halls and magnate churches themselves, in turn, also occupied a prominent position in the landscape. The display of sovereignty of these buildings was reinforced by their magnificent size and architecture. Central locality, elevated position, size and architecture were probably associated with ideological aspects and a deliberate strategy of being observed and associated with the divine world. Thus these buildings were important symbols of power for the elite. In this sense there is continuity from pre-Christian to Christian era.[135] On the other hand there is discontinuity regarding the shape and concrete realisations and expressions, such as building materials, architecture, and ritual constructions.

6. *Ritual objects—from the image of Freyr to the relics of St Eiríkr*

6.1. *Pre-Christian cultic images and the ideology of rulership*

According to Adam, the Svear honoured the statues of the three gods Óðinn, Þórr and Freyr in the "Uppsala temple", or more precisely in the *triclinium*, 'the banquet room' (see above). Adam's statement

[130] Ehn 1977: 4; DMS 1.2: 205.
[131] Wilcke-Lindqvist 1961: 518.
[132] Rosell 1968.
[133] See Redelius 2006: 45–49.
[134] Lundberg 1940: 323; DMS 1.2: 174; Tesch 2001: 18; Tuulse 1962: 223; Bonnier 1987: 221.
[135] Most likely also small private chapels existed during the 11th century which did not have a great public ideological significance for the political power. There is merely weak evidence for them in Svetjud, however. See above.

should not be dismissed as pure fantasy. That eastern Scandinavians had symbols of these gods in their sanctuaries is most likely. Place-names such as *Odenslund(a), Torslunda* and *Fröslunda* support a cult of Óðinn, Þórr and Freyr in pre-Christian Uppland.[136] Place-names also indicate the worship of idols in this area. OSw. *staver* 'stave' (Old Latvian and Lithuanian *stābas, stabs* 'pillar' or 'idol'), may refer to a type of idol. *Staver* appears in theophoric place-names, e.g. *Nälsta* (*Nærthastaff*, 1354) in Spånga, Uppland, 'the staff or idol connected with the goddess **Niærdh*'.[137] Archaeological finds may also support the existence of idols in pre-Christian Svetjud. A small Viking Age bronze statue discovered in Rällinge, Södermanland, has a phallic shape and might represent Freyr. The phallic shape resembles Adam's description of Freyr in the "temple": "*Cuius etiam simulacrum fingunt cum ingenti priapo*".[138] Some possible images of gods may also be connected to halls and cult houses in Svetjud. Several gold foil figures with iconographic depictions, discovered at halls, have been associated with the mythical sphere. The male figure in these depictions has often been interpreted as Freyr.[139] Also the phallic images from the cult house of Lunda may represent Freyr.

In my opinion the cultic images in the halls and cult houses had ideological dimensions. It seems as if the royal family of Uppsala was praised for being descended from the gods. According to *Ynglinga saga* Óðinn and the other Æsir emigrated from Asia and came to Svetjud. Óðinn settled at Sigtuna. He gave the other gods residences. Freyr received Uppsala, and together with the giantess Gerðr he had a son, Fjǫlnir, who was the first king ruling over *Uppsala auðr*. The entire line of the *Ynglinga*-family then descended from Fjǫlnir. This story could be interpreted as echoes of an ancient ideology, where the kings were honoured for their mythic origin.[140] Walter Baetke has, however, pointed out that Snorri was heavily influenced by medieval Western European chroniclers when he wrote his text.[141] In for example Frankish and Anglo-Saxon king lists, old pagan gods appear as euhemerised kings who migrated from Asia or Troy. The model for this came from

[136] E.g. Hellberg 1986.
[137] Hellberg 1986.
[138] "*His likeness, too, they fashion with an immense phallus*" Adam IV, 26.
[139] See e.g. Steinsland 1991.
[140] See Steinsland in this volume for a wider discussion of *Ynglinga saga* and *Ynglingatal*, and Beuermann in this volume for Fjǫlnir in the Orcadian context.
[141] Baetke 1964: 70–103.

classical literature and Livy's description of the flight of Aeneas from Troy and the foundation of the royal dynasty of Alba Longa in Italy.[142] According to Baetke, Snorri and other medieval authors reworked the indigenous traditions based on these learned conventions, thus creating the fiction that the Ynglinga-dynasty was of divine origin.

Baetke's stance may be questioned. There are traditions about the "Svea-kings" preserved in the Viking Age poem *Ynglingatal*, which lack the medieval *topoi* of euhemerism and the "Ursprungsfabel". In this poem there are also poetic expressions, which show that the rulers of Uppsala were actually honoured for their mythical descent. According to stanza 21 the Uppsala-king Aðils was called *Freys ǫttungr* "Freyr's kinsman". Alrekr and Eiríkr are described as *Freys afspringr*, "Freyr's offspring" (st. 13), while Egill is *týs ǫttungr*, "descendant of the god" (st. 19) and King Ingjaldr is called *goðkynningr*, "of divine descent" (st. 25).[143] The idea that Freyr was regarded as the forefather of the Svea kings is attested frequently in Old Norse prose.[144] Freyr is also called *blótgoð Svía*.[145] Of course information from such sources must be treated critically. However, some place-names containing Freyr (*Frö-*) in the Mälar region designate places associated with the organisation of society.[146] These names thus indicate a relation between the Vanir god and the ruling power.

The locations of the cultic images found in the late Iron Age halls of the Mälar region suggest that the rulers wanted to remind the cult community in a concrete way that they had a specific relation to Freyr or another god. Several of the gold foil figures of Helgö, for instance, which perhaps represented Freyr and his mythic consort, were related to the assumed high seat in the hall. This seat was intended for the ruler; most likely he was supposed to sit there while offering ceremonial toasts to the gods. At this liminal place he was thus surrounded by divine symbols which provided him with the necessary legitimacy for his pre-eminent role in society. Perhaps the ruler at Helgö wore gold bracteates around his neck during the rituals. Two fragments of such objects (dated to 450–575) have been found in connection with the

---

[142] Livy, Historia 1,1; 1,3.
[143] For a more extensive discussion on these kennings in *Ynglingatal*, see Sundqvist 2002: 156–158.
[144] See e.g. *Íslendingabók, Ættartala*. See also *Historia Norwegie* IX.
[145] See e.g. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, Flateyjarbók* I: 339.
[146] Vikstrand 2001: 55–71.

hall building, and one of them appeared at the "high-seat". Most likely these objects had images representing mythical beings. These objects were more visible for the "audience" than the small gold foil figures. It is not unlikely that also the chieftains at Lunda were related to the "Freyr figures", discovered in the cult house, close to the hall. It seems thus as if representations of Freyr and the other deities surrounded the rulers in the hall, perhaps in order to manifest the close relationship that existed between them.

6.2. *The relics of St Eiríkr*

Previous research often claimed that the Christian cult of St Eiríkr replaced the pagan cult of Freyr in Uppsala.[147] St Eiríkr was responsible for the same aspects of life as Freyr in the pagan period, for instance a good harvest and fertility. During the last decades scholars cast doubt on this theory. It has been argued that earlier interpretations of royal saints as direct substitutes of pagan gods are fraught with serious problems.[148] Such reservations are probably justified when we speak about royal saints in general. However, when it comes to the function of these cults in the context of the ideology of power, certain elements of continuity cannot be disregarded.

King Eiríkr Játvarðarson ruled Sweden in the middle of the twelfth century. The sources report that he was killed by enemies around 1160. Sometime in the second half of the twelfth century he was recognised as saint and his remains were placed in a reliquary shrine at the Cathedral of Uppsala. *Kalendarium Vallentunense*, dated to 1198, is proof of a cult of St Eiríkr at that time. He is also mentioned in Old Norse tradition. *Sverris saga* (ca. 1200), for instance, refers to Eiríkr as a saint and says that his bones rest in a shrine at (Old) Uppsala, the first archdiocese of Sweden.[149] The reliquary shrine of St Eiríkr currently rests in the Cathedral of present Uppsala, and contains parts of a skeleton, all belonging to a single person. One of the vertebrae has been cut by a sword, and a thigh-bone and a shin-bone have also suffered injury. The bones are dated to the middle of the twelfth century

[147] See e.g. Stjerna 1898. On St Eiríkr, see also Skórzewska in this volume.
[148] See e.g. Fröjmark 1998: 198.
[149] *Eirícr* [*hins helga*] *hvilir í scrini i Sviþioðu at Uppsolum. Sverris saga*. Ed. Indrebø: 107.

and can very well have belonged to the historical Eiríkr.[150] The evidence of the bones also harmonises with the information in *The Legend of St Erik* (ca. 1275–1290), which says that the enemies of Eiríkr taunted and mocked the wounded king and killed him by cutting off his reverend head.

The cult of Eiríkr in the Cathedral of Uppsala most likely had dynastic and political motifs.[151] Eiríkr's dynasty gained legitimacy through a holy ancestor, and could thus make stronger claims on the throne in the struggle against the Sverker dynasty. Most likely the recognition of his sainthood did not only result in more support for Eiríkr's own family, but also to stronger legitimacy for Christian kingship in general. It may also have underlined the idea of the king's inviolability. Lastly, by placing the relics in Uppsala Cathedral, the Eiríkr dynasty, believed to originate from Götaland, established a stronger connection with the Mälar region with its symbolic centre at Uppsala. It should be noticed, however, that the cult of Eiríkr during the early Middle Ages was local and restricted to the Mälar region.

Hence, it is most likely that ritual objects in both the pre-Christian and Christian cult buildings had ideological significance. The relics of St Eiríkr in the Cathedral of Uppsala may have had the same function as the cultic images in the old sanctuaries: to express the intimate relationship between the royal family and the divine world. These symbols created legitimacy for the ruling family. In addition, they also functioned as joint symbols for the cult community in the Mälar region. They created a feeling of unity between the king and his subjects.

7. *The ceremonial arena of the ruler—the ritual dimension*

According to *Ynglinga saga* 8 there were three cultic feasts in Svetjud every year. A sacrifice was to be made at the beginning of winter to ensure a good season, one in midwinter for good crops, and a third one in summer for victory. It has been argued that this description is based on genuine traditions.[152] One problem is, however, that it is only attested in the Old Norse prose. It is uncertain, for instance, whether

[150] Nilsson 1998: 136–138.

[151] See e.g. Fröjmark 1998: 192–193. Skórzewska in this volume for a discussion of the dynastic motifs.

[152] de Vries, 1970 (1956–57): §§305–314; cf. Nordberg 2006: 76–78.

any of the three feasts are identical with the sacrifice at the vernal equinox at Uppsala, mentioned in scholion 141 to Adam's *Gesta*.[153] Adam's feast may, on the other hand, correspond to the Disthingen referred to in *Upplandslagen* and the feast of the month of *gói* which appears in Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga* 77. There is evidence for a name of an ancient lunar month called *Distingstungel* in local dialects in central Sweden. A cult of the Disir at Uppsala is also attested in the Aðils traditions (see above). This feast thus probably has a historical background, similarly to the Yule-feast (*jól*). The Yule-feast was celebrated at the first full moon after the first new moon following the winter solstice, while the Disthingen took place at the third full moon.[154] Since these feasts took place during the winter, some of the rituals were probably performed inside cult buildings, where also the rulers took part in the ceremonies.

7.1. *The ruler as cultic leader*

According to Adam of Bremen there were priests (*sacerdotes*) appointed at the "Uppsala temple", who offered the peoples' sacrifices at the calendric feast. Several researchers are sceptical about Adam's information on that point.[155] The term *sacerdotes* evokes the differentiated priesthood of ancient Rome or the Roman-Catholic church. Adam may be indulging in an *interpretatio romana* or *Christiana*, in that he interpreted Scandinavian culture and religion through his Roman-Christian glasses. A centralised differentiated priesthood with ritual specialists who were exclusively devoted to their cult never existed in pre-Christian Svetjud.[156] On the other hand there may have been cultic leaders at the calendric religious feasts, who were responsible for specific functions in these ritual contexts. There are terms and designations preserved in the Swedish place-names, carrying meanings supporting this notion, for instance OSw. **gudhi* and **vivil*.[157] Most likely these cultic leaders had other societal duties beside their religious functions.[158]

---

[153] Scholion 141 says that the sacrifice was at the vernal equinox (*hoc sacrificium fit circa aequinoctium vernale*), i.e. the beginning of the spring planting. This sentence is uncertain, as it is only attested in manuscript A3, dated to 1434. Hultgård 1997: 30.
[154] Nordberg 2006.
[155] See e.g. Hultgård 1997: 19–20.
[156] See Sundqvist 2007.
[157] Vikstrand 2001: 386–397.
[158] Sundqvist 2007: 41–43.

It seems, however, as if Adam was acquainted with the idea that it was the ruler who officiated at the sacrifices in the common cult in Uppsala. In scholion 140 we read:

> *Nuper autem cum rex Sueonum Christianissimus Anunder sacrificium gentis statutum nollet demonibus offerre, depulsus a regno dicitur a conspectu concilii gaudens abisse, quoniam dignus habebatur pro nomine Iesu contumeliam pati.*[159]

It seems thus as if King Anunder was driven from the public feast and assembly (*concilium*) at Uppsala, since he would not perform as a cult leader at the sacrifices. This image agrees much better with the information given in Old Norse literature. According to the U-version of *Hervarar saga* (ca. 1300) for instance, the Svear removed King Ingi (the Elder) Steinkelsson from office, since he would not make sacrifices on their behalf at the assembly which probably was held at Uppsala.[160] It seems as if the late Viking Age cult community in Svetjud expected that the king performed or at least participated in the common sacrifices. Perhaps the sacrifice was only valid when the king took part in the rituals. A plausible interpretation is that the king was the most important mediator between the human and the divine world during the sacrifices. His ritual role in the cult was thus necessary for the society, and *per se* it also legitimated his high position in other social contexts.

7.2. *The ceremonial banquets*

The sources report that the rulers of Svear played a significant role particularly during the drinking ceremonies in the banqueting hall (see above 5.3). These types of rituals were not simply a public expression of power, they actually established it. In *Ynglinga saga* 37, for instance, it is mentioned that King Granmarr of Södermanland invited King Hjörvarðr of Denmark to a ceremonial feast (*til veizlu*). In the evening it was customary "to drink a full beaker" (*drekka…full*). During the banquet the rulers sat in high seats opposite one another. The

---

[159] "*When not long ago the most Christian king of the Svear, Anunder, would not offer the demons the prescribed sacrifice of the people, he is said, on being deposed, to have departed 'from the presence of the council, rejoicing' that he had been 'accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.'*" This scholion was probably written by Adam himself, as it occurs in the oldest manuscript A2.

[160] *Hervarar saga*, ed. Jón Helgason 1924: 160. See also *Orkneyinga saga* 35.

text implies that during the drinking rituals everyone present in the drinking hall paid a great deal of attention to the kings. As also in the description of the hall in *Fagrskinna* (see 5.3) the very placement of the high seats indicate this.

Whether this type of drinking ceremonies had religious connotations is uncertain. There are clear signs in other sources however that drinking rituals occasionally had religious elements and were parts of the sacrificial feasts in Eastern Scandinavia. According to Adam of Bremen IV 26–27 libation rituals were made to the three images in the banqueting hall (*triclinium*) in Uppsala:

> *Si pestis et fames imminet, Thor ydolo lybatur, si bellum, Wodani, si nuptiae celebrandae sunt, Fricconi.*[161]

In connection with the dishonest songs (*neniae,… multiplices et inhonestae*) which were sung by the Svear at the sacrificial feasts, Adam used the noun *libatio* 'libation sacrifice'. Also the *Gutasaga* mentions that libations were made during the sacrifices in Gotland during ancient periods, especially in connection with sacrificial meals.[162] Such feasts probably took place in aristocratic banqueting halls, such as the one found in Vallhagar.[163]

Whether all these medieval written sources give reliable evidence for Viking Age conditions in Eastern Scandinavia is of course uncertain. Prohibitions in normative Christian texts directed against pagan customs and ideas may give some support to the idea that libations were essential at pre-Christian sacrificial feasts. In the medieval *Guta Law* we read that invocations with food and drinking were prohibited when they did not follow Christian customs.[164] Also archaeological material may partly support the impression given by the medieval texts. At Helgö large amounts of glass have been discovered at house group 2. No less than 96 percent of the 1600 glass fragments found at the island was discovered at this house group. Interestingly, there was a particular concentration in the hall-house at Foundation I, more specifically at the "high seat". The glass was clearly high-status and comprised for instance fragments of filigree glass claw and cone beakers.

---

[161] "*If plague or famine is nigh, a libation is made to the idol of Thor, if war, to Wodan, if marriage is to be solemnized, to Fricco*".

[162] *Gutasagan*, ed. Pipping: 64.

[163] On Vallhagar, see Herschend 1998.

[164] *Gutalagen, af blotan*, ed. Pipping: 6–7.

It has been estimated that these glass fragments belonged to at least 50 beakers and bowls of different types dated to the period between the Roman Iron Age and the Viking Age. It cannot be excluded that these beakers have been used for ceremonial purposes, for instance in connection with ritual banquets.[165] At the hall discovered in Birka similar finds were made. In the western part of that house broken glass from exclusive beakers were found. Most likely the high seat was located at this place, where the king was sitting during his visits in Birka (see 5.3). Also animal bones and numerous knifes indicate that the hall was used in connection with ceremonial banquets.

7.3. *From pre-Christian rituals to church ceremonies*

The sources indicate that the ruler during the ceremonial feasts also had the opportunity to demonstrate his generosity and his wealth in a concrete sense. In order to create alliances and friendship, he gave his men food and gifts, probably in ritualised forms in the hall.[166] Evidence of this system may be seen in late Viking Age runic inscriptions from the Mälar region.[167] For instance, a runic inscription on a bone discovered in the block called Trädgårdsmästaren in Sigtuna says:

> **kunukr : iaR : matr : bestr : han : a f mest : han iaR : þekili**
> *KunungR eR mataR bæztr. Hann a fe mæst. Han eR þækiligR*,

The king is generous with food. He is the richest [man]. He is full of favour. On the backside the inscription says:

> **mari · selti · rif · a fe mest · aff asa**
> *Mari (?) seldi rif. A fe mest…*
> Mari (?) gave the rib. He is the richest…[168]

This inscription may have been carved by coincidence on a bone when Mari took part in a banquet organised by the king in one of the halls discovered in Sigtuna.[169] Since the bone is dated to around 1100 it is possible that the term *kunungR* refers to King Ingi the Elder.

---

[165] Holmqvist 1980: 56–65; Zachrisson 2004.
[166] On gifts, see Jón Viðar Sigurðsson in this volume.
[167] See Jansson 1985: 131–133.
[168] Gustavson, Snædal & Åhlén 1992: 166. My translation based on Gustavson.
[169] For the halls in Sigtuna see Tesch 2001: 28.

It seems thus as if also Christian kings and magnates during the transition period held great banquets in halls. The bone from Sigtuna points to such events. Moreover, during the transition period these halls may have also been multi-functional buildings: despite all the excavations made in Sigtuna no traits of wooden churches have been discovered. According to Sten Tesch the first Christian cult was therefore carried out in the hall buildings discovered there.[170] In the centre of these halls hearths were found, and there are remains of long-benches along the walls. Thus in these Christian buildings very similar activities to the ones in the pre-Christian halls found in Fornsigtuna took place, for instance banquet, distributions of gifts, and (Christian) religious activities. Tesch supports his statements by pointing at the six "sepulchral-stones" found. These stones were consecrated covers of reliquaries often placed directly on the altar. These stones could also have the function of moveable altars. Perhaps it was in a hall equipped with such an altar that King Ingi arranged a huge feast sometime around 1100, resulting in the rune-carved bone. Yet at the same time, the building of Romanesque churches began in Sigtuna with St Gertrud's, St Per's and St Olof's. New Christian ceremonies were introduced in connection with these churches, ceremonies which equally were of great importance for the legitimacy of the ruler. These ceremonies were led by the bishop and the priests in Sigtuna, who probably were close allies of the king.

7.4. Adventus, coronamentum *and* laudes regiae

Continental sources report that Frankish kings were honoured with royal praise (*laudes regiae*) at for instance coronation, synod, and arrival (*adventus*) to the town or during ceremonies in church.[171] This praise often had a liturgical character. In a manuscript from Metz dated to the ninth century Charles the Bald is praised thus: "*Ave sacer et alme, Imperator Carole/ [Ave sacer et alme, Imperator] excelse./ Deus rex coeli Te conservet*".[172]

---

[170] See Tesch 2001: 28. For Christian cult in halls, see also Holmqvist 1980: 60; Herschend 1998: 13.

[171] Kantorowicz 1946: 65–111; Nelson 1987.

[172] "*Hail sacred and gracious, Emperor Charles./ [Hail sacred and gracious, Emperor], Your Excellency./ May God, the king of heaven, protects you*". Quoted from Kantorowicz 1946: 73. My transl.

These acclamations were occasionally connected with a ritual where the coronation ceremony (*coronamentum*) was repeated for the already crowned king. Frankish rulers went to their "coronation church", for instance at Christmas, Easter and Ascension Day. The king appeared with his crown and insignia, and received the homage of the people (*vox populi*).[173]

It has been suggested that many of these royal and liturgical ceremonies (e.g. *laudes regiae*) were associated with churches comprising western towers, for instance at St Denis, Lorsch, Centula, Aachen and Korvey.[174] These towers resembled the exterior of royal palaces. They were often a symbol of the king's power. In these towers there were floors above ground level with private chapels, opening towards the nave, where the emperor could sit and look down towards the altar during the church feasts.

There is no evidence of *laudes regiae* in the early Swedish liturgical materials. But some of the early churches in Sweden have balconies connected to western towers similar to the churches of Germany, France and England.[175] This indicates that similar types of ceremonies, such as the *laudes regiae*, were also known in early medieval Sweden. The western tower of Husaby church, for instance, resembled the tower of Korvey, however, its dimensions were much smaller. In the Husaby tower there was a floor above ground level with an *emporium* and a balcony facing towards the nave and the altar. Similar arrangements may also be seen in Örberga church, and at several Romanesque churches in the Mälar area (see above 5.3). The elevated position of the ruler in these churches most likely had some kind of ritual or symbolic significance during the ceremonies.

Gunnar Redelius has discussed whether St Per in Sigtuna included constructions with ideological significance.[176] He focused particularly on the impressive round arch portal (1,50 × 3,70 m) in the central tower. It has an opening facing the "nave" in the west. Today this portal leads to nowhere. According to Redelius there had been a balcony in front of it, where the king and other prominent individuals could perform public acts. This kind of construction may have been connected with the *coronamentum* of the king at the great church

[173] Kantorowicz 1946; Nelson 1987.
[174] E.g. Smith 1956: 74–106. Cf. Lundberg 1940; Palme 1959; Nelson 1987.
[175] Cf. Lundberg 1940: 303–310; Palme 1959.
[176] Redelius 1975; 2006: 40–49.

festivals. In the "coronation portal" the king appeared and received the homage from the people.[177] While there is no evidence for Redelius' hypothesis, in the absence of any better suggestions it at least merits consideration.

Certain constructions in the churches from the Mälar region and Götaland thus indicate that ceremonies with ideological implications took place there. Probably also the western portals appearing in connection with the churches of Sollentuna, Flasta and perhaps Odensala were used for similar purposes.[178]

8. *Concluding remarks*

In my opinion there is a certain continuity from the pre-Christian cult buildings to the early medieval churches regarding the legitimisation of power. It seems as if kings and magnates owned and/or controlled such buildings, and used them for various purposes, both before and after conversion. In a functional sense some of the early churches played a similar role for the Christian elite as the halls played for the late Iron Age aristocracy. (1) At both halls and churches the elite took tribute from different groups. They also used these buildings for other profane purposes, such as for residence and defence. (2) Both pagan and Christian cult buildings and their strategic locations in the landscape were symbolic expressions of sovereignty, and thus part of the ideology of rulership. (3) Both halls and churches were considered ceremonial arenas, where rulers under ritual circumstances could display their wealth and power to individuals from their own social group (the aristocracy), but also to people from other social strata. During these rituals the ruler occupied a symbolic elevated place inside the ceremonial room, either the high seat in the hall, or the balcony and *emporium* in the church. (4) In both the hall and church there were sometimes ritual objects (cultic images, and relics) which connected political authority with divine power. These symbols were also related to the noble and mythic ancestors of the ruling family.

Concerning their shape and concrete realisation, there is discontinuity between the pre-Christian cult buildings and the Romanesque churches. The churches implied new architecture, building materials,

[177] Redelius 2006: 42–43. Cf. Tesch 2001: 31; Ros 2001: 158.
[178] Redelius 1975: 67; Bonnier 1987: 23–25, 95–96.

interiors and ritual constructions.[179] The rituals performed in these buildings, as well as the ritual objects, which may have involved ideological aspects, also differed between the pre-Christian and Christian eras. Also the character of the cultic leadership differed. Anything equivalent to the centralised, hierarchical and specialised priesthood of the Roman-Catholic church did not exist at the pre-Christian sanctuaries. The pre-Christian cultic leaders had other societal duties beside their religious tasks.

Perhaps there was a transition period, when halls were also used as a room for Christian rulers and rituals, as discussed for Sigtuna. In such halls old drinking ceremonies may have been performed as well as Christian rituals, such as Holy Communion. As soon as the Romanesque churches were erected, new ceremonies were introduced which were important to the ruling power.

The ideological aspects connected to the magnate churches in the Mälar region do not have to be seen as direct borrowings from the old system of the Svear into the new Christian one. Perhaps it is better to envisage a long process of adjustments or accommodations. The Christian culture which reached Svetjud in the Viking period had been Germanized for a long time.[180] For centuries Christianity had been influenced by the Germanic culture of Continental Europe and Britain. The Christian royal ideology developed among Franks in the eighth and ninth centuries, for instance, was not only derived from late Antiquity, Rome and the Near East, but also from Germanic elements.[181] Most likely also aspects connected to the early churches in Continental Europe were adjusted, in one way or another, to Germanic ideas about cult and rulers. When Christianity came to Svetjud, with "new ideas" about ruler-ideals and cult buildings, they were therefore not wholly new to the Svear. As in the past, the leader in society, the king, earl and chieftain, did not only care about profane aspects, he was also strongly involved in religious matters. The churches were therefore often erected at his farms, i.e. in the same places where the halls and cult houses had been situated earlier. In this context the "new sanctuaries" continued to constitute central places in the social and political

[179] It is most likely, however, that the architecture of stave-churches in Norway was based on pre-Christian ideas. See Gansum 2008.
[180] Russel 1994.
[181] Steinsland 2000: 92–97.

landscape and to function as arenas for the rulers and their interests in a similar way as the "old sanctuaries" had done for centuries.

Bibliography

Sources

ADAM OF BREMEN *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificium*, ed. B. Schmeidler, 3rd edn. Hannover and Leipzig 1917.
DS = *Diplomatarium Suecanum. Svenskt diplomatarium.* 1–, eds. J. G. Liljegren et al., Stockholm 1829–.
Eyrbyggja saga. *Íslenzk Fornrit* 4. Ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson & Matthías Þórðarson, Reykjavík 1985.
Fagrskinna. Íslenzk Fornrit 29. Ed. by Bjarni Einarsson, Reykjavík 1985.
Flateyjarbók. En samling af norske konge-sagaer med inskudte mindre fortællinger. Band 1–3. Ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfusson & C. R. Unge, Christiania 1860–68.
Hervarar saga. I: *Heiðreks saga. Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, ed. Jón Helgason, København 1924.
Historia Norwegie, eds. I. Ekrem and L. Boje Mortensen. Transl. P. Fisher, Kopenhagen 2003.
Kjalnesinga saga. Íslenzk Fornrit 14. Ed. by Jóhannes Halldórsson, Reykjavík 1959.
RIMBERT *Vita Anskarii*, ed. G. Waitz, Hannover 1884.
Skj = *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning 800–1400*. AI–II, BI–II. Ed. Finnur Jónsson, Köbenhavn 1967–1973 (1912–15).
SNORRI STURLUSON *Heimskringla* I–III. *Íslenzk Fornrit* 26–28. Ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík 1941, 1945, 1951.
SRS = *Scriptores rerum Suecicarum medii aevi.* I–III. Eds. E. M. Fant et al., Uppsala 1818–1876.
SSGL = *Samling af Sweriges Gamla Lagar. Corpus Iuris Sueo-Gotorum Antiqui.* Vol. 1–13. Ed. [H. S. Collin &] C. J. Schlyter, Stockholm 1827–1877.
ST = *Sverges tragtater med främmande makger. 1. 822–1335*, ed. O. S. Rydberg, Stockholm 1877.
Sveriges runinskrifter. 1–15. KVHAAH, Stockholm 1900–1981.
Sverris saga. *Sverris saga etter Cod. AM 327 40*, ed. G. Indrebø, Kristiania 1920.

Studies

Alkarp, Magnus & Neil Price 2005. Tempel av guld eller kyrka av trä? Markradarundersökningar vid Gamla Uppsala kyrka, *Fornvännen* 100, 261–272.
Andersson, Gunnar et al. 2004. *Att föra gudarnas talan. Figurinerna från Lunda.* Riksantikvarieämbetet. Arkeologiska undersökningar. Skrifter 55. Stockholm.
Andersson, Thorsten 1991. Sæbohæradh, Fastakirkia och Esterna. Sockenbildning i en uppländsk by, *Kyrka och socken i medeltidens Sverige*. Studier till det medeltida Sverige 5. Ed. by Olle Ferm. Stockholm, 143–156.
—— 2004. Svethiudh, det svenska rikets kärna, *Namn och bygd* 92, 5–18.
Anglert, Marit 1993. Kyrkorna i Möre, *Möres kristnande.* Projektet Sveriges kristnande. Publikationer 2. Ed. by Henrik Williams. Uppsala, 145–170.
Anglert, Mats 2006. De tidigaste kristna kulthusen, *Kulthus och dödshus. Det ritualiserade rummets teori och praktik*. Eds. Mats Anglert et al. Stockholm.
Anton, H. H. 2004. Sakralkönigtum. §18: Franken, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 26. Ed. by Heirich Beck et al. Berlin–New York, 258–266.
Arrhenius, Birgit 1995. Regalia in Svealand In Early Medieaval Times, *Tor* 27:1, 311–335.

—— 2000. Tuna och Husby i Vendel, *En bok om Husbyar*. Riksantik-varieämbetet. Avdelningen för arkeologiska undersökningar. Skrifter 33. Ed. by Michael Olausson. Örebro, 93–100.

Axboe, Morten 2004. The Bracteates from Helgö, *Excavations at Helgö XVI. Exotic and sacral finds from Helgö*. Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien. Ed. by Helene Clark & Kristina Lamm, Stockholm, 35–40.

Baetke, Walter 1964. *Yngvi und die Ynglinger. Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung über das nordische "Sakralkönigtum"*. Sitzungsberichte der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philologisch-historische Klasse. Band 109. Heft 3. Berlin.

Birkeli, Emil 1932. *Høgsætet. Det gamle ondvege i religionshistorisk belysning*. Stavanger.

Blomkvist, Nils, Brink, Stefan & Thomas Lindkvist 2007. The kingdom of Sweden, *Christianization and the rise of Christian Monarchy. Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900–1200*. Ed. by Nora Berend. Cambridge, 167–213.

Bonnier, Ann Catherine 1987. *Kyrkorna berättar. Upplands kyrkor 1250*. Uppsala.

—— 1996. Kyrkor, dopfuntar och gravmonument, *Gamla källor och nya perspektiv*. Projektet Sveriges kristnande. Publikationer 5. Ed. by Bertil Nilsson. Uppsala, 181–214.

Brink, Stefan 1990. *Sockenbildning och sockennamn: Studier i äldre territoriell indelning i Norden*. Acta. academiae regiae Gustavi Adolphi LVII. Studier till en svensk ortnamnsatlas utgivna av Thorsten Andersson 14. Uppsala–Stockholm.

—— 1996. Tidig kyrklig organisation I Norden—aktörerna i sockenbildningen, *Kristnandet i Sverige. Gamla källor och nya perspektiv*. Projektet Sveriges kristnande. Publikationer 5. Ed. by Bertil Nilsson. Uppsala, 269–290.

—— 1999. Fornskandinavisk religion—förhistoriskt samhälle. En bosättningshistorisk studie av centralorter i Norden, *Religion och samhälle i det förkristna Norden. Et symposium*. Ed. by Ulf Drobin et al. Odense, 11–55.

—— 2000. Nordens husabyar—unga eller gamla? *En bok om Husbyar*. Riksantikvarieämbetet. Avdelningen för arkeologiska undersökningar. Skrifter 33. Ed. by Michael Olausson. Örebro, 65–73.

Brunstedt, Solveig 1996. *Alsnu Kungsgård. Forskningsprojekt Hovgården. Uppland. Adelsö socken RAÄ 46 m fl.* Riksantikvarieämbetet. Arkeologiska undersökningar. UV Stockholm, Rapport 71/1 (2).

Bruun, Daniel. & Finnur Jónsson 1909. Om hove og hovudgravninger på Island, *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*. II Række. 24. Bind. Kjøbenhavn, 245–316.

Christensen, Tom 1997. Lejrehallen. "…gick Grendel att söka det höga huset…", *Arkeologiska källor till aristokratiska miljöer i Skandinavien under yngre järnålder. Rapport från ett seminarium i Falkenberg 16–17 november 1995*. Hallands länsmuseers Skriftserie No. 9/GOTARC C. Arkeologiska skrifter 17. Ed. by Johan Callmer & Erik Rosengren. Halmstad, 47–54.

Damell, David 1991. *Fornsigtuna. En kungsgårds historia*. Upplands Bro.

—— 1993. About Royal Manors from the Late Iron Age in Middle Sweden, *Current Swedish Archaeology* 1. Ed. by Mats Burström & Anders Carlsson. Stockholm, 39–47.

Dillmann, François-Xavier 1997. Kring de rituella gästabuden i fornskandinavisk religion, *Uppsalakulten och Adam av Bremen*. Ed. by Anders Hultgård. Nora, 51–73.

DMS = *Det medeltida Sverige*. 1.1–1.8. Stockholm 1974–2006.

Duczko, Wladyslaw 1996. Gamla Uppsala, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 10. Ed. By Heirich Beck et al. Berlin–New York, 409–418.

Ehn, Ola 1977. *Vaksala kyrka*. Upplandskyrkor 107. Uppsala.

Ekman, Tomas 2000. Item Husaby in Nierícia, *En bok om Husbyar*. Riksantikvarieämbetet. Avdelningen för arkeologiska undersökningar. Skrifter 33. Ed. by Michael Olausson. Örebro, 9–38.

Ferm, Olle & Sigurd Rahmqvist 1985. Stormannakyrkor i Uppland, *Studier i äldre historia tillägnade Herman Schück 5/4 1985*. Stockholm, 67–83.
Fröjmark, Anders 1998. De nordiska helgonkungarna, *Sveriges kyrkohistoria. I. Missionstid och tidig medeltid*. Stockholm, 191–198.
Frölund, Per 2007. Gamla Uppsala under äldre järnålder, *Land och samhälle i förändring. Uppländska bygder i ett långtidsperspektiv*. Ed. by Eva Hjärthner-Holdar et al. Uppsala, 361–378.
Gansum, Terje 2008. Hallene og stavkirkene—kultbygninger i overgangstid, *Kolleger fra nær og fjern*. OAS 10, 199–213.
Gräslund, Anne-Sofie 1997. Adams Uppsala—och arkeologins, *Uppsalakulten och Adam av Bremen*. Ed. by Anders Hultgård. Nora, 101–115.
Gräslund, Bo 1993. Folkvandringstidens Uppsala. Namn, myter, arkeologi och historia, *Kärnhuset i riksäpplet*. Upplands fornminnesförening och hembygdsförbunds årsbok. Uppland. Ed. by K. Blent et al. Uppsala, 173–208.
Gustavson, Helmer et al. 1992. Runfynd 1989 och 1990, *Fornvännen* 87, 164–174.
Göthberg, Hans 2008. *Bosättning och kyrkogård vid Gamla Uppsala kyrka*. Uppsala.
Hedlund, Gunnar 1993. Utgrävningen 1992, *Arkeologi och miljöekologi i Gamla Uppsala. Studier och rapporter*. OPIA 7. Ed. by Wladyslaw Duczko. Uppsala, 64–69.
Hellberg, Lars 1986. Hedendomens spår i uppländska ortnamn, *Ortnamnssällskapets i Uppsala Årsskrift*, 40–71.
Herschend, Frands 1993. The Origin of the Hall in Southern Scandinavia, *Tor* 25, 175–199.
—— 1995. Hus på Helgö, *Fornvännen* 90, 221–228.
—— 1998. *The Idea of the Good in Late Iron Age Society*. OPIA 15. Uppsala.
Holmquist Olausson, Lena 2001. Birkas befästningsverk—resultat från de senaste årens utgrävningar, *Birkas krigare. 11 artiklar kring Birkas befästningsverk och dess krigare*. Ed. by Michael Olausson. Arkeologiska Forskningslaboratoriet, 9–15.
Holmquist Olausson, Lena & Laila Kitzler Åhfeldt 2002. *Krigarnas hus. Arkeologiska undersökningar av ett hallhus i Birkas Garnison*. RAÄ 35, Björkö, Adelsö sn, Uppland 1998–2000. Rapport 4. Arkeologiska Forskningslaboratoriet. Stockholms Universitet.
Holmqvist, Wilhelm 1980. *Vikingar på Helgö och Birka*. Stockholm.
Hultgård, Anders 1997. Från ögonvittnesskildring till retorik. Adam av Bremens notiser om Uppsalakulten i religionshistorisk belysning, *Uppsalakulten och Adam av Bremen*. Ed. by Anders Hultgård. Nora, 9–50.
Janson, Henrik 1998. *Templum Nobilissimum. Adam av Bremen, Uppsalatemplet och konfliktlinjerna i Europa kring år 1075*. Avhandlingar från Historiska institutionen i Göteborg 21. Göteborg.
Jansson, Sven B. F. 1985. *Runinskrifter i Sverige*. Stockholm.
Jørgensen, Lars 2002. Kongsgård—kusted—marked. Overvejelser omkring Tissøkompleksets struktur og function, *Plats och praxis—studier av nordisk förkristen ritual.* Vägar till Midgård 2. Ed. by Kristina Jennbert et al. Lund, 215–247.
Kantorowicz, Ernst H. 1946. *Laudes Regiae. A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Mediaeval Ruler Worship*, Berkeley–Los Angeles.
Karlsson, Jan O. M. 2006. De svenska cistercienserklostren: kyrklig förhistoria och etablering, *Tidlige klostre i Norden. Et symposium*. Ed. by Lars Bisgaard & Tore Nyberg. Odense.
Keyser, Rudolf 1847. *Nordmændenes Religionforfatning i Hedendommen*. Oslo.
Kitzler, Laila 2000. Odenssymboliken i Birkas garnison, *Fornvännen* 95, 13–21.
Lamm, Jan Peder 2004. Figural Gold Foils Found in Sweden, *Excavations at Helgö XVI. Exotic and sacral finds from Helgö*. Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, Stockholm. Ed. by Helene Clark & Kristina Lamm. Stockholm, 143–175.

Lamm, Kristina & Cecilia Åqvist 1997. Long-lived settlement units in central Sweden, *Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 10. Ed. by H.-J. Häßler. Oldenburg, 177–194.
Landau, Peter 1982. Eigenkirchenwesen, *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 9. Berlin–New York, 399–404.
Larsson, Lars & Karl-Magnus Lenntorp 2004. The Enigmatic House, *Continuity for Centuries. A Ceremonial Building and its Context at Uppåkra, Southern Sweden.* Uppåkrastudier 10. Ed. by Lars Larsson. Stockholm, 3–48.
Lindgren, Mereth 1995. Stenarkitekturen, *Den romanska konsten*. Signums svenska konsthistoria 3. Stockholm.
Ljungkvist, John 2006. *En hiar atti rikR. Om elit, struktur och ekonomi kring Uppsala och Mälaren under yngre järnålder*. Aun 34. Uppsala.
Lundberg, Erik 1940. *Byggnadskonsten i Sverige under medeltiden* 1000–1400. Stockholm.
Nelson, Janet. L. 1987. The Lord's Anointed and the People's Choice: Carolingian Royal Ritual, *Rituals of Royalty. Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*. Ed. by D. Cannadine & S. Price. Cambridge.
Nielsen, Ann-Lili 1996. Hedniska kult- och offerhandlingar i Borg, *Religion från stenålder till medeltid.* Riksantikvarieämbetet. Arkeologiska undersökningar. Skrifter 19. Ed by Kerstin Engdahl & Anders Kaliff. Linköping, 89–104.
Nilsson, Bertil 1998. *Sveriges kyrkohistoria. I. Missionstid och tidig medeltid*. Stockholm.
Nilsson, Ing-Marie 2003. Härskarsymbol och högsäte—om betydelsen av västmarkering i romanska kyrkor, *META* 2003/1, 31–49.
Nisbeth, Åke 1982. *Ängsö kyrka och dess målningar*. KVHAA. Ant ser 33. Stockholm.
Nordahl, Else 1993. Södra Kungsgårdsplatån. Utgrävningarna 1988–1991, *Arkeologi och miljöekologi i Gamla Uppsala. Studier och rapporter*. OPIA 7. Ed. by Wladyslaw Duczko. Uppsala, 59–63.
—— 1996. *. . . templum quod Ubsola dicitur . . . i arkeologisk belysning*. Aun 22. Uppsala.
Nordberg, Andreas 2006. *Jul, disting och förkyrklig tideräkning. Kalendrar och kalendariska riter i det förkristna Norden*. Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi 91. Uppsala.
Norr, Svante & Anneli Sundkvist 1995. Valsgärde revistited, *Tor* 27: 1, 395–418.
Ohlmarks, Åke 1936. Isländska hov och gudahus, *Bidrag till nordisk filologi tillägnade E. Olsson*. Lund, 339–355.
Olsen, Magnus 1926. *Ættegård og helligdom. Norske stedsnavn sosialt og religionshistorisk belyst*. Instituttet for sammenlignende kulturforskning. A. Forelesninger. 9a. Oslo.
Olsen, Olaf 1966. *Hørg, hov og kirke. Historiske og arkæologiske vikingetidsstudier*. København.
Palme, Sven Ulric 1959. *Kristendomens genombrott i Sverige. Den stora omvälvningen i svensk historia: vikingatågen, missionen och det svenska rikets uppkomst*. Stockholm.
Peterson, Lena 1994. *Svenskt runordsregister*. Runrön 2. Ed. by Lennart Elmevik & Lena Peterson. Uppsala.
—— 2007. *Nordiskt runnamnslexikon*. Uppsala.
Rahmqvist, Sigurd 1986. Gamla Uppsala by—Upplands största, *Från Östra Aros till Uppsala. En samling uppsatser kring det medeltida Uppsala*. Uppsala stads historia 7. Uppsala, 254–271.
Redelius, Gunnar 1972. *Kyrkobygge och kungamakt i Östergötland.* KVHAA 45. Stockholm.
—— 1975. *Sigtuna studier. Historia och byggnadskonst under äldre medeltid*. Stockholm.
—— 2006. *Sigtuna och Sko. En tid och ett rum*. Uppsala.
Ros, Jonas 2001. *Sigtuna. Staden, kyrkorna och den kyrkliga organisationen*. OPIA 30. Uppsala.

Rosell, Ingrid 1968. *Tillinge kyrka. Åsunda härad, Uppland*. Band XI:2. Sveriges kyrkor 121. Stockholm.
Sawyer, Peter H. 1991. *När Sverige blev Sverige*. Occasional Papers on Medieval Topics 5. Alingsås.
Schäferdiek, Knut 1986. Eigenkirchen, *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 6. Ed. by Heinrich Beck et al. Berlin–New York, 559–561.
Skyllberg, Eva 2008. Gudar och glasbägare—järnåldersgården i Lunda, *Gestalter och gestaltningar. Om tid, rum och händelser i Lunda*. Riksantikvarieämbetet. Arkeologiska undrsökningar. Skrifter 72. Stockholm.
Smedberg, Gunnar 1973. *Nordens första kyrkor. En kyrkorättslig studie*. Bibiotheca Theologiae Practicae 32. Lund.
Smith, E. B. 1956. *Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages*. Princeton, New Jersey.
Steinsland, Gro 1991. *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi. En analyse av hierogami-myten i Skírnismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal og Hyndluljóð*. Oslo.
—— 2000. *Den hellige kongen. Om religion og herskermakt fra vikingtid til middelalder*. Oslo.
Stjerna, Knut 1898. *Erik den helige. En sagohistorisk studie*. Lund.
Stutz, Ulrich & Hans E. Feine 1989. *Forschungen zu Recht und Geschichte der Eigenkirsche. Gesammelte Abhandlungen*. Aalen.
Sundqvist, Olof 2002. *Freyr's Offspring. Rulers and Religion in Ancient Svea Society*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Historia Religionum 22. Uppsala.
—— 2006. Från vikingatida aristokratiska hallar till medeltida stormannakyrkor, *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift* 52, 20–32.
—— 2007. *Kultledare i fornskandinavisk religion*. OPIA 41. Uppsala.
Söderberg, Bengt 2005. *Aristokratiskt rum och gränsöverskridande. Järrestad och sydöstra Skåne mellan region och rike 600–1100*. Riksantikvarieämbetet Arkeologiska undersökningar. Skrifter 62. Lund.
Tesch, Sten 2001. Olof Palme, S:ta Gertrud och Sigtunas medeltida kyrkotopografi, *Biskopen i museets trädgård. En arkeologisk gåta*. Sigtuna museers skriftserie 9. Sigtuna, 9–44.
Thümmel, Albert 1909. *Der germanische Tempel*. Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur 35, 1–123.
Tuulse, Armin 1962. *Håbo härad, södra delen*. Uppland VII: 2. Sveriges kyrkor 94. Stockholm.
—— 1968. *Romansk konst i Norden*. Stockholm.
Vikstrand, Per 2000. Konungen och helgedomen, *Oluf Rygh. Rapport fra symposium på Stiklestad 13.–15. mai 1999*. NORNA-rapport 70 B. Ed. by B. Sandnes et al. Uppsala, 213–32.
—— 2001. *Gudarnas platser. Förkristna sakrala ortnamn i Mälarlandskapen.* Acta academiae regiae Gustavi Adolphi. LXXVII. Studier till en svensk ortnamnsatlas utgivna av Thorsten Andersson 17, Uppsala.
Vries, Jan de 1970 (1956–57). *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* I–II. Grundriss der germanischen Philologie 12/1–2. Berlin.
Wahlberg, Mats 1975. Sockennamnet Sighridhakirkia, *Ortnamnssällskapets i Uppsala Årsskrift*, 45–49.
Watt, Margareta 2007. Kan man tyde guldgubbernes gestussprog? *Kult, guld och makt. Ett tvärvetenskapligt symposium i Götene. Historieforum Västra Götaland*, Serie B, Vetenskapliga rapporter och Småskrifter 4. Ed. by Ingemar Nordgren. Skara, 133–148.
Wilcke-Lindqvist, Ingeborg 1961. *Lyhundra härad, sydvästra delen*. Sveriges kyrkor 88. Uppland V: 5. Stockholm.
Wood, Susan 2006. *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West*. Oxford.

Zachrisson, Sune 1963. Från vendeltid till vasatid. Redogörelse för de byggnadsarkeologiska undersökningarna av Eskilstuna kloster och slott 1961–62, *Eskilstuna stads museer. Årsbok 1963*. Eskilstuna, 17–74.

Zachrisson, Torun 1998. *Gård, gräns, gravfält. Sammanhang kring ädelmetalldepåer och runstenar från vikingatid och tidig medeltid i Uppland och Gästrikland*. Stockholm Studies in Archaeology 15. Stockholm.

—— 2004. Det heliga på Helgö och dess kosmiska referenser, *Ordning mot kaos—studier av nordisk förkristen kosmologi*. Vägar till Midgård 4. Ed. by Anders Andrén et al. Lund, 343–388.

Åqvist, Cecilia 1996. Hall och harg—det rituella rummet, *Religion från stenålder till Medeltid* Riksantikvarieämbetet. Arkeologiska undersökningar. Skrifter 19. Ed. by Kerstin Engdahl & Anders Kaliff, Linköping, 105–120.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM WINE IN A GOBLET TO MILK IN COWDUNG. THE TRANSFORMATION OF EARLY CHRISTIAN KINGS IN THREE POST-VIKING TALES FROM IRELAND

Jan Erik Rekdal

Is tre fhír flathemon cech comarbe con a chlí ina chainorbu clanda.
Audacht Morainn ('The Testament of Morann')[1]

Introduction: Irish medieval king tales

In Irish medieval tales the king is frequently, if not constantly, subject to criticism. Criticism of royal conduct, implicit or explicit, is the theme of most of the king tales. These tales span a long period of time: they were written down from the seventh-eighth century to the twelfth, and the kings described include both pre-historic kings and historic kings down to the tenth century.[2] Yet notwithstanding the inclusion of pre-historic material which may have been transmitted orally, these texts were written well within the Christian period in Ireland, reckoned to start with the fifth century. Tales about pre-historic and historic kings have all been labelled the 'Historical cycle'[3] (also called the 'Cycle of the Kings').[4]

---

[1] 'It is through the justice of the ruler that every heir plants his house-post in his fair inheritance.' (*Audacht Morainn* par. 16, pp. 16–17).

[2] As pointed out by Dillon: Domnall mac Muirchertaig (+980) is the last king occurring in a saga of this kind (Dillon 1946: 115–117. King Brian Bóruma (+1014) is mentioned in a king tale and plays, of course, a central part in the *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaibh* ('The battle of the Gaels with the Galls'); there is a question, which I cannot go into here, of how much this latter 'historical' tale differs from a king tale (Ní Mhaonaigh 2006: 149–50; cf also Breatnach 2005: 221–222.

[3] The term goes back to the nineteenth century historian Eugene O'Curry, but scholars such as M. Dillon (1946: 73) and F. J. Byrne (1973) adhere to it *in the sense of historical as opposed to legendary*. It is difficult to distinguish historical from legendary subject matter in these tales except for, normally, the person of the king. Nevertheless I suggest to continue using the term, if in a different understanding: it indicates that few if any of these tales are contemporary with the kings described. The 'Historical Cycle' concerns *past* kings already at the time of writing. For the present analysis I will opt for the label 'The Cycle of the Kings'.

[4] Dillon 1946; Wiley (ed.) 2008.

Two categories

I will for this discussion classify the tales concerning kings into two categories. The first one consists of all king tales written before the eleventh century. In this first group I will also include the group of texts called admonitory texts. Although they are tales belonging to a different genre, they are concerned with the same questions about rulership as the king tales. One might also possibly have used a chronological criterion, putting the tales about the pre-historic/legendary kings into one group and those about the historic kings into another. Such a classification may, however, overshadow the features they share and their common concern for rulership.

In the second group, consisting of tales written in the eleventh and twelfth century, we seem to have fewer king tales.[5] To this group belong the three king tales which will be analysed in this chapter. Although they, or at least two of them, describe early historic kings and are also concerned with rulership they are distinguished from other king tales by their different approach and perspective. The approach and perspective of our tales will be discussed further below. Suffice to say here, that it consists of explicit criticism together with a pronounced aim of saving the king from Hell.

My question in this chapter is why is there so much critique and so little praise in many of the king tales? To discuss this question I have chosen the tales with the harshest, at least the most explicit, critique, the three post-Viking tales about two early historic and one fictional (or partly fictional) king: Diarmait mac Cerbaill (+565), Muirchertach mac Erca (+534) and Suibhne mac Colmáin Chuair. The tales are *Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill* ('The sudden death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill'), *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca* ('The sudden death of Muirchertach mac Erca') and *Buile Suibhne* ('Suibhne's vision/frenzy').

One reason for the sheer amount of tales depicting a king critically, may be that the lay nobility, including the king, depended on advice from the learned nobility—which encompassed specialists, such as judges, *filid* (learned poets) and clerics—to ensure good governance of society.[6] The king's natural instincts were for example not sufficient

[5] Oustanding example of tales in this group would be *Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaibh* and *Fled Dúin na nGéd.*

[6] The learned elite of *filid* was ranked by seven grades and three sub-grades, exactly like the lay nobility, so a chief poet (*ollam*) would praise a king, a minor poet a minor king or lord, etc. The Church had a similar hierarchy—from bishop to doorkeeper.

for delivering good judgements; to ensure that the expertise of the professional judge was also required.[7] Another reason for the extensive production of king tales may have been a wish of the learned nobility to put into words a Christian ideology of rulership not only for the ruler's benefit but also for that of society at large. It is tempting to propose that the majority of medieval Irish prose narratives—saints' lives included—concerns kings and their problems of remaining faithful to the Christian ideology. There might be a third reason for the high number of such tales: that each text was a manifestation of the power given the clerics through their skill of literacy—which was unique to them. But almost unique was also the power of the rulers through their martial skill—which was however, admittedly, shared by their warriors.

For all the critique of royal conduct formulated in the king tales they were certainly also meant to entertain. The admonitory element being of a general kind may explain why the tales were seen as adaptable to later kings; and, indeed, they were in fact subsequently re-circulated with new plots to admonish new kings. So also were early kings adaptable to later critique, as demonstrated in the three tales in focus here.

Pre-historic/legendary kings

Among the earlier tales, and focused on by scholars discussing the ideology of kingship, are the tales about the prehistoric kings, like that of Conaire Mór in the tale *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel* (*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*).[8] For this tale as for others about other prehistoric kings and legendary ancestors like Cormac mac Airt, his father and grandfather, Art mac Cuinn and Conn Cétchathach, I will claim that the main theme is the *fír flathemon*, the 'truth of the prince'.[9] For

---

In law, a king and an *ollam* were juxtaposed as the protectors of a *túath*—the petty kingdom (Charles-Edwards 2000: 127 n. 13). The chief poet (*ollam*) may have been engaged by the *túath* itself or by the king. The ecclesiastical scholars did not have a similar hierarchy but they belonged to the same stratum as the others. However, we see how representatives of the four groups are juxtaposed in the following formulation from the law *Bretha Nemed* (a law on the status of the *filid*): 'A *túath* is not a *túath* without an ecclesiastical scholar, a churchman, a poet (*fili*), a king by whom contracts and treaties are extended to (other) *túatha*'. (*Uraicecht na Ríar*: 90).

[7] Charles-Edwards 2000: 140–144.

[8] West 1999; Charles-Edwards 1999; Ó Cathasaigh 1985, 1996; O'Connor 2007, 2008; Sayers 1993; Sjöblom 1996.

[9] *Fír* is translated first and foremost with 'truth', 'justice', 'oath'. One of the chief duties of a king was the giving of judgement. The opposite of true judgment ('fír-breth'), was false judgement ('gúbreth'), Kelly 1998: 312.

example, in the text *Scéla Éogain in so 7 Cormaic*,[10] Cormac's subtle dealing with Mac Con's judgement as opposed to his own reflects juridical awareness; even Conaire's *juggling with judgments* reveals juridical knowledge.[11] In these tales the raison d'être of kingship is presented as delivering true judgment and the king's ability to keep justice intact.[12]

There is close intertextuality between these king tales and the admonitory texts like *Audacht Morainn*[13] and *Tecosca Cormaic*,[14] and *Briathar-thecosc Con Culainn*[15] for that matter. These admonitory texts are terse and sober advice from the learned orders, whereas the king tales offer case-studies of royal conduct in full-blown tales with plot and intrigues. In the earliest texts addressing kings such as *Audacht Morainn* the king is admonished indirectly through a messenger: "Tell him…Let him…." It becomes clear from the admonitions that the king should avoid war and aggressive behaviour, unless forced into this in defence of his *túath*. Set up against three other types of rulers it becomes clear that the true ruler is the only one of the four who is peace-seeking.

In the tales about *pre-historic/legendary kings* everything is centred on the king's perfect truth and immaculate appearance, demonstrating how easily it can be shaken and shattered, with dire consequences. In these tales depicting a pre-historic king there would as yet be no cleric with the capacity to 'save' the king who has misjudged.

Historic kings

These tales may tend to explain the downfall of a king for various reasons—not only because he did not judge according to the 'truth of the prince'. Also here in the tales about *historic kings* the critique is

---

[10] Ó Cathasaigh 1977: 126–7.

[11] There is another group of tales, however, the Ulster-tales, where the king, Conchobar, does not act according to the king's truth, recently demonstrated by Clancy (2005, 2008) without suffering any consequences. His misjudgements seem somehow to be sanctioned by the society around him. These tales are marked by the absence of any kind of corrective authorities whether secular or clerical, but they are also tales about decadence and downfall. (cf. Radner 1982).

[12] See how Cormac succeeded to the kingship of Tara through pointing out the false judgement given by the incumbent king and how he later lost it when he was blinded in one eye. (Ó Cathasaigh 1977: 126–27; 69).

[13] *Audacht Morainn* ed. and tr. by F. Kelly.

[14] *The Instructions of Cormac Mac Airt* ed. and tr. by K. Meyer.

[15] Smith 1925: 187–192.

shown, not preached. Its implicit form of admonition thus bears semblance to that found in *Audacht Morainn*. These tales read as allegories of how easily a king may distort the truth and loose his perfect appearance. This tends to happen frequently through unjust and aggressive, warrior-like conduct.[16] Although the tales depict kings who rule well within the Christian era, clerics occur very seldom; and if they do they act in the periphery, playing a modest and subordinate role to the king, and rarely managing to set things right.[17] Although in these tales the kings are not confronted with representatives of the Church the tales were re-told, if not composed, in monastic settings. Most of them seem to date from the ninth and tenth centuries.

These tales do, however, often present two opposite royal characters—one good, the other evil—the good showing an example of just conduct and Christian virtue—the other representing the opposite. These characters are frequently in a close relationship, like father and son, brothers, or foster-father and fosterling.

'The truth of the king'

All the king tales seem to have their basis in the ideology of rulership which is preached at least implicitly—the ideology of *fír flathemon* ('the truth of the king'). The term may appear as an Irish glossing of the Christian term *rex iustus*,[18] but it is held to be pre-Christian.[19] In pre-Christian times it is thought to have meant that 'It is through the truth of the ruler that he secures peace, tranquillity, joy, ease, comfort.'[20] The concept of *fír flathemon* was undoubtedly later Christianised and used for the Christian term *rex iustus*, with its concepts of the just king representing God on earth, the incarnation of law, order and justice. Common to both the pre-Christian and the Christian understanding

[16] Two examples picked randomly: *Orgain Denna Rig* and *Fingal Rónain*.

[17] See as examples Mael Chaba in *Fled Dúin na nGéd* and Saint Mo Laise's clerics in *Tochmarc Becfhola*.

[18] In the literature the term is claimed to be from Augustin's *De Civitate Dei*. Interestingly the term as such does not occur in that work but appears to be coined by scholars for the concept concerning 'happy rulers' expressed by Augustin in the aforementioned work: that rulers are happy if they rule with justice, cf. *De Civitate Dei* V, 24: 'iuste imperarent'.

[19] Ó Cróinín 1995: 77–8; Kelly 1998: 236.

[20] Kelly 1976: 6, par. 14; see also Ó Cathasaigh's use of this example in his discussion of the word *síd* (Ó Cathasaigh 1977–79: 137–55, 140).

of *fír flathemon* is therefore the idea that if the king would master the truth initiated to him, his reign will be peaceful and prosperous.

The material for the present analysis

My analysis here is based on the second group of tales. The three post-Viking tales in focus here may be seen as different to the 'traditional' king tales, because here the domain of the king is juxtaposed to the domain of the cleric; a feature which can resemble hagiography.[21] The three tales in focus here differ, however, simply and crucially from saints' lives by being kings' lives: they have the king as the protagonist around which the intrigue evolves. It is from the eleventh century on that this new kind of tales emerges where the clerics not only occur on the stage together with the kings but play a prominent part not subordinate to that of the king. Here it is the cleric who plays the part of the judge formulating juridical advice. Maybe that explains why the critique here is expressed rather bluntly and in direct confrontations. These are the three tales which are the object of the analysis in this discussion of the critique of rulership in Irish medieval narrative tradition.

The question for research

To remind us again, the question was, why are almost all king tales so focused on critique of the king, rather than praise?

My main claim is that the production of all these tales is an endeavour to overwrite the warrior ideology, probably not just a pagan residue, with the Christian ideology of the *rex iustus*. This may to some extent explain the seemingly excessive critique. The warrior ideology was surfacing all the time as a result of the pugnacious inclination lurking in the heart of a king who was also a champion.[22] Secondly, it will be argued that traditionally this clerical endeavour was closely linked to a manifestation of clerical power through the use of literacy, as opposed to the king's and nobles' martial skills. Lastly, this clerical power seems now in these later tales to be used to propagate Christian

[21] Wiley includes them in his 'An introduction to the early Irish king tales' in Wiley (ed.) 2008: 13–67.

[22] In *Audacht Morainn* we hear of four different types of rulers, three of them serve as negative examples and may be seen more as representations of a warrior ideology. The royal misconduct may rather have been a matter of adherence to the warrior ideology than deviation from the Christian ideology.

rulership for society at large, and to advance a national monarchy as well as a national church through close cooperation between the two.

My hypothesis in more detail is that in our tales the critique of the king's warrior conduct is harsh yet seems simultaneously to contain a desperate wish to save him. The consequences of royal misconduct are devastating. It is as if the clerics want to strip the king of his warrior attire. My suggestion is that the inglorious deaths they suffer are meant to purge them. As an explanation for this we should consider that a wish for purgation and salvation may have been particularly pronounced during the period of Church reform, the very period when these tales were written.[23]

We may ask whether the two groups of tales serve as a demonstration by the learned orders of two situations: the importance of juridical expertise for the king's truth when available and the fatality of its absence on the one hand, yet also the redeeming quality of the ethical advice offered by clerics when the king heeds it. Between the two groups of texts there is an ongoing inter-textual dialogue discussing the consequences of the absence or presence of clerics. Unfortunately, the same kings do not appear in both groups so as to enable a comparison of two versions of the same king. Still, we may ponder on the absence of clerics in the first group with the great bulk of pre-eleventh-century king tales. Was the ecclesiastical nobility still in a subordinate position to the lay nobility—at least to the extent that direct confrontation was to be avoided? The tales, however, express with all clarity how the kings involved suffered from the want of admonition—a situation radically changed in the tales subject to the present analysis. When the king failed to master the *fír flathemon*, both his kingship and he himself were doomed, whether he was historic or not.

However, in the narrative context of the later tales of the second group, it is doubtful whether the concept of *fír flathemon* is still reckoned with. Here the king appears stripped of what made him king; he is constantly on the verge of loosing his sovereignty, but when he finally does so the king himself does not perish completely. These tales read as an effort to save that stripped king and to equip him with a new kind of truth—that of God—a truth he may obtain via the clerics.[24]

---

[23] Ó Cuív 1967: 107–122, 117–121.
[24] Ó Cróinín 1998: 77.

The analysis of the three late tales includes a contrastive reading of the tale of a pre-historic king, Conaire Mór in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (TBDD) probably of the eighth or ninth century. This tale is of great interest for the present examination, focusing as it does on the *bruiden* as the ambience of the plot. A comparison with TBDD can be justified by the fact that the only full extant version of it is of the eleventh century and thus contemporary with at least one of the three tales. I will here consider TBDD in its eleventh-century context.[25]

In support of an examination of texts of various age is the fact that all—both the tale of the pre-historic king Conaire and the three of the three early Christian kings—are collected in the same fourteenth-century manuscript—*The Yellow Book of Lecan* (YBL). In this respect I am following the redactor of that manuscript.

The king tales Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill *('The sudden death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill')*, Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca *('The sudden death of Muirchertach mac Erca') and* Buile Suibhne *('Suibhne's vision/frenzy'): kings in confrontation with clerics*

The three kings of these tales from the eleventh and twelfth centuries who are confronted with clerics are all early partly pagan, partly Christian kings, at least nominally: Diarmait mac Cerbaill (+565), Muirchertach mac Erca (+534) and Suibhne mac Colmáin Chuair (who dies a few years after the Battle of Mag Rath in 637). They shall be dealt with here in the chronological order of their tales. While Diarmait and Muirchertach are historical, Suibhne is of obscure origins and may be a fictive figure modelled partly on a grandson of Diarmait, Suibhne Colmán Mór,[26] although his life did not end as it does for the Suibhne in the tale. The Suibhne of the tale fought in the historical battle of Mag Rath 637. The degree of his historicity ought not to concern us here, apart from the fact that that he is presented as a king of the early part of the seventh century. Whoever the historical king was on whom the literary character of Suibhne may have been based, Suibhne is depicted as king of the earlier phase of Christian kings in Ireland—though some hundred years later than Diarmait mac Cerbaill and Muirchertach mac Erca.

---

[25] I have noted recently that also Ralph O'Connor (2007: 67 n. 36) does this and appears to be doing it also in his forthcoming study of this text.

[26] O'Keeffe 1913: xxxii.

The tale *Buile Suibhne* ('Suibhne's frenzy/vision') seems to be the latest of the three and differs from the other two by its title which refers to king Suibhne's madness, whereas the former two belong to the group of tales called *aideda*[27]—'sudden deaths.' Suibhne's madness is, of course, a kind of death of the king. Also Suibhne, however, suffers a sudden death.

All three tales however, are written in a period when the Church was in an accelerating process of reform, which was boosted by and reached its climax under the Anglo-Norman invasion in the latter half of the twelfth century. The tales analysed here are strongly impregnated by the ethos of this reform.

All three tales are about kings transgressing boundaries of some kind. In *Buile Suibhne* the focus is on the king's madness, in the other two it is the kings' foreboding of death as a result of the clerics' cursing of their transgression. The three tales group themselves together because they all present a story about a king who violates the ethics and/or the sanctuary of a cleric, and the dire consequences this violation has for his kingship. Thus the three tales depict the king in confrontation with clerics in the shape of monastic founders and holy men; they describe how his kingdom perishes and the king himself is doomed on earth but redeemed by the interventions of the clerics, so that he ends up, to a certain extent, resembling royal martyrs.[28]

1. Aided Diarmata[29]

'The "violent" death of Diarmait Mac Cerbaill' presents us with King Diarmait of the southern Uí Néill, the heir to the Tara kingship driven into exile by Túathal Máelgarb ('Túathal the bold brute'). Diarmait

[27] The intertextual reference embedded in the title *aided* ('violent death'), indicating genre, should not be ignored. Of these *aideda* we have six of Ulster heroes (not kings) and a couple of others about early kings, part of the so called Cycles of the Kings (Dillon: 1946 and Wiley 2008). In none of these *aideda* does a saint or a cleric occur.

[28] Herbert 1997.

[29] There is almost a cycle of tales which read as consequences of Diarmait's misdeeds. They are the death-tales of his son Bresal (Lives of Saints from *The Book of Lismore*, xxvii–xxviii), and of Diarmait's three other sons, Dunchad, Cinall and Maelodor, (*Hibernica Minora* 70–75) respectively. Tuathal's killer, Maelmór, Diarmait's foster-brother, has his tale. Even a tale about his sons' killer Máelodrán exists, (*Hibernica Minora* 76–81) and a further one about Diarmait's lance-carrier and herald (*callaire*) which reads as a shorter version of that of Diarmait himself, and one about another of Diarmait's sons, Áed Sláine the kin-slayer (*Silva Gadelica* V, VII).

was supposedly the last pagan high-king of Ireland (c. 545–565), and as such the last to celebrate the ritual of the *Feis Temro*.[30]

In exile Diarmait helps St. Ciarán to raise a church. For that Ciarán through his prayers makes Diarmait king. Diarmait bestows land to Ciarán. Soon after this the king violates the right of sanctuary protecting Church premises which the land he had granted the Church now was. For this Diarmait is severely reprimanded by Ciarán, and the cleric prophesises that the king would consequently suffer death by wounding, burning and drowning. This prophecy is repeated by Diarmait's own prophet and his druid, as well as in the ensuing confrontations the king has with two more monastic founders, Ruadán and Colum Cille. And indeed, King Diarmait ends his life by being pierced, burned, drowned and having his head smashed by a roof-beam which falls down on him.

The parallel established in *Aided Diarmata* between Diarmait and the founder, St. Ciarán, lends a structure to the tale that binds together the three confrontations which make up the tale but may have been separate anecdotes.[31] This parallel is established at the very beginning when the two protagonists Diarmait and Ciarán find themselves simultaneously on opposite banks of the Shannon. Diarmait is on board his ship by *Snám Dá Éan*,[32] whereas Ciarán goes ashore on the bank opposite, at *Druim Tibrat*—"the spot where Clonmacnois stands today", the opening paragraph informs us. When Diarmait is informed by his druids (*dráidhi*) about the fire kindled by Ciarán and his clergy, he crosses the river to where Ciarán is.[33]

---

[30] Byrne 1973: 104.

[31] The text occurs in B. L. Egerton MS 1782 and in the *Yellow Book of Lecan*. O'Grady's edition and translation from Egerton (*Silva Gadelica* VI) underlies the present analysis and is the text referred to throughout. Joan Radner (1983) uses the *Yellow Book of Lecan* for her quotations and references. John Carey has translated the last part of the Egerton version and of nr. V in *Silva Gadelica* in Koch 2003: 212–216. Recently Dan Wiley (Wiley 2002: 58 n1.) has prepared in an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Harvard University, 2000) which I have not seen, an edition with translation of the tale from the *Book of Uí Maine* with variants from Egerton MS 1782 and in *Yellow Book of Lecan*. Cf also Wiley's edition of the material concerning King Diarmait from *The Book of Lismore*, Wiley2002: 53–59. This materal is very much the same as the tale called *Stair ar Aed baclámh* in *Silva Gadelica* (66–72)—which reads as a shorter version of *Aided Diarmata* itself.

[32] Note that Suibhne also visits this place in his tale. For the history of the name cf. Marstrander 1911: 219–25, 219–20.

[33] Here Diarmait also moves from a place with a pagan denomination to a place with religious references. Snám Dá Éan ('The Swim of two Birds'), the place where he

The topographical opposition-cum-convergence has its counterpart in other features of the narrative. The parallels turn into antipodes as they represent the opposing ethics of the worlds of paganism and Christianity, although this does not explain the composition of the tale in the eleventh century. What was pagan in the tale and appropriate to the period depicted, would to the tale's eleventh-century audience appear as secular and warrior-like. This I will come back to later. *Aided Diarmata* is the most extensive of the three tales and discusses most overtly the vexed problem of Church and State ('cill ocus túath'). The opposition between State and Church, king and cleric, which gradually turns into two antipodal spheres, is underscored also by the structure of the tale made up of three encounters of king and cleric with a crescendo of conflict between the two parts.

In the first conversation between Diarmait and the monastic founder, Ciarán mac an tSaoir ('Ciarán son of the Carpenter') explains to Diarmait who wonders what he is doing ("*cissi hopair dogní?*"), that he is building a little church. The question gives the impression that Diarmait may not have been familiar with what a church or chapel was. This is further supported by Diarmait's reaction to St. Ciarán's answer that he was building a little church. He appears not to understand 'church' as a common noun when he answers: "It could as well be its name, then: the little church" (1. 9: *'Cumma dono gidh edh a hainm', ar Diarmait, 'eclais bec'*) This could be an effort to present a vacillating mind of a king in a transitory state moving from paganism to Christianity.

---

is when Ciarán arrives on the opposite bank, got its name from an incident the tale informs us about: "The two birds Nár mac Finnchad son of Conall Cernach killed on the shoulder of Eistiu, a female warrior" ('*dá én ro marb Nár mac Finnchad micc Conaill cernaigh for gualainn Eistine banfhéinnedha* [*ms.* b-fheinnighi]' p. 73) (for a female warrior, a 'banféndi', cf. Mc Cone 1986: 12). The other place was referred to by a well, Druim Tibrat, before it got the name Clonmacnois. Many wells were venerated and regarded as holy also in pagan times, and it was next to holy wells that many a contention between druids and clerics took place to see who of the two parties was in possession of the strongest magical power. Such contentions occur frequently especially in early Christian literature such as the lives of St. Patrick. It is noteworthy that in the *Book of Armagh* Patrick crosses the Shannon from the same place as Diarmait: "*Venit ergo Patricus sanctus per alueum fluminis Sinnae per Vadum Duorum Auium in Campum Ai.*" (The holy Patrick came across river Shannon by The ford of the two birds in Mag Ai.) *Book of Armagh* 11b1, cf. footnote on p. 165 in *Buile Suibhne.*) A presentation of Diarmait mac Cerbaill following in St. Patrick's footsteps accords well with the tradition of degrading Cenél Coirpri for the benefit of his kinsman Diarmait and his descendants (Charles-Edwards 2000: 33–34, 468).

Co-founding a Church

Then Ciarán adds: '*Plant the pole ('cleith') with me and I will put my hand above yours and your hand and your kingship will be over the men of Ireland before this time after tomorrow ('bus tráthsa nach noirrther')*.' Here at the exordium of the tale yet another central motif is formulated: the importance of maintaining an intimate connection between Church and State.[34] Furthermore, it is understood that the Church shall maintain its close connection with the State only if the king follows the Church's teachings and accepts its leading role. The miraculous power of the Church is clearly demonstrated in the same scene. Diarmait, however, who is driven into outlawry by the then-reigning King Túathal Máelgarb,[35] wonders rightly how he is going to obtain the kingship of Tara. Ciarán answers tersely that that is for God to decide ("*Is folaidh Dia in nísin*.") Soon after Diarmait's foster-brother murders Túathal and before the week ended, the men of Ireland inaugurated Diarmait king ("*ro rígsat iarum fir Eirenn in tí Diarmait siu ro bo cenn sechtmaini*.")

Ciarán is presented as literally implanting into the soil a Christian king simultaneously with the pole of his church. We understand from this scene how Ciarán creates a Christian king at the very moment when he founds his church. Diarmait is not only brought into the realm of his coming kingdom but also into to sphere of Christianity. Do we see here a subtle cleansing of a predominantly pagan king? In the tradition Diarmait is regarded as the first Christian high-king,[36] but also as the last to hold the sacral kingship of Tara. An awareness of this may to some extent explain the authorial exposition of Diarmait acting in a constant fluctuation between pagan/secular and Christian ethics.

From dialogue to confrontation: sanctuary rights

The first meeting between Diarmait and Ciarán is marked by dialogue and integration and is not a confrontation. Their relationship however does not remain so. Already during the next meeting we see a full-

[34] McCone 1990: 145–6, 145.

[35] Both in this story as well as in *Aided Muirchertaich meic Erca*, when it comes to critique of royal conduct, Tuathal is presented quite negatively (cf. Byrne 1973: 90–91).

[36] Byrne 1973: 104.

blown confrontation. This happens when king Diarmait bestows land on Ciarán—land on which an enemy of the king lives. Diarmait has this man's house burnt, thus causing the man's death by wounding, burning and drowning in a vat in which he tries to escape the flames within the house. Ciarán admonishes Diarmait severely for this. With his acts, Diarmait violated the rights of sanctuary on Church property by then protecting the land Diarmait had granted the Church. Ciarán prophesises that the king would consequently suffer the same kind of death by wounding, burning and drowning.[37] The cleric avoids, however, cursing Diarmait himself, his rulership and his descendants. Consequently, the three-fold death can be seen as some sort of cleansing or 'purgation' as suggested by Radner (1983: 187–88). It was on their way to the congregation of the men of Ireland at Uisnech that the bestowal of land, the killing of the enemy, and the admonition of Diarmait took place. Then, witnessed by the men of Ireland, Diarmait submits to Ciarán, offering his own and his offspring's services to him for ever. Diarmait subsequently ruled well for a long time, and the tale informs us that he was exceptionally good in 'figure (*cruth*) and appearance (*delbh*), wisdom (*ercna*) and speech (*innscni*) and in royal rule (*ríge*)'.

The prophecy of Diarmait's death is also made by Bec mac Dé, his druid or prophet (*fáid*) who is said to be the best seer in his time. The relation between cleric and pagan prophet is depicted as an opposition that will converge. (I will come back to this later.) Mac Dé's prophecy gives more details about Diarmait's death. Also the person who will pierce him with his spear is revealed to him: Diarmait's fosterling Áed Dub mac Suibhne, son of the king of Dál nAraidhi, a king Diarmait had killed. We also hear how and where it would happen: Áed Dub would pierce Diarmait's breast so that his spine will break in the house of Banbán, the hospitaller (*briughad*), when Diarmait tries to escape the burning house. Diarmait would be wearing a shirt from a single flax-seed, a mantle from a single sheep and the beer in his horn be brewed from a single grain of corn and he would be eating bacon of a pig that was never born. But it would be the roof-beam of the house (*ochtach an tighi*)—more specifically, the roofbeam (*feice*)[38]—that, by falling on his head, would give him the death-blow. This will

[37] See Radner 1983 on the significance of the three-fold death.
[38] *Cleith* and *feic(e)* is used indiscriminately in the narrative.

happen when Diarmait has sought refuge from the flames in an ale-vat (*dabhach chormma*). The roof-beam in Banbán's guesthouse is that of Diarmait's own hall: when Diarmait heard the prophecy that the roof-tree would give him the death-blow he threw his roof-tree out of his house. Banbán, the hospitaller, picks up this very same roof-tree one day when he is out fishing and installs it in his guest-house.

So it appears that what will finally undo Diarmait is a part of the construction of the hospitaller's house—the *bruiden*. This roof-beam corresponds to the house-post of the church which Diarmait helped Ciarán to fix in the beginning of the tale. As the roof-beam of the *bruiden* was originally that of Diarmait's own hall, the correspondence includes both the king's hall and the *bruiden*. I take it that this correspondence works as an architectural illustration of the ethical message of the cleric and the tale. By means of the word for roof-beam or ridgepole (*cleith*), the little church erected by St. Ciarán is set up against Diarmait's royal mansion and the guesthouse run by the hospitaller Banbán. Considering the hospitaller's close alliance with a king,[39] one may argue that a guest-house is also part of a king's royal site or sites.[40]

This indicates that the new construction of the church will undo the old construction, not first and foremost of the *bruiden*, the guest-house, which is Banbán's house,[41] but of Diarmait's own house to which the original roof-beam belonged. Do we also discern a parallel if not an opposition between Diarmait's spine and the roof-beam: when Diarmait's spine which upholds Diarmait's stature breaks also the architectural construction symbolizing his reign breaks down? Does this parallel suggest a message: if Diarmait had been able to lean more on Ciarán's church-pole, his kingship would have remained intact?

Diarmait finds himself in confrontation with monastic founders three times. One may be tempted to see this in combination with his threefold death; that he is to suffer a death for every transgression he makes, because all confrontations are about breaches of sanctuary. The two next confrontations are with St. Ruadán of Lorrha and St. Colum Cille.

---

[39] G. Mac Eoin 1997, 1999.

[40] It is described as "*sídh sainemail*" ('brilliant mansion/peace/otherworldly site). I will come back to this when the opposite building is introduced (p. 75, l.27 in *Aided Diarmata*).

[41] But surely also this edifice is burnt down at the end.

King Diarmait's prophet ('fáid') Bec mac Dé formulates in his prophecy about Áed Dub, the king's killer before he interprets it for Diarmait: 'I see the fierce warrior (e.g. hound) that shall spoil the brilliant mansion' ("*Atchiusa in coin conamail loitfios in síd sainemail*"). Bec mac Dé thus uses the metaphor of a hound to refer to a warrior,[42] and that of *síd*—a tumulus often indicating an otherworldly abode—to refer to the *bruiden*, the king's hall. The word *síd* also means 'peace.' In this particular context therefore, the *bruiden* is described positively as opposed to the warrior who is to violate it.

St. Ruadán

The confrontation between Diarmait and the clerics escalates when he trespasses the sanctuary of Ruadán in order to avenge the killing of his herald (*callaire*). Diarmait brings the killer, Áed Guaire, as a captive to Tara. Ruadán together with Brendan of Birr demands that Diarmait give Áed back to them as Ruadán had guaranteed the man sanctuary. Here, royal law is set up against Church law—and Church law overrules royal law by giving immunity to one who has broken the latter. The two saints sing maledictory psalms ('*salma escaine*')[43] against the king. Ruadán and Diarmait end up cursing each other. The cleric says that the king's body shall be mangled by enemies and his limbs scattered so that they would not be found in one place. At Diarmait's death we shall see that his head alone remains, not consumed by the fire. At this exchange of curses, however, Diarmait curses Ruadán's eye which he looses. This demonstrates that royal power is not inferior to that of the cleric. During the confrontation with Ruadán, Diarmait for his part predicts that a wild boar would tear up Ruadán's grave-mound and that his relics (*taissi*) be scattered. Interestingly the narrative parallel here suggests an elevation of the king's body similar to that of a saint—that of Ruadán. Also their respective foundations they curse, both the royal seat of Tara and Ruadán's diocese ('*fairche*') are to be deserted ('fás). Ruadán predicts that never again should smoke come from a roof-tree (*cleith*) in Tara ('…ná bía dé do chlethi i Temraig co bráth'). Here we have another reference to the roof-tree.

When this last curse is uttered, Diarmait looks up at the roof-tree and Ruadán repeats what his prophet Bec mac Dé had already foretold:

[42] It is further specified by Bec as a 'cú ruadh'—a wolf.
[43] See Wiley 2001.

"*Is bidba duit in cleithi úcut cíadonéchnagtar, or Ruadán: is é in cleithe sin dobibar it étan iar do chláidedh do allmarchaib.*"[44] With this last prophecy Diarmait gives in to the cleric.

Ruadán's reference to the roof-tree in Diarmait's house seems to disagree with that of Bec mac Dé which refers to the roof-tree in Banbán's guest-house. Diarmait, however, exclaims when he finally sits in Banbán's house, and when he begins to suspect that he is now in the place of doom which the prophecies were referring to. The old roof-tree in Banbán's new house had belonged to Diarmait's house, which Diarmait realises, but too late ('*is é so mo techsa, ar Diarmait*'—'this is my house'—not translated by O'Grady).[45] We may, as the *Book of Lismore* version does, infer from Diarmait's exclamation that he had exchanged the roof-tree to avoid the prophecy.[46] This exchange of old for new can and ought to be read as a metaphor also for the king's reign: he removes one pagan feature of his kingship. However, Diarmait's inner self only partially accepts the new, and that is not enough.

St. Colum Cille

The third and final step in Diarmait's ever accelerating descent towards disaster and ruin is his confrontation with a third monastic founder—Colum Cille. A similar crime takes place: Diarmait violates Colum Cille's guarantee, in the same manner as with Ciarán and Ruadán. In this third case, it concerns the son of the king of Connacht who had committed murder at the actual banquet of the Tara festival. As the opening, the tale tells us that death would await the man who breaks the rights of the feast of Tara or any of the three congregations in Uisnech, Tailltiu and Tara (p. 73). So Diarmait is fully justified when he avenges the transgressions against the feast of Tara. However, against his royal law (*récht rígda*) the clerics claim immunity (*comairce*), which of course causes conflicts. The sons of Muirchertach, Diarmait's predecessor but one, handle this in an exemplary way: when the transgressor of the feast of Tara places himself under their protection (*comairce*), they place him under Colum Cille's protection implying that he is safer there. Thus he is moved from secular to

[44] 'that roof-tree you look at is hostile to you—it is that roof-tree that shall be hurled down in your face.' *Aided Diarmata*: 78.

[45] It is spelled out in the later version translated by Wiley 2002: 53–59.

[46] This is the explanation given explicitly in the slightly younger Lismore version.

ecclesiastical protection. Is this meant to suggest that a cleric's protection is superior to that of a king or is it the protection of Colum Cille in particular? Throughout the tale the clerics try to make the king adjust to their judgement which normally opposes his (p. 77); and it is always they who win the argument.

A central theme of this story from a Christian point of view would be royal transgression against the Church's rights, from a secular point of view clerical violation of royal rights. The contest is not clear: both groups appear to be wrong. The king is not made powerless in the confrontation with the clerics.

Fate and christianisation

Throughout most of the narrative, Diarmait dreads his own death of which he has been made aware since the first prophecy uttered by Ciarán, repeated by his own seer Bec mac Dé, and partly in relation to the roof-beam also proclaimed by Ruadán. At the same time Diarmait does not seem to accept his fate. He thus has the prophecy concerning his kingdom and his death repeated regularly, apparently hoping that it would not come true. When Bec mac Dé repeats his doom in further details, '*…daera fir, saera mná, mess fás, fidh cáin, olc bláth, ili gáith, samh fliuch, ith nglass, terc ass, midhbuidh tromm in gach tír, caeil tuircc, uilcc ríg, fíor nolcc, guin gnáth, bith críon, líon ráth…*',[47] mac Dé is discharged of his duties and Diarmait's druids (*dráithe*) are brought in, only to repeat what Bec prophesied. Diarmait's doubt as to mac Dé's capacity of prophesying leads to Bec mac Dé's submission to Colum Cille. Colum Cille, for his part, praises his prophecy ('*is amra in fháistine*') and tells him it is from God he has got this great insight. Also Diarmait's druids, when asked to give their version, confirm Bec mac Dé's prophecy, stressing the three deaths: slaughter (*marbodh*), drowning (*bádhud*) and burning (*losccud*). From this we understand that there is not only a process of Christianisation regarding King Diarmait himself, but also concerning his prophet. At the same time the whole episode seems to confirm Bec's powers over the king.

[47] *Aided Diarmata*: 80. In the third version of Bec mac Dé's prophecy when asked by Diarmait about the shape of his kingdom after him, we appreciate the set imagery of unjust kingship: "unfree men (daera fir), free women, void of mast, smooth wood, bad blossom, frequent winds, summer wet, green corn, a lot of cattle (terc ass), dependants burdensome in every land (midhbuidh tromm in gach tír), meagre boars (caeil tuircc), wicked kings (uilcc ríg), bad truth (fíor nolcc), constant killing (guin gnáth), a world withered (bith críon), a number of forts (lion ráth)…." (O'Grady's translation).

Diarmait's death

One gathers that just before *samhain* (the traditional feast of November 1st), Diarmait is invited by a warrior (*laech)*, who appears to be Banbán, to come to spend a night at his house. Diarmait's wife warns him not to accept, but he goes against her wish and in spite of her warning. When the tale informs us that Diarmait goes with Banbán to Ráith Bec, the audience understands immediately that Diarmait is going to his doom. Ráith Bec was mentioned in the prophecies as the place where the *bruiden* was. And at this feast all the omens of the previous prophecies appear: Diarmait gets a shirt of one flax-seed, a mantle of the wool of one sheep and a drink of ale of one grain of corn. Then Diarmait looks up towards the ceiling saying: 'The lower part of the house is new, but its upper-work is not ('*is nua íochtar in tighi ocus ní hóg a uachtar*')—in the sense, 'is of re-used material'. Banbán explains that when once they were out in their boats fishing they saw a roof-tree of a house floating on the sea and he had a house made of it. 'This is my house', Diarmait exclaims, 'let us get out, warriors.' In the doorway, however, Áed Dub mac Suibhne meets him and pierces him with a spear so that his spine breaks. Diarmait turns back into the house which however is set on fire. Trying to escape the flames he throws himself into a vat of beer, when the roof-beam falls down on his head, and he dies.

Not only Diarmait's head but also other relics (*a thaissi*), which must be secondary relics such as clothes and other possessions since nothing is left of his corpse, are brought from Ráith Bec to Eglais Bec in Clonmacnois. This note confirms, on the one hand, the parallel fates of Diarmait's and Ruadán's bodies as predicted in their exchange of curses. It also underlines the opposition between the two buildings, Banbán's at Ráith Bec and Ciarán's at Eglais Bec.

Three-fold death

The significance of a three-fold death has been discussed by Kenneth Jackson, Brian Ó Cuív and more fully by Joan Radner and more resently by William Sayers and Tomás Ó Cathasaigh offering the most comprehensive analysis of the motive,[48] but with no conclusive interpretation. I will join Radner in seeing the three kinds of deaths as three ways of

[48] Jackson 1940, Ó Cuív 1973–74, Radner 1983, Sayers 1992; Ó Cathasaigh 1994.

doing penance in dying. This may also pave the way for the suggested reading of Diarmait as a royal martyr of some sort. It should however be noted that both King Diarmait and King Muirchertach (see below) suffer what seems almost a four-fold death: they are pierced (wounded by a spear), drowned and burned as the prophecy predicts—but they also have their heads crushed. In Diarmait's case it says that he died from the roof-beam hitting his head ('*ro thuit féicce in tighi ina chionn comba marb de*.' p. 82), in Muirchertach's it is told that the house fell down upon his head ('*Tuitig in tech ina cenn iarsin…*' par. 42). One could argue that this an elaboration of how they were burnt; it demonstrates, nevertheless, the central part held by the falling down of the roof-beam or the house in the imagery of the three-fold death in these two tales.

Diarmait is placed within a Christian setting but is struggling to get to grips with it. His burial in the churchyard of Clonmacnois highlights a final Christian embrace. His is heavily criticised but clearly not given up by the clerics. Ciarán underlines in his judgement that he will not take heaven or earth from him or his children as a result of his transgression, but that Diarmait shall suffer a three-fold death of wounding (*guin*), drowning (*bádud*) and burning (*losccad*). The stress on his three-fold death seems to suggest some purgation of sin. It is a Christian punishment reflecting pagan customs. The old ways of the champion kings and warriors turn back on them with the three most frequent ways in which they kill each other: the piercing of enemies with spears, the drowning of enemies (was this especially for those who did not carry weapons, like poets?),[49] and the burning of enemies trapped in their houses. Considering the fact that these three deaths or at least a couple of them may be inflicted on a king who is regarded a Christian king—judged from his burial in a high-prestige monastic burial-place—the three-fold death could certainly not only have pagan connotations, but also explicitly Christian ones. I will suggest that the reason why this death could turn into some form of purgation resulted from its connotations with the death of Christ, the piercing and the drink (thirst) on the cross.

[49] This could also relate to their drinking excesses when they could drown in vats of liquor as they do in this tale. The drinking would of course take place in the king's hall or in the *bruiden*.

Violent versus peaceful death

This leads on to the question concerning the list of kings who died a violent death (*aided*) and those who did not. There is a contemporary genealogical text, a regnal list in the twelfth-century Rawlinson B. 502 manuscript, listing forty-five kings after the coming of Christianity.[50] Twenty-five of these are reported to have died a violent death, amongst whom we find Diarmait mac Cerbaill and Muirchertach mac Erca. The way of death recorded is burning, drowning and wounding. As pointed out by Charles-Edwards,[51] there was a normative problem concerning those kings who died by violence. Adomnán in his *Vita Columbae* said that it was idle to speak about them. In the period 590–650 the kings who died such a death were not recorded in the annals as kings of Tara, only those who died in their bed were. This affected two kings concerning us, Congal Cáech (+637) of whom Suibhne was an ally, and Congal's grandfather Fiachnae mac Báetáin (+626), who both died violent deaths and both were kings of Tara. What seems to happen in the three death-tales under consideration here is some kind of rehabilitation: the specific death is recycled as a 'purgation'—an *interpretatio Christiana*. This gives the traditional way of killing a new meaning in an explicitly Christian context, devised by the clerics who had taken over the scene, at least in the narrative. Could inglorious deaths, at least in the eyes of a Christian reformer, resulting from pugnacious conduct turn glorious if fought for a Christian cause, and become the kind of death required of a martyr? The king dying peacefully in his bed could never become a martyr.

Accordingly, a central motif of this story is the particular death awaiting Diarmait. From the very first transgression Ciarán forebodes that Diarmait is to suffer a so-called three-fold death. More to the fore of this analysis are the elements involved in his death: fire, liquid (beer) and iron, and the importance given to them by the clerics.

Banbán's bruiden

The critique in the tale may not be directed so much towards the royal seat—in spite of Ruadán's cursing of Tara, which was then laid waste—as it is towards the *bruiden* of Banbán as part of the king's ambience.

---

[50] Ó Cuív 1965, 1973–4; cf. *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*: 124–26.
[51] Charles Edwards 2000: 504–5.

It is after all the roof-tree which kills the King Diarmait when he is in the *bruiden*. However, it is not the roof-tree belonging to Banbán's *bruiden*, but the roof-tree originally of King Diarmait's own royal hall and re-used in Banbán's *bruiden* that kills Diarmait. This suggests the reading that Banbán and his *bruiden* represent the old sacral but pagan kingship of Tara. This implies a critique of Diarmait that he ought not to have been in Banbán's *bruiden* at Ráith Bec: that Diarmait like the roof-tree of his own house did not belong there; it is an improper place for him. It is in the opposite place—not in Ráith Bec but in Eglais Bec, Ciaran's church, that Diarmait should be—near the pole that can sustain his kingship. I think this ambiguity in the presentation of Diarmait we see concerning the *bruiden* is at the heart of the matter regarding the presentation of him in general.

Eighth-century laws, a seventh-century life and sixth-century king revisited

As mentioned earlier, the ignorance of the laws concerning monastic sanctuary and the violation of the guarantee given to persons seeking protection appear as the main transgressions on the king's part. This is a threat for a unity of Church and State, a unity very much at stake in the tale itself and at the time this tale was composed. Joan Radner points out that "sanctuary rights were a major issue in Church-State relations in Ireland in the eleventh century."[52] The tale propagates the union of king and cleric in mutual respect under the leadership of the Church. Ignorance of this on the king's part is intolerable not only for the Church but for the union itself which is crucial for holding society together. In the tale King Diarmait has a dream where two men approach him—one appears as a cleric, the other as a layman. They strip him of his royal crown or diadem ('*miond ríg*'), split it into two parts and depart each with his half. His prophet, Bec mac Dé and his poet, Cáiridh mac Fionnchaeimhe agree that the dream foretells[53] that 'your sovereignty ('*flaithes*') has come to an end and your kingship ('*ríghe*') is finished, so also your ruling grip of Eirinn: from now on there will be a division of Church and State ('*roinn etir chill ocus túaith*'). And that is what the division of your royal crown forebodes

[52] Radner 1983: 193.

[53] The interpretation of the dream is referred to as 'your dream's judgement' (breth th'aislingi') by the two learned men.

to us: the division of the sovereignty of Ireland ('*flaitheas Eireann*') between State and Church ('*etir thúaith ocus eglais*').'[54] The expression 'division of Church and State' ('*roinn etir chill ocus túaith*') matches what the early eighth-century law-tract, *Córus Béscnai*, states about the Church and the State being 'sewn together' ('*comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith*').[55] In this respect Church and State were closely linked in early Christian Ireland, just as elsewhere in Europe. In Ireland, the holding of positions like abbot, poet and king often within one family saw to this tight 'sewing'. For a tale propagating one king and one Church the choice of Diarmait was probably motivated by Columba's statement in Adomnán's *Life* about him, that Diarmait was king of all Ireland (cf. n. 60 below).

Another interesting feature of this tale is the stress on unity concerning the circumstances of Diarmait's *(three-fold)* death: ale from a single grain of corn, a shirt ('*léne*') of one flax-seed, a mantle ('*brat*') of the wool of s single sheep, and bacon from an un-farrowed pig. Does this investment *cum* meal resembling an inauguration display a unity that in itself is exemplary and rehearsed in conjunction with the king's and the cleric's hands on the pole in the church? Is it a similar unity but in a new clothing that is wished for in the tale's message? Is this early historic tableau meant to promote a view of royal and clerical rights as one and the same, neither of which should be challenged foolishly as they are in this tale? Do we observe an apology in the ambivalence with which the character of Diarmait is drawn? The outcome of the mutual cursing, not the least that of the clerics, is not what the tale seems to opt for which seems rather to be: the old union of king and cleric—State and Church which is now at stake. Furthermore, it may be a demonstration of how unstable the old inauguration is, as unstable as the roof-beam, compared to the consecration of a king provided by the Church.

Diarmait's descendants

We should note the tales about Diarmait's sons and their deaths: also his grandsons (Colmán and Suibhne) further demonstrate the downfall of the lineage after Diarmait. Both in the Annals and in the *Vita Columbae* by Adomnán from approximately 700 we hear of Áed Sláne,

[54] *Silva Gadelica*: 78–9.
[55] McCone 1990: 145.

Diarmait•s son, being warned by Columba to avoid kin-slaying which will deprive him of •the monarchy of God predestined for you by God.•[56] In this passage of the Life it is implied that Diarmait•s kingship of Tara comprised the whole of Ireland. But Áed is in our tale •predestined• to commit kin-slaying. Still in his mother•s womb Bec mac Dé prophesies that Áed Sláne will kill his nephew, Diarmait•s grandson, Suibhne mac Colmáin Móir„who is to be avenged by his son, Conall mac Suibhne. Of Diarmait•s descendants those who may have been kings of Tara held the kingship together with a brother until his grandsons Bláthmac and Diarmait died in the great plague.[57] Other tales tell of how other sons of Diarmait are killed (see above).

In the eleventh and ensuing centuries, however, the Church and the State were dri ing apart as a consequence of the Church reform to amend a long-lasting secularisation of the Church. In the tale, one looks to the early Christian centuries to comment on the situation of the present: a king not yet securely embedded in Christian tradition and still not quite familiar with Christian ethics and laws demonstrates well the importance of a close alliance of Church and State.

Embedded in the use of the genre, aided, there is a reference to the death-tales about the Ulster king Conchobar and his warriors. is connotes further a pre-Christian time when society was breaking down according to this group of tales. ere is further a reference to the bruiden-tales. is formal reference tallies with what in content appears as a residue of paganism„which should at the time of the composition of the tale rather be seen as an element of the immoral secular life led by the lay nobility.

Also a critique of earlier saints/clerics embedded in the critique of Diarmait is, however, to be discerned in the narrative, less explicit in the tale, than in hagiography concerning Diarmait. is goes back to

king of the west of the world', as she calls him. She repents then to Cairnech and dies of grief for the king. A grave is made for her. The story tells that Cairnech showed great care for the king's soul, but he did not manage to bring it immediately out of hell. Through his prayer composed for Muirchertach, however, Bishop Cairnech eventually managed to save the king's soul from hell.

A drop of blessing at the heart of the curse

The structure of opposition in this tale is confrontational and antinomic but also flexible to a degree. The movements of the king back and forth between his mistress and the clerics, his acting according to the ethics of both parties, reveal an ambiguity in the presentation of the royal character. It is not the king as such who is the subject of critique here, but a part of him—which is made clear by Sín, his mistress. She is the embodiment of the king's weakness or immorality. However, the narrative's ultimate forbearance towards the king is revealed at an early stage (par. 11), when Bishop Cairnech in his cursing of the fort leaves a small place which he blesses. With this, the bishop seems to leave a grain of hope amongst all his condemnation of the king and his rulership.

Compared to *Aided Diarmata* less of the dead body is destroyed in *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*, and the king remains closer to the clerics throughout the whole narrative. The strained relationship between the two parties in the first tale has improved somewhat in the second. A greater lenience on the Church's part towards the king succumbing to temptations is expressed when the bishop recognises Sín's beauty.

3. Buile Shuibne

In *Buile Shuibne* ('Suibhne's frenzy, vision'),[71] also a twelfth century tale, there is, at least initially, no hesitance in the critical attitude towards the king's conduct. The legendary Suibhne mac Colmáin Chuair, king of Dál nAraidhe goes mad during the battle of Magh Rath ('Moira') in

[71] *Buile Suibhne (The frenzy of Suibhne) being The Adventures of Suibhne Geilt* is edited and translated by O'Keeffe (1913) & without translation in Mediaeval And Modern Irish Series 1, (1975 (1931)). Much has been written on Suibhne during the second half of the last century, focusing first and foremost on the threefold death, Jackson (1940). Most recently Ní Mhaonaigh (2006) discusses the story as a product of the Church reform of the time.

AD 637. The story-line is much simpler than in the earlier two tales. Suibhne's frenzy results from a curse by the holy man Ronán Fionn as a revenge for Suibhne's aggression towards him. The holy man was marking out the site of a church called Cell Luinne in Dál nAraidhe. Suibhne hears the sound of Ronán's bell and finds out that Ronán was marking out a church on his territory (*crich*) and land (*ferann*) (par. 3). Enraged by the news Suibhne sets out in haste to drive the holy man away. His wife Eorann[72] tries to stop him by grabbing hold of a part of his cloak so that its fibula of silver springs off spinning through the house, and Suibhne runs naked to the place where Ronán was. In this scene, it appears Suibhne is not only stripped of his royal attire but also divested of his kingship.[73] The holy man was praising the Lord with his psalter in front of him when Suibhne reaches him. Suibhne grabs the psalter and throws it into the lake near by. Then he drags Ronán out of his church. Simultaneously a messenger from Congal Claon mac Scannláin utters a cry to call upon Suibhne to join Congal Claon or Cáech ('squinting' or 'half-blind') in battle at Magh Rath. Congal became king of Tara but lost his kingship when he was stung by a bee in his eye.[74] Suibhne was an ally of King Congal.

Suibhne goes with the messenger leaving Ronán disgraced and sorrowful for the loss of his psalter. Later in the day an otter brings the psalter back to Ronán in immaculate shape with not a single letter spoiled. Ronán praises God for the miracle and curses Suibhne that he shall always be naked flying around in the world and that he shall die by a spear-point, that the fate of the descendants of Colmán might be destruction and extinction.

Spear through holy water

Ronán comes to Magh Rath to make peace between the incumbent king of Tara,[75] Domhnall mac Aodha, and Congal Cáech. Ronán also guarantees that nobody would be killed from the time the battle ceased every day until it begun again the next day. Suibhne, however, does not respect this rule and violates the cleric's guarantee of protection

---

[72] In all the three tales the wives are trying to hold the kings back, and suffer from their misconduct.

[73] Suibhne's wife does the opposite of what Banbán's daughter does to Diarmait in the bruiden—the opposite of the sovereignty goddess?

[74] Charles-Edwards 2000: 494ff.

[75] Ibid.: 498.

(*cumairce*) (par. 7) by killing somebody every evening and before battle the next day. On the day of the big battle Suibhne arrives early in a wonderful tunic given to him by Congal for having killed Oilill Cedach king of the Uí Faolain. Suibhne meets Ronán together with eight psalmists who are sprinkling holy water on the hosts. When they sprinkle water on Suibhne he takes this as mockery and hurls his spear at one of the psalmists. Then he throws a dart at Ronán himself so that it pierces the bell on Ronán's breast and the shaft flies up in the air. After this Ronán prays to the Lord that Suibhne, like a bird, might go as high as the spear-shaft went up in the air and that the death he inflicted on Ronán's foster-child might kill him.

A king's throne and a yew-tree

When the battle is joined, the armies on both sides raise three mighty shouts that cause a terrible fear in Suibhne so that he starts trembling and the weapons fall from his hands. He flees like a bird hardly touching the ground and finally settles in a yew-tree. Later on he flees to another tree underneath which the victorious army of Domnall had encamped after the battle. Domnall recognises him and laments him. Off Suibhne flees again and ends up in Glen Bolcáin, in a place where 'the madmen used to dwell when their year of frenzy was over.' (*Ann nothaigtais gealta Eireann o robadh slán a mbliadhain ar gealtacht*—par. 17) [76] For seven years Suibhne wanders throughout Ireland before he returns to Glen Bolcáin. Loingseachán, either Suibhne's son or foster-brother, comes to capture him and bring him back home. Loingseachán tries three times. In the meantime Suibhne visits his wife, Eorann, who now lives with Guaire, another claimant to the kingdom. Suibhne reproaches her for enjoying the love of another man and the comfort of his house while he, her husband lives like an outlaw. She protests saying she would rather live with him in the wilderness than with any other man.

When Loingseachán succeeds in capturing Suibhne the latter regains his reason, but an old woman reminds him of his frenzy and thus makes him fly away again. Suibhne visits his wife again but would not enter the house. Since he does not want to live with her, she asks him

[76] Cf. the reference to madmen in Ireland who lose their wits in the infernal din of battle in the medieval Norwegian text *Konungs skuggsjá*.

to leave her for good, for she was ashamed that people should see him in his madness.

At the time when his reason comes back to Suibhne so that he wants to return to his people, this is revealed to St. Rónán who prays that Suibhne should not be allowed to return to take up his persecution of the Church. Suibhne is promptly frightened by a fearful sight of monsters and flees up into the trees again.

At the door of the church

Suibhne comes to the monastery of Moling who informs him that he would die there and be buried there. His time of penance has reached an end. Moling further exacts a pledge ("*naisgim-si fort*") from Suibhne to come visiting every evening so that he could write down his story.[77] Every evening Suibhne is given supper there by Moling's (female) cook. The cook would stamp her foot into the cow-dung up to the ankle and fill the hole thus made with new milk for Suibhne to lie down and lap up. The cook's husband, the herdsman Mongán, misinformed about the relationship grew jealous and he eventually slays Suibhne with a spear while he was lying down to drink his milk. Before his death Suibhne confesses his sins and receives the body of Christ and is anointed. A death swoon comes on Suibhne, and Moling and his clerics place a stone on Suibhne's tomb. When Suibhne rises from his swoon, Moling takes him by the hand and they go together to the door of the church ('co dorus na heglaisi'). Suibhne leanes against the doorpost and gives a loud sigh, and his spirit goes to Heaven, and he is buried with honour by Moling. One may see a parallel here to the dying at the door of the *bruiden* called 'drink of death'.[78] Here at the end of the story the situation from the beginning is reversed. Now it is the king stripped of his royal paraphernalia who is killed by one of the saint's men.

---

[77] This illustrates how the cleric now writes the king's story into the monastic canon, in a manner not unlike the way Ciarán implants a pagan king into Christian soil by founding a church. The king tale is becoming part of the saint's tale: 'for it is destined for you to be here and to end your life here and to leave your tales and adventures here and to be buried in a churchyard of the just' (*ar atá a ndán duit bheith annso 7 do shaogal do thecht ann,, do sgéala 7 th'imhtechta d'fhágbáil sunn 7 th'adhnacal I reilicc fíreóin*…par. 76).

[78] Cf. Nikoleva 2001 and Arbuthnot 2008.

In this tale the protagonist is not easily defined as a historical person, but since the battle of Magh Rath is dated to 637, also this third tale is about an allegedly quite early Christian king.

Buile Shuibhne *has in common* with *Aided Diarmata* and *Aided Muirchertaig* that it looks back at an early phase of Christian kingdoms. In this respect one could say that all three tales juxtapose early and modern. Similarly they juxtapose the secular with the Christian genre in that hagiography and its holy men are brought on stage together with the secular nobility without the narratives being tales about a saint. In earlier king tales the clergy had been virtually absent.[79]

While the two previous kings moved between their own royal sites and the monastic sites, Suibhne is driven out of this physical domain. When he sets out to banish Rónán from his ground, he leaves his house without his cloak—his royal vestment—and enters naked the place where Rónán is building a church. It is the opposite of the normal movements of a king, who is given his cloak at his inauguration.[80] Similarly Suibhne leaves his royal residence, and only visits it twice without however entering the house, remaining standing at the lintel ('*fordhorus*' pars. 31, 58). As to the opposing site of the royal hall, the church or monastic site, Suibhne does not get farther than the door to Moling's church when he is dying; he dies leaning his shoulders to the threshold, doorpost ('ursoinn'). Suibhne's space after being cursed and going mad at the opening of the battle is in trees in the wilderness. He is indoors only once during that whole period, and only because he is captured by Loingseachán. When the hag teases Suibhne he immedialtely leaps up and vanishes through the skylight of the *bruiden* ('*dar forlés na bruighniu*' par. 39).

Suibhne has abandoned his life as king completely. Eorann, his wife, now lives with Guaire mac Congail—the son of the Congal who fell at the battle of Magh Rath with and whose ally Suibhne was. Guaire is one of two who is entitled to the kingship (righe) given up by Suibhne, the tale informs us. When Suibhne first returns home, his wife Eorann says however, that she would go and live with him in the trees until feathers grow on their bodies. (par. 32) Since Eorann displays considerable restraint at the beginning of the story—her effort to stop

[79] Herbert 1997: 27–39, 28.

[80] See Conaire Mór arriving naked at the feast of Tara where he is invested in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*.

Suibhne from attacking Rónán—we may ask whether Eorann recognised that Suibhne's temper and lack of judgment had been replaced by the wisdom of the madman. This cleansing and transformation of Suibhne's is fully recognised by the wise monk Moling at the end of the tale.[81]

When Eorann asks Suibhne at the time of his second visit home not to come to her anymore since he does not want to remain anyway, she is arguing by references to his shape: 'we are ashamed that you are seen in that figure by people who have seen you in your own figure.' (*is nár linn t'fhaicsin fón deilbh sin dona dáoinibh atchonncatar thú fód dheilbh fé[i]n.*' par. 55)

King, saint and saintly madman

Suibhne abandoned his royal form and figure, his kingdom and his rulership and lives bereft of any kind of social relations. Soon he starts praising the ascetic life he endures in the wilderness like a hermit. At times he joins companies of other mad men. He also meets men who have become mad in a similar way as he himself. Finally, although without leaving the wilderness, he pays daily visits to the monastic site of Moling.[82] When Suibhne first arrives there Moling holds a psalter from which he is reciting to his student. The scene of Suibhne's first confrontation with a cleric is here repeated at the end of his life. In the dialogue between Moling and Suibhne it becomes clear that Suibhne has become a pious hermit who contrasts his ascetic life to that of Moling's and also prophecies his death by a herdsman of Moling's.[83] We recognise a personification of the ascetic movement in the Church (*Céili Dé*—God's clients).

One of Moling's monks refers to Suibhne in a verse as 'king, saint and saintly madman' ('an rígh, an [n]áomh, an náomhgheilt'). Does this mean that the only way for a king to become a saint is to go mad, that there is no way for a king to sainthood but through madness in the meaning of leading an ascetic life in solitude in the wilderness?

When referring to Diarmait's bodily remains as relics there were indications of an idea of a royal martyr; in the case of Suibhne, however, the idea emerges clearly in the abovementioned verse and in

[81] The wisdom of the madman, cf Nagy 1982, 1996.

[82] Moling is a seventh-century saint who appears to have a renaissance in the eleventh and twelfth century (Byrne 1973: 144; Kenney 1929: 61–3).

[83] There is a contemporary text called *Baile Moling* (Kenney 1929: 463).

St. Moling's praise of him in the last sequence of verses (par. 85). In many a saint's life the saint is of royal descent but he would have chosen the monastic life. This is not the case with Suibhne who is cursed into it, but turns out not only to accept it but eventually to prefer it. Moreover, Suibhne's is not a monastic life but the ascetic life of hermit—a life of penance.

Betwixt Congal in his falsehood and Domnall in his truth

Suibhne is as close we can come to the conception of a martyr king so frequent in English and Continental traditions, with which the Irish church had become familiar through the reforms of the eleventh and twelfth century. An old Irish Law tract about the battle of Magh Rath that lists three virtues: 'the defeat of Congal Cloen in his falsehood (sic) by Domnall in his truth (sic) and that Suibhne the madman became mad…'[84] Betwixt Congal in his falsehood and Domnall in his truth Suibhne goes mad. This can be seen as a third option. Suibhne fought for Congal—he was therefore on the wrong side but he is given a chance to repent. It is precisely all elements related to battle and fighting that drive Suibhne mad. He enters the woods as a pagan warrior and leaves them to be buried in a Christian graveyard. The woods and the hall or the *bruiden* have some common architectural features, and in the three tales both serve as a place of transformation.

4. *The historical connection between the three tales*

Diarmait mac Cerbaill (+ 565) was killed by Áed Dub mac Suibhne whom Diarmait had adopted as a fosterling after killing his father. Áed Dub (+588) was like his father a king of Dál nAraidi. Diarmait himself was succeeded by two brothers Forggus and Domnall mac Muirchertaig, sons of King Muirchertach (+536), Diarmait's predecessor but one. Diarmait had been defeated by them as part of alliance at the battle of Cúl Dreimne, two years previously. This battle may have been caused by Diarmait's attempt to remove these two cousins of his from the position of joint-heirs apparent.[85]

His mistress Sín makes Muirchertach believe by that Tuathál Maelgarb has come to avenge himself. It is Tuathál Maelgarb who succeeds Muirchertach and thus precedes Diarmait. The reason for

[84] Dillon 1948: 56, 64.
[85] Charles-Edwards 2000: 294.

Tuathál Maelgarb's revenge is unclear, but it appears that it is on behalf of his grandfather who fought and won the battle of Granard.[86] I have not been able to confirm this, but it may seem that Tuathál Maelgarb killed Muirchertach.

Suibhne mac Colmáin Chuair, the protagonist of the third tale, however fictional, is also presented as king of Dál nAraidi. From the fact that he was sent for to join the battle of Mag Rath in support of King Congal Cáech (+637), it seems that he would have been his client-king in the same way as Áed Dub was to Diarmait. Suibhne tells of his companionship with Congal in Mag Line where Diarmait's client-king Áed Dub ruled and Diarmait was killed. That the relationship between Suibhne and Congal was that of a client-ship is supported by what Suibhne relates about all the gifts Congal bestowed on him when Suibhne threatened to go to another 'master' (par. 51).

Suibhne was killed by Mongán, Moling's swineherd.[87] It must be permitted to speculate whether this narrative character of a swineherd bore some resemblance to the seventh-century Cruithni-king, Mongán mac Fiachnae, son of the God Manannán mac Lir—his terrestrial father would be Fiachnae mac Báetáin. Mongán's obit is 625 so he is close both in time and place to the other characters in the tale. Like his godly father Mongán is famous in the tradition for his ability of shape-shifting. The swineherd was also known for the same ability.[88] In his stories Mongán is further associated with adultery and wife-swapping.[89] His father, Fiachnae, who survived him, succeeded Áed Dub as king of Dál nAraidi (588–626) and king of Tara. So Mongán would have been an heir-apparent to that kingship removed by his nephew Congal Claen.[90] In the tale Mongán kills Suibhne because he is made to believe that Suibhne commits adultery with his wife, but Mongán's enmity would also have had other reasons since Suibhne was Congal's ally.

This short overview shows that these three tales make up a cycle recounting northern events closely related also regarding the dating for the two first tales, and if not for the dating then at least concerning place and royal line for the third. The three tales can be read as a

---

[86] Ibid. 447 ff., 450–51.

[87] I am well aware that this herdsman in earlier material of the story was called Grác, cf. Stokes (1908), Carney (1955: 138–42), Ó Cathasaigh (1994: 64–57).

[88] Ní Chatháin 1979–80: 200–211.

[89] Ó hÓgáin, 1991: 301–3.

[90] Ibid. 499–500; Byrne 1973: 112.

serial where similar motifs are developed, like the clerical presence in the royal arena and the cleric's role as a castigator-turned-mediator in the last tale.

5. *The king: warrior and guest in the* bruiden

The warrior

In all three tales the most conspicuous feature in the portrayal of the king is the feature of the defender, the warrior and champion. Diarmait is easily vexed and acts towards the abbots as if they were enemies in a battlefield. This recalls the pugnacious behaviour of the Ulster tales about the pre-historic warrior-champions.

The imagery of war and references to warriors reveal features of the warrior culture and ethos that were still an intrinsic part of rulership viewed with disdain by the clerics as long as they were not in command of it. When Diarmait's prophet Bec mac Dé describes Áed Dub who is going to kill Diarmait, he uses an imagery or vocabulary for the old pagan warrior of which the main metaphor was 'hound', *cú*. Further, when Diarmait fights against Saint Colum Cille his wizard ('*drái*') makes a magic barrier between the two which is overcome by what Colum Cille refers to as '*féine dreamain*'.[91] It is tempting to say that odd references to the warrior and warrior-bands lurk in the text much in the same way as they would in contemporary society. 'Old' warriors are described as entering the tales and societies as 'foreign' elements not actually pertaining to it.

So also Muirchertach is described as fighting and defending himself and his fort. Each incident during which Muirchertach acts as warrior is conjured up by his evil mistress, and in reality these occurrences are conceits and Muirchertach's enemies fake.

Suibhne is also acting on behalf of his territory when he tries to chase Rónán from his land. The act is of course a misjudgement on Suibhne's part as Rónán is not an ordinary foreign occupier but a peaceful soldier of Christ. The inadequacy of Suibhne defending against being sprinkled with consecrated water is strongly underlined in the narrative. Simultaneously we hear of Suibhne going to battle in support of his ally, king Congal Cáech—a central part of a king's duties.

[91] Restored by O'Grady (p. 85) to '*féinnidh dremain*' (furious warrior). Note the female warrior referred to initially in the tale.

It is exactly as he is entering the battle-filed that Suibhne experiences his fright or frenzy. We shall remember that *baile* means 'vision' and 'madness resulting of a supernatural revelation' (DIL: baile). What is it that Suibhne has a vision of? He has a vision of his life at a distance. The battle cries[92] of the warriors displace his mind to such a degree that he perceives his life from without. It is when Suibhne hears these cries and their reverberation 'in the clouds of heaven and in the vault of the firmament' (*i nellaibh nimhe 7 i fraighthibh na firmaminnte*) that he is filled with frenzy, flight, unsteadiness, and 'hatred for the very place he used to be in and love for every place he had not been to' (*miosgais gac ionaidh ina mbíodh 7 serc gach ionaidh noco roichedh*' par. 11). Of all the bodily reactions he has, his sight is also distorted ('*rosaobhadh a radharc*'). Does his reaction tally with a Christian perspective on battle—something from which the clerics wanted to dissociate themselves? Does this shock represent the point of departure on Suibhne's way to a mental transformation?

When Suibhne initially arrives on the battle-field on the day fixed for the great battle, he is clad and armed in the most prestigious way (par. 7–8), as opposed to the previous day when he confronted the cleric naked. He has resumed his warrior stature. Rónán's curse however, removes his royal attributes as well as his weapons. Suibhne's first meeting with the cleric, naked, serves as an overture to the following episode. The king looses control of his kingdom when he shuts out the representative of the Church. Disobedience leads to disaster and ruin. It is only in unison with the Church that he can manage to rule. Repentance and penance can on the other hand save the soul of the disobedient king, even make him holy.

Nowhere in the three tales are warfare and madness more closely interlinked than in this last one about Suibhne. Ultimately it is madness that leads to redemption, but initially what Suibhne experiences is mere craziness.

When warrior-like conduct occurs inappropriately and dislocated in the tale as in the initial scenes in *Buile Shuibne* and throughout

[92] The cries of the army are compared to those of herds of stags ('*amail dámha damhghoire*' par. 11) It is difficult to decide whether it is significant that the tale reports that some claim that it was a horn of a deer ('*congna fiadha*') that penetrated Suibhne and not the swineherd's spear (cf. par. 79). The association of the battle cries with a herd of stags or deer and a deer-horn killing him could be seen in connection with a traditional king hunting a deer or stag, but never being hunted by it.

Aided Diarmata and *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*, it is in some way linked to the *bruiden*.[93]

When Bec mac Dé prophesies for Diarmait and Áed Dub that the latter is the future murderer of King Diarmait, he begins by saying: 'I see the fierce (hound-like) warrior (hound) that shall destroy the unique *síd*.' ('*atchiusa in coin conamail loitfios in síd sainemail*' p. 75) Síd is the common word for the otherworld but also means 'peace.' The king has just before been praised for his peace ('*a shídh*') and good manners. Now, the author plays on the positive meaning of the word *síd* in the mouth of a pagan (at least still so at this stage of the narrative) prophet and on how a warrior may end the síd.[94] Áed Dub is of course to stab the king from without Banbán's bruiden when the king tries to get out in order to escape the roof-tree.

The bruiden

Frequently the narrative form of the critique refers to the guest-house called *bruiden* which is often closely related to the king and which seems also to have overlapped with the king's own guest-house—at least in our stories we find such overlapping (*tig n-oiged*).[95] This is conspicuously so in the tales carrying the term in their title, like *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. This guesthouse (*bruiden*) also plays an intrinsic part in the severe royal critique in *Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill* and *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*, if less so in *Buile Shuibhne*. I see this as part of a tendency of this period to recycle old themes and motifs.[96]

The bruiden appears to carry several connotations to pagan culture and belief (cf. also the building at Emain Macha as it has been discerned by archaeological excavation).[97] We hear of five or six *bruidne* in the literature. They seem to belong very much to tales grouped together as the Ulster cycle—tales describing champions and their warrior-milieu (*Mesca Ulad*, *Scéla Muicce Mac Dathó*, *Fled Bricrenn* etc.). In the Middle-Irish tale *Scéla Mucce Meicc Da Thó* we hear that

[93] The *bruiden* is not mentioned in relation to Suibhne's misconduct as he flees from his home early in the narrative.

[94] Interestingly it was Áed Dub who was to be regarded as the bad man in early Irish tradition. In Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, Áed Dub is strictly condemned as the murderer of Diarmait, a king 'ordained by God's will'.

[95] The relationship between *bruiden* and *tig n-oiged* shall be discussed below.

[96] Cf. Herbert 2007.

[97] Charles-Edwards 2000: 147.

there are five *bruidne* in Ireland at the time of the narrative: the *bruiden* of Macc Da Tó himself in Leinster, Da Derga's in Cúalu, the *bruidne* of Forgall Manach and of Mac Da Réo i Bréifne, and that of Da Choca in Mide.[98] The *bruiden* of Blaí—*Bruiden Blai Briuga*—is not mentioned here, but is the sixth one known. It is generally held that *bruiden* is part of the otherworld—the *síd*. I will suggest that it was made part of the otherworld as it was associated with or made synonymous with pagan belief and cult combined with feasting and drinking. A *bruiden* run by a hospitaller and a banqueting hall or the king's hall do not seem to be easily distinguishable. I take this as the reason for these particular buildings—represented first and foremost with the *bruiden*—becoming central in the critique of a king.[99] I therefore place these buildings in the same category as the king's halls we know from other traditions, such as *Beowulf* and the Norse sagas. The relation between a king's hall and a *bruiden* run by a hospitaller emerges clearly in *Aided Diarmata* where the roof-beam the king has thrown out of his own building is picked up and used for a *bruiden* by the hospitaller Banbán in Ráith Bec.

The roof-beam versus the house-post

In the king tales the roof-beam (*cléithe*) appears as a synecdoche for the king's hall and for the *bruiden*, if they are to be kept apart. Especially in the first tale about Diarmait mac Cerbaill the focus on the semantic relation between the house-post, 'pole' (*cleth*)[100] and the 'roof-beam' (*cléithe*)[101] and their metonymic connotations to a church and a *bruiden* respectively are striking. Accordingly architectonic construction is a motif from the beginning. Another motif emerges from the use of both words as metaphors for 'chief' and 'chieftain'. The impression we get from Diarmait's first meeting with Ciarán building a church, that the

---

[98] *Ro-ferad fáilte friu huili, ocus ructha cuci-sium isin mbruidin.Is {s}í sin in chóiced bruden ro- boí i nHérinn isind aimsir sin, ocus bruden Da-Derg i crích Cúalann ocus bruden Forgaill Manaich ocus bruden Me[i]c Da-Réo i mBréfni ocus bruden Da-Choca i níarthur Midi.*

[99] Cf. Mac Eoin (1997, 1999) and Mc Cone (1984).

[100] Another word for 'house-post' is *clí*, like *cleth* it is also used metaphorically of persons (Watkins 1978: 155–6).

[101] In the tale we shall observe that for *cléithe, féice* is used alternatively as a synonym (p. 75, ('féicc') and p. 82). The word was also used for the opening for light in the roof, cf. *Sanas Cormaic*, nr. 664: '*Féici quasi fíghe, íarsindí imfuilnges soillsi dond tegh*' along which light is permitted to the house'.

king seems to be unfamiliar with a church building, could have something to do with its new and different construction compared to the building constructions Diarmait would be used to: those of a traditional kind belonging to an old pre-historic tradition, like that of the *bruiden*. It is, however, to be noted that Ciarán's pole is planted upright. A similar scene, purported to be the same, is depicted on a panel of the Cross of the Scriptures from 901 situated in Ciarán's monastic settlement of Clonmacnois.[102] Thus, the *cleth* represents a central, if not the main axis of a building construction.[103] I will show later that the difference of position of the pole and of the roof-beam is significant as they stand in antonymic relation to each other in the tale. The *cleth* is further mentioned in the laws, being planted as a sign of claim to ownership of land.[104] I hold it that when Ciarán asks Diarmait to put his hand to the house-post, this indicates that the land where he is erecting his church should be considered an inheritance shared by the two of them. Of this land, Diarmait shall be the secular ruler if he acknowledges Ciarán as the religious ruler.

The related word *cléithe*,[105] however, is a word which occurs in connection with a guest-house, banqueting-hall or hostel. The *bruiden* is

---

[102] Byrne 1973: 91.

[103] Note that *clí*, which also means 'house-post, pillar', acc. to DIL is indeclinable. In O'Davoran's glossary it is equated with *cleth*, p. 620. It occurs in the Würzburg-gloss, 33a5: *is clí darach moysi (i)sintegdais*: "Moses is an oaken pillar in the house" (A Lexicon: clí), cf. also *Fel. Oeng.* p. 310 where it is translated with 'king-post.' 'King-post' is explained as "an upright post in the centre of a roof-truss, extending from the ridge to the tie-beam" in *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, cf. 'king'. Explained also in *Sanas Cormaic*, nr. 275: *'Is bésad na cleithe, is balc oc lár, is aol oc cléithe, is díriuch doeim doeamhair.*' 'The manner of the *clí* is firm at the ground and slender at the roof-beam, it is straight…'. From this explanation of Cormac's it becomes clear that *clí* is indeed equated with *cleth*. Another remark by Cormac in which he explains why also this word may be used figuratively for an *'airechas in grádha*' ("status of the grade"), makes it even clearer: *amail atcumaic in clí isin tegdais ó lár co cléithi* sic *dano adcomaic airechas in grádha so dianad ainm clí ó ánRáith co fochlagáin*: 'the way the post in the house extends from the ground to the ridgepole, sic the status of this grade for which the name is *clí* extends from *ánRáith* to *fochlagán*.' According to Charles-Edwards (2000: 131) *ánruth* is the second highest rank—following *ollam* whereas *clí* is the third; *fochloc* is the seventh from above—the lowest. Watkins claims that the word *clí* meaning 'poet' is a distinct word from the other *clí* 'house-post' as the former is masculine declinable (1978: 155).

[104] Kelly 1978: 29 and 1998: 2 fn. 9, 104.

[105] Note the long vowel as opposed to the short of *cleith*—but this long vowel is not guaranteed by rhyme, cf. DIL. Both words have the figurative meaning of 'chief, head'—*cleith* mostly 'chief warrior'. If that word was mostly used figuratively in the meaning of 'chief warrior' it makes sense that it is the king as 'chief warrior' who destroys the king as just ruler and peacemaker.

a building which plays a central part in the heroic tradition as the place where feasts used to take place. We recognise it from Ulster-tales such as 'The Tale of Mac Da Thó's pig' (*Scéla Muicce Mac Da Thó*), 'The intoxication of the Ulstermen' (*Mesca* Ulad) and of course, 'The destruction of Da Derga's hostel' (*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*) and others. While therefore the *bruiden* does, the *cléithe* alone does not seem to play any significant part in these Ulster-tales, but it is mentioned as an element pertaining to the hostel. I will further claim that it works as a synecdoche for the whole building of *bruiden* and serves as a 'memory stick' not only for the building but for everything associated with it. In the same manner it also means 'house' as we know it from the word *sen-chléithe* meaning an 'ancient house' which was also a legal term when used metaphorically about a 'hereditary serf, serf bound to the land'—a person who is not a slave, but bound to his lord, and who has to go with the land if it is acquired by a new owner.[106]

In the examples I have found, the 'cléithe' stands for the ridgepole or roof-beam—a pole in a vertical position under the roof as the samples show. It occurs frequently in the expression 'from roof to floor' where we see it also taking on the meaning 'roof' ('*ó cléithib co talmandae*' l. 824–5 in TBBD). This example is taken from the description given of the *Bruiden Da Derga* in the tale of that name. In the tale *Mesca Ulad* ('The Intoxication of the Ulstermen'), Cú Chulainn leaps from the ridgepole of one house to that of another to get the Ulster-men out of the triple guest-house in which they are trapped to be burned ('*a chléithe n-óchtarach din tig co mboí for cléthiu in tigi aile*.' ll. 953–954).

A common theme in many of these heroic tales is how the feast turns out to be a way of killing the invited party collectively by burning the house down upon them. This is the purpose behind the invitation in several stories, such as *Mesca Ulad* above and *Orgain Denna Ríg* ('*The Destruction of the Dinn Ríg*'). We know the battle and destruction taking place inside or outside the *bruiden* also from *Scéla Muicce Mac Da Thó* and even more dramatically, from *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. The examples suffice to postulate that the *bruiden* is synonymous with excessive drinking, fire and killing. Interestingly, in later Middle Irish the word by then mostly spelt *bruighen* has then taken on the meaning of 'fight, contest, quarrel' (DIL)—exactly what used to take place in the

[106] *Críth Gablach*: 105; Kelly 1988: 35–36.

building; it is thus no longer referring to the building itself. The word had by that time gone through a semantic shift from 'banqueting-hall' via 'scene for fighting' to the 'fight' itself. The kind of *bruiden* depicted in the tales referred to, appears already to have come a good way in the process of the semantic shift from 'banqueting-hall' to 'a scene of fighting'.

It is time to ask why this particular house was chosen as a battle-scene? Of course, these houses represented a place where customs and conduct according to rank and order were at stake—so much part of the ideology of kingship. The slightest disorder of seating could easily cause jealousy, contention, fighting and disaster—as is demonstrated in the tale, *Fled Dúin na nGéd* ('The Feast of the Fort of the Geese').

Bruiden—*a place for pagan cult*

I propose that the banqueting-hall—the *bruiden*—once also represented a place for pagan cult. We know from Norse narratives how banqueting halls combined drinking and the celebration of Óðinn. So much part of the Indo-European tradition, why should they not have had a similar function, combining drinking and feasting, in prehistoric Ireland? This may explain why the houses are depicted negatively in texts produced in an entirely Christian setting. I advance the hypothesis that the *bruiden* was the building the church was meant to replace. In both cases, the building and the cult would be closely interwoven.

The banqueting halls or hostels are often erected for a specific occasion. In *Mesca Ulad* and in *Fled Bricrenn* (Bricriu's feast) we hear that the construction of the hall starts as part of the preparations for the feast, after the guests are invited. They were probably wattle-and-daub houses—involving the word *cliath*,[107] maybe similar to that which was built for Henry II during his visit to Dublin in 1172–3.[108] These houses may have been different from the *bruiden* which appears as a well established institution with a hospitaller—a *briugu* who was a member of the aristocracy.[109] In legal texts the *briugu* is a rich landowner

[107] *Cliath* 'wattle' is yet another word which together with the others forms a cluster of closely related words referring to traditional building-techniques.

[108] Byrne 1973: 57.

[109] Cf two articles by Mac Eoin (1997, 1999). It is worth underlining that in *Aided Diarmata* King Diarmait notices that the Banbán's *bruiden* is all new except for the *cléithe* which is old. Does this indicate that the *bruiden* was erected on the occasion of Diarmait's visit?

with a public function of dispensing unlimited hospitality to all persons in his hostel, which must be in an accessible position. For this he is given the same honour-price as the king of a *túath.*[110] The tract *Uraicecht Bec* gives the *briugu* the same grade as the *flaith* or a ruling noble if he has twice the qualifying wealth of the noble's grade (Laws v 76.1).[111] Further, every *briugu* must have roads to his house ('*cach briuga ramatach*' Comm. iii. 112.12). We read in TBDD that his house should be central: in that tale the road goes through the house (ll. 280–81). Further I have noticed that *bruidne* also seem to be situated close to water-ways, like Da Derga's *bruiden* through which the Dodder (*Dothra*) river (ll. 1434–5) flowed and others obviously close to the river Boyne.

In Muirchertach's story the word *bruiden* does not occur, but the House of Cletech where he resides was run by a *briughu*—hospitaller called Spelán—whom we recognise from another tale about the pre-Christian king Cormac mac Airt. When Sín, King Muirchertach's mistress, makes him invite guests for a feast it is specified that this is to a drinking hall (*tech n-óil*, par. 7), which I take to be a building part of the Cletech if not the Cletech itself. It is unclear whether Cletech was a site, a house or a personal name—usually it is referred to as 'the house *of* Cletech' which may point to a place- or personal name. It could, however, also be the name of a remarkable house. In *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca* Spelán's house is described as 'the trophied house of Cletech' *tech comrumach*[112] (par. 5).

In the Rennes *Dindshenchas*[113] the name *Cleitech* (sic) is explained in three ways: 'named after a druid who lived and was buried there, or, because it was the top (cleith—'chief') of the houses of Ireland which was situated there—the house which was burnt on Muirchertach mac Erca, or, because of the death of Cormac Mac Airt Uí Cuind in whose throat a salmon's bone stuck.'

In the tale[114] referred to here, Cletech is juxtaposed as a royal site in line with other royal sites known in Ireland. Our tale claims that the house of Cletech (also, Cle(i)tech/Cle(i)ttech) is better than any other

[110] Cf. the Old-Irish law, Críth Gablach. p. 79.
[111] Kelly 1998: 36–8.
[112] The same adjective is used for Ciarán's church l. 4210: *it cill comhramhaigh* in *Lives of Saints,* ed. Stokes.
[113] *Revue Celtique* XVI (1895), 65–66.
[114] Ó Cathasaigh 1977: 69.

house built for all the royal sites—for Tara, Nás, Craeb ruaid (Emain), Emain Macha, Ailech Neit (Inishowen) or for Cleitech. I take *cletech* to be a compound of *cleth* and *tech* (cle(i)th-t(h)ech: 'house-post house'—the meaning of which once signified that it was constructed by means of a *cleth*. It would thus have been coined in the same way as *dair-thech* 'an oaken house' and *cloig-thech*—'a bell-house'. Then that meaning was forgotten and house (*tech*) is added to it: tech *cletig*.

Church vs bruiden

In the tale of Diarmait but also in that of Muirchertach the church emerges as the antonym of *bruiden*. In the latter tale the constant movements between the house of Cleitech and the church in Tuilén where the bishop resides contribute to establish a trajectory line between the two sites on which the king and the bishop move back and forth, whereas the mistress and the wife stay put each on her own side. The site of the *bruiden* and that of the church appear as of equivalent importance, although of a secular versus an ecclesiastical kind which should not in itself imply the antagonism by which the relationship is marked in the tale. The clerics try to talk King Muirchertach out of his transgression with his mistress who has made him abandon his wife and family who now live under the protection of the bishop.

Even in the earlier ninth-century tale about the destruction of Da Derga's *bruiden* in which the setting is pre-Christian a juxtaposition of church and *bruiden* occurs, although not on the narrative level but in a metaphor with which the fire kindled by Conaire in the *bruiden* is compared with 'a burning oratory' (*daig ndairthaigi*, l. 586).[115] It is tempting to suggest that this metaphor is the result of a slip of the tongue—the Christian setting of the scribe slips in because of his experiences with the burning of churches by the Vikings or by the Irish themselves. The juxtaposition may reflect an association and conception of *eclais* ('church') as the antonym of *bruiden* ('hall').

The roof-beam is an important part of the construction of an edifice. In the tales dealt with here the *bruiden* is burnt down upon both kings. In the case of Muirchertach it is the mistress who sets the hall on

[115] 'Each night Conaire kindled a huge fire, a boar in the forest. Seven outlets it had, and when a log was taken from its side, the extent of the flames at each outlet was that of a burning oratory.' (Gantz: p. 77). '*Secht ndorais as. In tan don-iscide crand assa thaíb ba méit daig ndairt(h)aigi cach tob no théiged for cach ndorus*', Knott: par. 65.

fire by scattering fire throughout the house and the sidewalls (par. 38: '*…fon tech is fona fraightibh*').[116] In the case of Diarmait it is his old roof-beam which falls down on his head. Through prophesies he is repeatedly warned against his roof-beam that will kill him. To avoid this he has it thrown out of his house. On his visit to Banbán's hostel, however, as discussed above, King Diarmait notices that the house is new ('*nua*' sic) except for the roof-beam, and mentions this to his host who confirms it. Once when his host had been fishing he had picked up the roof-beam that came floating towards him and had, for the curiosity of it, made a house with it ("*dorónad liumsa ar a ingantus tech de*" p. 81). When Diarmait recognises his own roof-beam it is too late for escape.

In the tale of the death of Diarmait I would claim that the *cleithe*—the roof-beam—works or reads as a memory-stick. It is certainly a synecdoche for the *bruiden*, and the *bruiden* is the physical representation of paganism. *Cléithe* and the *bruiden* are associated with the old pagan lifestyle and beliefs. The juxtaposition established by the narrative between the two kinds of buildings, by introducing the church at the opening and Banbán's *bruiden* at the end of the tale, underlines further the opposition between them. Banbán has built a new house into which he has implanted the roof-beam of the king's house which the king had tried to abandon. This house has its parallel in another new house or house in the process of being raised: Ciarán's church at the opening of the tale. Cirarán makes use of a *cleth* while Banbán uses an old *cléithe*—one upright, the other horizontal. Even a new house cannot keep the old roof-beam from falling down—because the ideology and belief supporting it are decaying and lack strength. In the cultural memory based on which the tale about King Diarmait's death was composed the *cléithe* was a reminder or a memory-stick not only for the building called *bruiden* (and the old 'chief warrior') but for the pagan cult and culture which the *bruiden* stood for—now replaced by the church. When king Diarmait comes on his visit to the *bruiden* he is given a shirt woven of a single flax-seed, a mantle of a single sheep, ale brewed from a single grain of corn and bacon of an unborn pig. The one who bestows the clothes to him and serves him

[116] Fraightaib 'side-walls'—*fraig* about interior walls of a house—is used in all the heroic sagas.

is Banbán's daughter with whom he also sleeps. The investment, the meal and the intercourse bear comparison with the *feis Temro*—'the fest of Tara'—the 'sacred marriage' *hieros gamos*. Both the clothes and what he is served are symbols of singularity and uniqueness befitting a sovereign, but also of unity and of wholeness—of things not divided: wool from one sheep, bacon of an unborn piglet, shirt from one seed, and ale of a single grain of an unknown cereal found in a ringdove (*ferán eighinn*: 'a little man of ivy') which Banbán had killed. Seen against the royal diadem that is being divided in Diarmait's dream nothing has been divided to produce the products given to him in Banbán's house. Although nothing is mentioned in our tale how the shirt or the mantle was woven, the quality of wholeness and singleness recalls the quality of the mantle of Jesus woven as one piece for which the soldiers cast lots and did not divide for fear of tearing it apart (John 19: 23,24). This seamless garment was to symbolise the ideal of an undivided Church.

The tightness expressed by the early law using the metaphor of sewing recalls the vestments he gets from Banbán's daughter. It may be argued on the basis of the quality of the gifts and the meal that they were meant exactly and only for a ruler but should, according to the message of the tale, have been received in a different environment and a different building, proper to a Christian ruler: the Church. The symbol of unity between church and state was clearly expressed at the opening of the tale by the hands of the king and the abbot above each other on the same pillar of the church. The hands of the leading ecclesiastic and of the lay ruler rested on the same pillar—the pillar (*cleth*) of the church and not of the *bruiden* (for which a *cleth* is never mentioned, only the *cléithe*). King Diarmait ought to be inaugurated in unison with the authority of the Church and not according to that of the *bruiden* which is falling asunder in decay like its ridgepole. The episode of the *bruiden* tells us that the narrator obviously based his tale on the belief that Diarmait was the last king celebrating the feast of Tara. But he also puts his hand on the pillar of Ciarán's church. So the tradition about him as a Christian ruler and the last ruler to celebrate the feast of Tara is indeed manifest in the tale.

The story relates that Diarmait's body was all consumed by the flames but that his body nevertheless was buried in two places, according to a Clonmacnois tradition (*Annals of Tigernach* 564). His head was taken to Clonmacnois, to rest there at Ciarán's monastic site. What was left

of his body was interred in Connor (Coindire) not far from Mag Line where he was killed by his client-king Áed Dub.

The head

Thus also in death King Diarmait is split between different places and interests. The reason that the monastery of Clonmacnois stressed their possession of Diarmait's head is based on the belief that 'where the head has been placed, there all the limbs will be brought together'. ('*Ubi enim caput fuerit, illic omnia membra congregabuntur*' in *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, xlix. 10). As Charles-Edwards points out 'the place of resurrection' would often be the final resting-place of the head.[117] This claim implies that it was held among the monks of Clonmacnois, St. Ciarán's followers, that the unity which king Diarmait never obtained in life he would finally have when he was resurrected—a resurrection that would take place in their midst in the monastic centre.

King Diarmait is the king who in Irish tradition incarnates the religious transformation from paganism to Christianity. He celebrates the feast of Tara and he puts his hand together with Ciarán's on the pillar of the church. Considering that the words *cléithe, cleth* and *clí* all share the figurative meaning of 'chief', 'champion' and 'head', the ridgepole is a symbol of the king as the axis of religious transformation. Simultaneously with the ridgepole falling down the king is destroyed. In this we see a juxtaposition of the old roof-beam (senchléithe) and the king of old belief. The king who adheres to the old pagan belief becomes a *senchléithe* metaphorically: a serf bound to pagan land and not a Christian king on Christian land blessed by the Church. The *bruiden*, however, is never to be repaired whereas the king will be: in his resurrection. In the meantime he (his head) will rest in the sanctuary of Clonmacnois—the very sanctuary he violated.

At the very end of the narrative and not pertaining to the story proper it is said that Diarmait 'chose himself to be buried there when he fasted in the little church by which he was healed from a head-suffering after he had fastened against the saints of Ireland and after his cure had been denied him until then'. (*…is ann ro thogh féin a adnacal in tan do throiscc i neglais bicc dia ro híccadh do'n chenngalur iar fertain a throsci fri noemaib Erenn ocus iar néimded a icca co*

[117] Charles-Edwards 2000: 527, n. 22.

riacht sin.' p. 82) There exists a late tale of its own about Diarmait's head-suffering.[118] Here we are told that the pain was bothering him to such an extent that he failed to rule and to judge the men of Ireland. When he turned to the saint of Ireland for help he received none, except for Colum Cille's advice to go to Clonmacnois where he has his spiritual alliance (*anmchairtine*), and to fast there and put some of the earth from Ciarán's grave on his head. Diarmait asks the monks of Clonmacnois to bring whatever is left of his body after his death to rest for a night in the little church and to be buried in the graveyard. It is obvious that the tale is later than our tale as it hints to the fact that only Diarmait's head is left of him after the fire in the *bruiden*. I read this tale also as underlining the effect of the cleansing which the head undergoes. Does it not convey to us between the lines that if Diarmait had had his whole body smeared with earth from Ciarán's grave it would probably not have been affected by the spear or the flames?

Death in liquid—a kind of baptism

This focus on the head of the dead king occurs also in the tale about the legendary King Conaire in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* ('The Destruction of Da Derga's hostel' cf. discussion above). The druids of the warrior-bands inflicted a thirst on him (*ro-luige digi*, par. 144 'a great weakness for drink'). But all the drink has been used to extinguish the fire of the *bruiden*. Conaire's chief champion Mac Cécht goes to search for water but all the nearby rivers are made dry by the same druids. When he finally returns he sees the enemy cutting off Conaire's head. He pours water into Conaire's mouth and Conaire utters a verse: 'Good man, Mac Cécht, (…) he brings drink to a king, he does a deed of valour'. This drink of water by the 'entrance of the bruiden' recalls the drink of death (blood) at the same place but has a positive quality.

Mac Cécht not only catches water he also protects Conaire's son by carrying him under his arm while searching for water. Thus he secures the royal succession and one could say that by doing so he saves Conaire's kingship. The parallel to the clerics taking care of Diarmait's head and Muirchertach's body becomes clear. These kings also try to quench a thirst by throwing themselves into vats of beer and

[118] From *Brussels* MS 5057–5059 published and translated by Grosjean 1951: 96–102.

wine. Moling's cook in Suibhne's tale also gives to a king his drink—milk served in a cow-dung.[119]

No bruiden *and beer—only monastery and milk*

In Suibhne's case there is no fort where there could be a *bruiden* or a drinking hall (*tech n-óil*), as he is driven from his fort and kingship through his madness almost from the beginning of the tale. Both a *bruiden* and a drinking hall are nevertheless mentioned in the story as being part of his life as king (par. 35). Indirectly the *bruiden* comes up when Loingseachán fools Suibhne down from his yew-tree and contrasts his present life similar to that of bird with the life he used to live '…without food, without drink, without clothes like any birds of the air after having been in garments of silk and satin…with you were women gentle and comely…many and diverse nobles and chiefs, and young lords, and landholder and hospitallers were at your command.' (*gan bhádh, gan digh, gan edach amail gach n-ethaid n-áerdha, ier mbeith a n-éttaighibh sroldae sireghda…7 mná málla maisecha let…iomdha iolarrdha d'urradhuibh 7 do tháoisechuibh 7 d'óigthighernaidhibh, do bhrughadhuibh 7 do bhiatachaibh dot réir.*' (My underlining).[120]

---

[119] The theme of drinking and thirst becomes part of an imagery which I think permeates the tales. The drink of death being served at the door of the *bruiden* is a metaphor for blood since it refers to the slaughter that takes place at the *bruiden*. The burning of the *bruiden* works as some kind of repercussion of the heat and passion (*bruth* and *gal*) of the warrior—both martial virtues. The thirst comes as a second repercussion hitting the warrior himself (inflicted on Conaire by a druid)—the fierceness of the warrior hits back on the warrior himself, for which there is no remedy. Are the water served to Conaire by his chief champion and protector and the vats for the two kings trapped in the burning halls some kind of second inauguration turned into baptism? In Conaire's case there is no salvation—but it may still be read as a kind of second inauguration where he is served a drink—not by the cupbearers or sovereignty goddess but by his protector. Mac Cécht answers when asked the first time for a drink: 'You shall be safe from them, and not a spear will pierce your body. Seek the drink from your servers and your cupbearers.' ('*Raga slán úadib ocus ní raga gaí it chorp. Cuindig dig cod dáilemnaib ocus cod deogbairib*' par. 145, l. 1428–1429) This could suggest a reading of the pre-historic king's death as an allegory of salvation. I hope to come back to this at a later occasion. When Suibhne is served milk it is because he has gone through a cleansing by his ascetic life in the wilderness—he is half way to the promised land of 'milk and honey.'

[120] The contrast to his drinking milk from a hole in cow-dung becomes stark when we consider what Loingseachán says further: 'Many cups and goblets and carved buffalo horns for pleasant-flavoured and enjoyable liquors were yours also.' (*Iomad cúach 7 copán 7 benn mbreacagair mbúabhaill im lennuibh somblasda so-óla let bhéos*. Par. 35).

Also Suibhne's wife shows her familiarity with the *bruiden* when she says at their first meeting after Suibhne has gone mad that she would rather live with Suibhne in a hollow tree than go with a king's son to 'drinking halls' (do thoigibh oil' par. 32). Suibhne's kingdom has become the equivalent of the wilderness or wasteland where the king now lives; the hall is paralleled by a hollow tree, interestingly contrasted with the symbols of the traditional kingdom and its royal court by his wife, par. 32. Noteworthy then, that when Suibhne finally approaches civilisation again it is in Moling's community called Moling's house ('Tech Moling'), referring to his church. This is the first 'house' Suibhne approaches by his own free will after he has been chased in madness from his royal court. (His short visit to Loingseachán's house was not by his won will but the result of being fooled. But it appears to have been a royal court as he escapes it through the skylight of the *bruiden*.) So also here in this third and last tale we see an opposition between the royal court or the *bruiden* and the church. If we accept the interpretation of the three stories as some sort of sequence, one could say that the hostility both to the royal site of Tara and to the *bruiden*, the building in which the king resides in the two former tales, reaches its climax in the story about Suibhne. Here the king is driven into a wilderness which has many common features with the wasteland prophesied by Ruadán about Diarmait's Tara, that it should lay waste (*fás*) with no dwelling and no smoke from a roof-tree (*cléithe*) (pp. 77–78). Compared to the previous tales there is in fact no longer an opposition between the two edifices as the church has replaced the *bruiden*; and it is at the entrance of the church Suibhne gives up his spirit to heaven and dies with his entire corpse intact—leaning it against the doorpost. Has he found the new way to become a king—and does the tale try to tell us that this way goes through that particular door—the door of a church?

A resurrection in prose for early kings?

From a Christian view-point this is Suibhne's place of resurrection as we meet it in hagiographical texts where it is a common motif that the clerics have to be on their *fód báis* (sod of death) when they die—a fact that makes many of them rush to the place destined for their death when they feel death approaching. It is important that from the same point of view it is synonymous with the sod of resurrection ('*terra resurrectionis*'). This interpretation is corroborated in the text by the

episode (pars. 46–50) of Suibhne's encounter with the fellow madman referred to as a man of the wood (*Fer Caille*) with whom Suibhne spends a year in Britain. This man is Ealadhan (Alladhan in another MS), a native of Britain and a son of a hospitaller/landowner[121] (*brughaidh* a later form of *briughu* is the form given in the text). Ealadhan has the same story to tell as he has experienced exactly the same as Suibhne: joining a battle in alliance with one of the two opposing kings and going mad as a result of the three battle cries (described here as the shouts of malediction on him ('*trí gairthi mallacht form-sa*'). He parts with Suibhne because his life has come to an end and he has to go to the place destined for him to die in. His death is drowning, but he will be interred in a churchyard of a saint.

In the tale about Diarmait it is the king who grants church-land ('altar-sod': *fót fri altóir*, p. 73) to Ciarán, the cleric. In the tale about Muirchertach it is the clerics who come to Brugh, the land surrounding his fort, to take care of his corpse as he will soon die. They do not ask the king for land when they start marking out a church there, but ask him 'to dig its trench in honour of the Great Lord of the Elements' ('*a clad do thachailt i n-anóir in Choimded.moir na ndúl*', par. 27). In Suibhne's case Rónán has started marking out a church on his land without having asked nor informed the king beforehand. Even though in Diarmait's tale there is a constant confrontation between the two parts it nevertheless all started with Diarmait's succession to the kingship through Ciarán's benediction. In Suibhne's case there is no such premise.

The three tales have revealed to us in a subtle way how ecclesiastical power gradually is to supersede royal power. The road to kingship is to go through the Church.

---

[121] This word also means 'landowner' and in later sources 'farmer, yeoman' (DIL). Although the text is twelfth century it seems appropriate considering the milieu that also this madman should be of high status like Suibhne. As discussed above, the status of hospitaller was among the highest in the Old-Irish laws—a status he enjoyed on the basis of the extensive lands he possessed. Cf. F. Kelly (1998). This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that also Ealadhan is 'afraid of being seized by the king's house or household' ('*egla thighe no theglaigh an righ dom tharrachtain*'—par 46). Accordingly I would claim that we have here yet another example of opposition between royal court and its closely affiliated buildings like the *bruiden* on the one hand, and the life of a madman in the wilderness on the other hand, resulting in the cleansing from sin and in a transformation leading to burial in a churchyard.

Bibliography

Sources

A Lexicon of the Old Irish Glosses in the Würzburg Manuscript of the Epistles of St. Paul, ed. by D. S. Wodtko, 2001, Wien.

Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill, Silva Gadelica (SG) 2 vols. ed. and tr. by S. O'Grady, 1892, London.

Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca ed. and tr. by Whitley Stokes, 'The Death of Muirchertach mac Erca,' *Revue Celtique* 23 (1902), 395–437 & without translation by L. Nic Dhonnchadha 1964, *Aided Muirchertaig Meic Erca*, Medieval and Modern Series 19, Dublin.

Audacht Morainn, ed. F. Kelly, 1976, Dublin.

Bethada Náem nÉrenn (Lives of Irish Saints) vol. 1 & 2, ed. and tr. by C. Plummer, 1968 (1922), Oxford.

*Buile Suibhne (The Frenzy of Suibhne) being The Adventures of Suibhne Geilt—*A Middle-Irish Romance, ed. and tr. by J. G. O'Keeffe, Irish Texts Society XII, 1913, London & without translation in *Mediaeval And Modern Irish Series* 1, 1975 (1931).

Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae ed. by M. O'Brien, 1964, Dublin.

Críth Gablach ed. by D. A. Binchy, 1979 (1941), Dublin.

DIL: *Dictionary of The Irish Language—Compact Edition*, 1983, ed. by E. G. Quin et al. (1973–6), Dublin.

Fél. Óeng: Félire Óengusso Céli Dé—The Martyrology of Oengus The Culdee ed. by W. Stokes, 1905, London.

Fled Dúin na nGéd ed. by R. Lehmann, 1964, Dublin.

Hibernica Minora ed. by K. Meyer, 1894, Oxford.

Lebor Bretnach: The Irish version of the Historia Brittonum ascribed to Nennius ed. by A. G. van Hamel, 1933. Dublin.

Lives of Saints from The Book of Lismore, ed. and tr. by W. Stokes, 1890, Oxford.

Life of Saint Columba, Founder of Hy. Written by Adamnan, Ninth Abbot of that Monastery. William Reeves (ed), First edition [clxxxiv + 385 pp.] Edmonston and Douglas Edinburgh (1874) CELT: The Corpus of Electronic Texts, http://www.ucc.ie/celt/publishd.html.

O'Davoran's Glossary, ed. by W. Stokes, Archiv für Celtische Lexikographie II.

Sanas Cormaic—An Old-Irish Glossary, *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts* IV, ed. by O. B. Bergin, R. I. Best, K. Meyer, J. G. O'Keeffe, 1912, Dublin.

Scéla Éogain in so 7 Cormaic, ed. and tr. by T. Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*, 1977.

Tecosca Cormaic, ed. K. Meyer, Royal Irish Academy, Todd Lectures XV, 1909.

The Annals of Tigernach, ed. by W. Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, XVI, XVII.

The Rennes *Dindshenchas* ed. by W. Stokes, *Revue Celtique* XVI , 1895, 65–66.

Togail Bruidne Da Derga, ed. by E. Knott, 1975 (1936), Dublin & tr. by J. Gantz, 'The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel,' *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, Penguin Classics, Hammersworth, 61–106.

Uraicecht na Ríar (The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law), ed. L. Breatnach, 1987, Early Irish Law Series II, Dublin.

Studies

Arbuthnot, S. 2008. Glossary Entries on *Anart* 'A Shroud', the Drink of Death and the Conjunction *Dath* 'because.', *Caindel Alban* ed. by C. Ó Baoill & N. McGuire (Scottish Gaelic Studies, vol. XXIV, 2008), 39–53.

Breatnach, C. 2005. Historical Tales, *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia* ed. by S. Duffy et al., New York.
Byrne, F. J. 1973. *Irish Kings and High-Kings*. Dublin.
Carney, J. 1955. *Studies in Irish Literature and History.* Dublin.
Charles-Edwards, T. 1999. Geis, Prophecy, Omen and Oath, *Celtica*. 23, 38–59.
—— 2000. *Early Christian Ireland*, Cambridge University Press.
Clancy, T. 2005. Court, King and Justice in the Ulster Cycle, *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society* ed. by H. Fulton, Dublin, 163–82.
—— 2008. Die Like a Man? The Ulster Cycle Death-Tale Anthology, *Aiste* 2, 70–93.
Dillon, M. 1946. *The Cycles of the Kings*, Oxford University Press.
Grosjean, P. 1951. *Analecta Bollandiana* 69, 96–102.
Herbert, M. 1997. The Death of Muirchertach Mac Erca: A Twelfth-Century Tale, *Celts and Vikings—Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica* ed. by F. Josephson, Meijerbergs Arkiv 20, Göteborg, 27–39.
Jackson, K. 1940. The Motive of the Threefold Death in the Story of Suibne Geilt, *Féil-Sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill* ed. by J. Ryan, Dublin, 535–550.
Kelly, F. 1988 (1998). *A Guide to Early Irish Law*. Dublin.
Kenney, J. F. 1979 (1929). *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland—Ecclesiastical*. Dublin.
Koch, J. (ed. in collaboration with J. Carey) 2003. *The Celtic Heroic Age, Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*. Aberystwyth.
Mac Eoin, G. 1997. The *Briugu* in Early Irish Society, *ZCP* 49–50, 482–93.
—— 1999. Old Irish *Briugu* 'Hospitaller' and Connected Words, *Celtica*. 23, 169–73.
Marstrander, C. 1911. Snám Dá Ên Cid Dia Tá, *Ériu* V, 219–25.
Mc Cone, K. 1984. Hounds, Heroes and Hospitallers, *Ériu* 35, 1–30.
—— 1986. Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fíanna*: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 12 (Winter), 1–22.
—— 1990. *Pagan past and Christian present*. Maynooth.
Nagy, J. F. 1982. The Wisdom of the Geilt, *Éigse* 19, 44–60.
—— 1996. A New Introduction to *Buile Suibhne (The Frenzy of Suibhne) being the Adventures of Suibhne Geilt*—A Middle-Irish Romance, Irish Texts Society, Subsidiary Series 4.
Ní Chatháin, Proinséas, Swineherds, Seers and Druids, *Studia Celtica*. 14–15 (1979–1980) 200–211.
Ní Mhaonaigh, M. 2006. Pagans and Holy Men: Literary Manifestations of Twelfth-Century Reform, *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century—Reform and Renewal*, ed. by D. Bracken & D. Ó Riain-Raedel, Dublin, 143–61.
Nikoleva, N. 2001. The Drink of Death, *Studia Celtica* XXXV (2001), 299–306.
Ó Cathasaigh, T. 1977. *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*. Dublin.
—— 1977–79. The Semantics of 'Síd' *Éigse* xviii, 137–55.
—— 1985. The Concept of the Hero in Irish Mythology, *The Irish Mind* ed. by R. Kearney, Dublin, 79–90.
—— 1994. The Threefold Death in Early Irish Sources, *Studia Celtic Japonica*. 6, 53–75.
—— 1996. *Gat* and *Díberg* in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga Commentationes Hummanarum Litterarum CVII: Celtica Helsingiensia, Proceedings from a Symposium of Celtic Studies, ed. by A. Ahlqvist et al.* Helsinki, 203–213.
Ó Cróinín, D. 1995. *Early Medieval Ireland 400–1200*, London.
Ó Cuív, B. 1965. Review of Nic Dhonnchadha, *Éigse* XI, 146–50.
—— 1967. Ireland in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries (c. 1000–1169), *The Course of Irish History* ed. by T. W. Moody & F. X. Martin, Cork, 107–122.
—— 1973–74. The Motif of the Threefold Death, *Éigse* 15, 145–50.
O'Connor, R. 2007. Searching for the Mortal in *Bruiden Meic Da Réo*, Ériu LVI, 117–143.

—— 2008. Prophecy, Storytelling and the Otherworld, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga, Approaches to Religion and Mythology in Celtic Studies* ed. by K. Ritari and A. Bergholm, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 55–68.
Radner, J. 1982. Fury Destroys the World, *The Mankind Quarterly* 23, 41–60.
—— 1983. The Significance of the Threefold Death in Celtic Tradition, *Celtic Folklore and Christianity—Studies in Memory of William W. Heist* ed. by P. K. Ford, University of California, Los Angeles, 180–199.
Sayers, W. 1992. Guin & Crochad & Gólad: The Earliest Irish Threefold Death in Celtic Tradition, *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples* ed. by C. J. Byrne et al., Halifax, Nova Scotia, 65–82.
—— 1993. Charting Conceptual Space: Dumézil's Tripartition and the Fatal Hostel in Early Irish Literature, *The Mankind Quarterly* 34, 27–64.
Sharpe, R. 1995. *Adomnán of Iona—Life of St. Columba* (translation of Adomnán's *Vita Sancti Columbae*) Penguin Classics, Hammersworth.
Sjøblom, T. 1996. Advice from a Birdman: Ritual Injunctions and Royal Instrictions in TBDD, *Commentationes Hummanarum Litterarum CVII: Celtica Helsingiensia, Proceedings from a Symposium of on Celtic Studies, ed. by A. Ahlqvist et al.* Helsinki, 233–51.
Smith, R. 1925. On the *Briatharthecosc Conculaind*, ZCP xv, 187–192.
Stokes, W. 1908. Poems Ascribed to S. Moling, *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts* II, 20–41, Oxford.
Watkins, C. 1978. VARIA III. 1. Oir. clí and cleth 'house-post, *Ériu* 29, 155–60.
West, M. 1997. Aspects of *díberg* in the Tale *Togail bruidne da Derga*. *ZCP* 49–50, 950–64.
—— 1999. The Genesis of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*: A Reappraisal of the 'Two-Source' Theory, *Celtica.* 23, 413–35.
Wiley, D. 2001. The Maledictory Psalms, *Peritia* 15, 261–79.
—— 2002. Stories about Diarmait mac Cerbaill from the Book of Lismore, *Emania* 19, 53–59.
—— (ed.) 2008. *Essays on the Early Irish King Tales*. Dublin.

CHAPTER SIX

THE WARRIOR IN OLD NORSE RELIGION

Jens Peter Schjødt

Introduction

A warrior is a person who fights. In this general sense, warriors exist in all societies and at all times. Of course there are differences from one culture to another, for example in the various technical aids to improve a warrior's fighting abilities. In addition, however, differences existed regarding the understanding of a warrior's role in society. In other words, people had a *concept* of a warrior: of his function and of his characteristics. Such a concept need not necessarily correspond to the warrior's effective role in society and politics. It does however explain and determine how people related to the warrior as an institution. It follows that within the ideology of a people we will find elements that address the existing phenomena of their society.

On the other hand, influence is exerted in both directions. Not only does society influence ideology, but ideology itself also attempts to influence 'the world'. While the warrior for example offers protection, at the same time, to the very society he shields, he is also a potential threat. He needs to be kept from turning against his own society. The most effective way to ensure this is to make the warrior accept a role as defined by society, thus influencing his own understanding of himself. In religious societies, if everyone is expected to share a common ideological basis, this aim is primarily achieved via the propagation of myths. Myths are the medium *par excellence* in which ideological structures are manifested and in which ideology is verbalised. Consequently, myths are at the centre of analyses of the ideology of any given society. They may not be the only, but they are certainly the most important expression of ideology in archaic societies.[1]

[1] This is not to say that exactly the same myths were known by every individual in a society. Every society has many variants of myths concerned with certain themes. These variants may be due to diversity in history or geography or social strata.

In addition, particular members and sub-groups of a society can be influenced in special ways. Their role and function in society can be inscribed into their consciousness in such a decisive way that society gains an exceptionally strong degree of control over them. Usually this happens in connection with their entry into the sub-group of which they shall be a member. In the field of history of religion, we call the activities that surround and enable such entries into sub-groups initiation rituals.

In order to get an idea of the ideology surrounding the warrior we shall thus in the following first discuss the problem of mythical divine warriors, or—if you want, of 'war-gods'; and after that we will come down to earth, so to speak, and will deal with the problems concerning partly the warriors as an institutionalised group in society, and partly the way in which they were initiated into this group.

Óðinn and Þórr

Regarding the mythology of the warrior, Georges Dumézil made important observations in a number of publications. In line with his 'programme', he stressed the common patterns in various Indo-European cultures. In particular, Dumézil examined the subject of the "warrior's three sins", where, within the Nordic material, he focused on the theme of Starkaðr.[2] In the present context however, Dumézil's views on the relationship between Óðinn's and Þórr's attitudes to war as a phenomenon are more important; these views have contributed to some confusion regarding the applicability of Dumézil's thoughts for the Nordic material, and have led to substantial criticism of his constructs in general. We shall therefore here shortly look at Óðinn's and Þórr's different relationship to war, not least because a discussion of this problem is necessary in order to understand the main aim of this chapter: examining the role of certain groups of warriors and of initiation.

There is no doubt that Óðinn and Þórr, and indeed many other Nordic gods, are particularly associated with war and fighting. Yet,

---

But as long as a society can be seen as one (and not as several societies) there will be some basic structures underlying the ideology and influencing the individual's way of perceiving his relation to the cultural and natural surroundings (cf. Schjødt forthcoming).

[2] Dumézil 1985: 97–106; cf. Lundager Jensen and Schjødt 1994: 159–162).

according to the medieval sources, it is only Óðinn and Þórr who would be candidates for the designation 'war god'. According to Dumézil Þórr is the Nordic version of the widely found warrior-god, or god of the second function. By contrast, Óðinn is a god of the first function, where he in particular is in charge of magic. However, Óðinn is also closely connected to war, as evidenced not only in the Old Norse texts, but also—indeed possibly most clearly—in Adam of Bremen. In the well known passage on the two gods' responsibilities in chapters 26 and 27 of the fourth book Adam says: "*Thor […] presidet in aere, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos ymbresque, serena et fruges gubernat. Alter Wodan, id est furor, bella gerit hominique ministrat virtutem contra inimicos.*"[3] And further: "*Si pestis et fames imminet, Thor ydolo lybatur, si bellum, Wodani.*"[4] Obviously, Adam thought Óðinn the warrior-god. Adam's views seem to be supported by several Old Norse texts, not least by *Ynglinga saga* chapter 6. Dumézil was aware of this problem for his interpretation, and attempted to explain these sources as evidence for a 'slippage of functions' which was supposed to have occurred within the Germanic areas.[5] According to Dumézil, the result of this alteration was that the first function partly came to encompass war, and the second function partly fertility. Admittedly, this is a possible development. In the present chapter which does not intend a general comparison between the two gods, we shall however not enter into this discussion. Here, it is important to examine the two gods' different relationship to war, and if possible to attempt a more systematic distinction.

Dumézil asserts that there was a clear difference between the two gods, which he attributes to the two types of warriors in the Indo-European pantheon. The sources seem to oppose an aristocratic, handsome warrior who is well integrated in society, to a brutal type, being somewhat outside society.[6] Although such a general differentiation can be supported, we cannot simply apply it to the two Nordic gods. Óðinn-warriors are frequently aristocratic, yet on the other hand they

---

[3] Schmeidler 1917: 326. "*Thor…presides over the air, which governs the thunder and lightning, the winds and rains, fair weather and crops. The other Wotan—that is the Furious—carries on war and imparts to man strength against the enemies".* (Tschan 2002: 207).

[4] Schmeidler 1917: 327. "*If plague and famine threaten, a libation is poured to the idol Thor; if war, to Wotan"* (Tschan 2002: 207).

[5] Dumézil 1958: 57–58 and 77–78; 1971: 87–95.

[6] The most typical manifestations are the two heroes from the Indian epos *Mahabharata*, Bhima and Arjuna.

are also frequently characterised by wildness, ecstasy, and therefore brutality.[7] And while Þórr's way of fighting is frequently somewhat primitive and at times brutal, there is no single character amongst the earthly warriors who could be considered a Þórr-hero. Dumézil first proposed Starkaðr, but later qualified his proposal.[8] In fact, it rather seems that Starkaðr is modelled on Óðinn. However, there are indications that Óðinn's and Þórr's relationship to war can be conceptualised as collective and individualistic, respectively.

In Norse mythology, Óðinn himself only fights on two occasions: in the first war of the world, where he throws his spear across the enemies (the Vanir), and in the last war, Ragnarǫk, where Fenrir devours him. Otherwise Óðinn's role in war and fighting is not physical but rather mental: he puts warriors into ecstasy and equips them with supernatural abilities, and he advises on deployment of troops and strategy. This is usually directed at rulers, and it is therefore usually armies or groups of warriors such as berserkers or *úlfheðnar* (wolf-warriors) who profit from Óðinn's help, such as we shall see below. Þórr, on the other hand, usually fights singly. He may be accompanied by Þjálfi or Loki, but the physical fighting itself is done by Þórr alone. Finally, the majority of the stories in which Þórr is the main actor describe his fights against giants and scoundrels of every kind—they are therefore purely mythological. Thus, if we label the *dramatis personae* according to Vladimir Propp's terminology we would call Þórr the 'hero', while Óðinn would be a mix of the 'helper' and the 'giver'.

Apart from this possibility to discern individualistic and collective traits, there is, as we just saw, a clear distinction in the manifestation of power: Óðinn participates in fights through psychological means, while Þórr is explicitly physical. Dumézil also noted this difference.[9] Nevertheless, we have to question Dumézil's characterisation of Þórr as the Nordic god of war—a characterisation which is also frequently

---

[7] Already Óðinn's very name alludes to this ecstatic behaviour ("*Wodan, id est furor*", Adam of Bremen IV.26), and especially *Ynglinga saga* ch. 6 leaves no doubt about the psyche of at least some of the Óðinn-warriors: "*His own men went to battle without coats of mail and acted like mad dogs or wolves. They bit their shields and were as strong as bears or bulls. They killed people, and neither fire nor iron affected them. This is called berserker rage.*" *Heimskringla*, trsl. by Lee Hollander, Austin 1964/1999. "*…en hans menn fóru brynjalausir ok varu galnir sem hundar eða vargar, bitu í skjǫldu sína, varu sterkir sem birnir eða griðungar; þeir drápu mannfólkit, en hvárki eldr né járn orti á þá; þat er kallaðr berserksgangr*" (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1979: 17).

[8] Dumézil 1971: 21.

[9] Dumézil 1971: 88.

found by authors who are influenced by Dumézil, while non-Dumézilians tend describe Óðinn as the 'god of war'. As the above discussion shows, both views can be supported. Yet it is worthwhile to attempt a more precise definition than hitherto of Óðinn's and Þórr's role concerning war.

For this, it is necessary to consider additional distinctive characteristics. One of these is that, in almost all cases, Óðinn's connection to war takes place amongst humans. It does therefore not show the same mythical traits as Þórr's. The latter hardly ever fights amongst humans; his quarrels with the giants occur in a cosmic setting. Óðinn's role, on the other hand, is to help his chosen heroes against their enemies (until he considers it opportune to betray them). This does not imply that his heroes fight on the side of justice against injustice, or, put even more anachronistically, on the side of good against evil. Óðinn's enemies are not necessarily lesser characters—in every sense—than his friends. By contrast, Þórr's enemies without exception constitute a potential threat against the civilised world. In other words, when Þórr fights, he protects the cosmos and keeps chaos at bay. It is possible that this also provides a matrix for understanding his role as a 'god of fertility'. Disease and hunger, mentioned by Adam, are threats sent by the forces of chaos.[10] They are phenomena against which humans cannot protect themselves; they are controlled by forces from the 'outside', from chaos, and thus it takes gods to ward them off, first and foremost among them Þórr. Þórr's activities thus almost exclusively serve to defend the cosmos, understood as a world which is sufficiently ordered for humans to live in it.

The differentiation between Óðinn and Þórr regarding their relationship to war can therefore be expressed in a number of binary opposition pairs:

collective	versus	individualistic
intellectual power	versus	physical power
earthly setting	versus	cosmic setting
'moral' indifference	versus	'moral' actions

In addition there is one other, and for me decisive, difference: offensive versus defensive. These terms require some explanation. On the one hand it is obvious that Óðinn can also be called upon if war threatens

[10] Cf. Bertell 2003: 244.

from abroad; on the other hand Þórr usually travels to the lands of the giants in order to fight them. In the greater context however, the constellations in which Óðinn participates are *potentially* offensive. If his chosen ruler wins he can subjugate new lands. By contrast Þórr's wars against the giants are always elements in the defence against potential threats to the world.

This analysis shows that a discussion whether Óðinn or Þórr is a 'god of war' in the Nordic pantheon is futile. The denomination seems simplistic and, considering the Nordic material, superfluous. Both gods are clearly associated with war and fighting, each in his way. If we were to propose a term that describes the second function better than 'fight' or 'war', we might consider 'physical strength' or 'protection of the cosmos'.[11]

Whether such a distinction is also possible for other Indo-European religions cannot be discussed here—it certainly does not appear unrealistic. Suffice to mention the example of Indra, whose enemies are remarkably similar to Þórr's.

Óðinn and the Männerbünde

If we can therefore relegate Þórr to the cosmic sphere, the 'warrior' as an earthly phenomenon first and foremost needs to be connected to Óðinn (yet without making Þórr, in as far as he embodies physical strength, completely irrelevant here). This raises the question of what exactly it is with Óðinn which makes him assume this special relationship with war and warriors. As mentioned above, one characteristic of Óðinn's is that he is connected to war as a collective phenomenon. Yet there are on the other hand a large number of chosen warriors who, individually, enjoy a special relationship with Óðinn.

The reasons for these special relationships are not immediately obvious in the sources. In some cases kinship between Óðinn and the chosen hero is mentioned or hinted at, for example *in Vǫlsunga saga*, as we shall see below, but also in many other instances. Regarding

[11] In an article from 2004 I have focused on yet another opposition, namely vertical vs. horizontal, since it is observable that the main part of the myths about Óðinn are played out on an axis connecting upper world and underworld, whereas the myths of þórr take place on an axis connecting Ásgarðr and Utgarðr. I shall not, however, deal with this any further in this chapter.

individual characters, we frequently find special relationships between Óðinn and rulers.[12] This may be connected to the fact that according to the west Norse sources Óðinn was king of the gods. However, as I have discussed elsewhere,[13] the ruler is merely *primus inter pares*, which means that he can be considered a representative for a group, namely society as such. The ruler was responsible for furthering the group's interests. For this it is vital that relations between the gods and society are excellent. Apart from the political responsibilities which we nowadays expect a ruler to shoulder, in societies such as the Nordic in the Viking Age people considered the ruler responsible for fertility, peace, and progress in a range of spheres—areas where we see external factors at work, which we simply see as beyond the control of humans. In religious societies, such factors are controlled by gods and other supernatural beings, and it is possible to manipulate them through different rituals. It is this manipulation which a ruler must be able to achieve, if he is going to succeed.

Similarly, in order to represent the interests of society in war, also the warriors require special abilities that ensure victory. Consequently, and similarly to rulers, also the warriors need a special relationship with the gods, and in this context especially with Óðinn. We have seen that he equips his chosen ones with two types of mental strength from the spheres of strategy and ecstasy respectively. *Ynglinga saga* claims that it is primarily strengths derived from ecstasy which Óðinn offers to his warriors. And we also know that the warriors obtain these strengths as part of a group. Thus regarding rulers, Óðinn offers individual, strategic abilities, while regarding warriors it is collective, 'ecstatic' strengths.[14] Consequently, we note a clear distinction: Óðinn offers to rulers far more comprehensive abilities than to warriors, presumably simply because rulers fulfil many more functions.

In my earlier article, mentioned above, I have argued that the special abilities a ruler is equipped with are transferred through initiation rituals, and in the following I shall analyse whether we have indications for similar practices for warriors. Before that, however, it will be

[12] Often in the literary sources it is almost impossible to distinguish between rulers and warriors, since rulers were also warriors. Nevertheless, as I argue here, there seem to be some differences in Óðinn's relationship to the two categories.

[13] Schjødt 1990.

[14] Nevertheless, there certainly are examples in which Óðinn has a special relationship, also to individual warriors. The best known examples are Starkaðr and Sinfjǫtli the last of whom we are going to discuss below.

necessary to decide whether there are any sources at all which point to a special relationship between Óðinn and certain groups of warriors. This will involve a brief discussion of the notions surrounding death in pre-Christian religion, as has been forcefully proposed by Lily Weiser and Otto Höfler, the two scholars who have most thoroughly dealt with the subject of *Männerbünde* in Old Norse and Old Germanic religion. Both of them proposed that there existed some type of relation between the living and the dead warriors, since in both realms we find groups of warriors who apparently have a special relationship with Óðinn.[15] I cannot agree on all points with these two scholars, but it is without doubt right to take into consideration the notions of the dead in order to understand fully the religious role of the living warriors. We therefore have to steer a roundabout course, discussing these notions.

[15] Both Weiser and Höfler are proponents of the theory that so-called *Männerbünde* existed amongst the Germanic and Scandinavian peoples. In general one considers Weiser to have provided the foundation for this theory, and Höfler to have refined it. Höfler, who provided the conclusive evidence, clearly acknowledges his debt to Weiser, who was the first to argue for the existence of *Männerbünde*. Both scholars have conducted thorough analyses of the relationship between certain mystic and 'real', or rather, cultic, elements. A rehearsal of the details of Weiser's and Höfler's argumentation would be beyond the confines of this chapter. I shall therefore limit myself to a short summary of Höfler's results, which elaborate, but do not contradict, Weiser's research. The point of departure is the two interchangeable names for groups of warriors, *úlfheðnar* and *berserkir*, who were the human or cultic equivalents to the *einherjar*. The latter can be characterised as an army of the dead, especially if one includes Tacitus's description of *harii* (*Germania* 43), where they are called *feralis exercitus*. (Höfler 1934: 166–167 and Weiser 1927: 34) Höfler also discusses the expression *Hjaðningavíg* (1934: 167–169) which we amongst other encounter in *Sǫrlaþáttr*, and which describes a fight between two armies of the dead. The expression is connected to the name *Héðinn*, which forms part of *úlfhéðinn*. Höfler argues that there was a stong connection between the mythical army of the dead (*einherjar, hjadningar*) and the cultic sphere (*úlfheðnar/berserkir* and *harii*). Notable differences between them notwithstanding, what characterises both *einherjar* and *hjadningar* is that they die and are reborn in eternity. The fact that the sources know nothing about either the *harii* or the *úlfheðnar/berserkir* dying and being reborn as earthly warriors, poses a certain problem for Höfler's theory, and consequently, his argument that we see mythical and cultic parallels—that *úlfheðnar* and *berserkir* represent the dead, that they have a kind of metaphoric relation to the dead—can be questioned. Rather, it seems that the human warriors enjoy a special status which shall transform them to *einherjar* after death which would change the metaphorical relation into a metonymical one. But there is no doubt that a kind of parallelism is at stake, and this is why we have to look a little closer at the conception of the dead in Old Norse religion.

In scholarly work it is frequently emphasised that Óðinn is a god who cannot be trusted.[16] He sometimes lets down his chosen heroes, and he is then often directly involved in their death, as with Haraldr hilditǫnn in *Gesta Danorum* (VIII, 4, ix) and Sigmundr in *Vǫlsunga saga* (chap. 11). Óðinn's seeming lack of trustworthiness is usually explained with reference to *Eiríksmál*, where it is said by Óðinn himself that the reason for taking the great kings to Valhǫll is that the gods must be prepared for Ragnarǫk. However, this mythological explanation, although it may reflect the ways the pre-Christian Scandinavians actually conceived of Óðinn's unreliability, is not sufficient when we try to understand the fact that Óðinn sometimes turns against his chosen heroes. First and foremost, of course, the myth is etiological in the widest sense, since it was a common experience that great kings and warriors, who were supposed to be great exactly because they were favourites of Óðinn, conceived as a war god, would be defeated and killed at some point. This, in the internal logic of the relation between man and gods, means that the god had abandoned them. The explanation, however, should be sought at more than one level. As already mentioned, it seems likely that the explanation which included Ragnarǫk played a part; but this would create a problem when other great warriors did not die in battle, so there must be more to it. What we have to look for is, on the one hand, the fundamental relation that Óðinn has to death and, on the other hand, the relation between Óðinn and his chosen heroes.

Different abodes of the dead

In a famous passage from *Gylfaginning*, Snorri (or rather Gangleri) says: "*Þat segir þú at allir þeir menn er í orrosto hafa fallit frá upphafi heims eru nú komnir til Óðins í Valhǫll.*"[17] This, together with another statement concerning Hel,[18] has been taken to indicate that the way people died was decisive for their afterlife. Yet as Andreas Nordberg

[16] E.g. recently by Steinsland 2005, 177, Näsström 2001, 55 and Nordberg 2003, 123.

[17] *Gylfaginning* Ch. 38. "*You say that all those men that have fallen in battle since the beginning of the world have now come to Odin in Val-hall*" (Faulkes 1987: 32).

[18] *Gylfaginning* Ch. 34: "*. . . . hon skipti öllum vistum með þeim er til hennar vóro sendir, en þat eru sóttdauðir menn ok ellidauðir.*"—"*. . . she has to administer board and lodging to those sent to her, and that is those who die of sickness or old age*" (Faulkes 1987: 27).

has shown, this should not be taken too literally.[19] As in many statements about cosmology, we have to realise here as well that the sentences should be understood metaphorically and that, especially in poetic language, it is important to accept that the same content can be expressed in different ways. Thus, "to die" (even violently) may be expressed as an erotic meeting with a female.[20] However, there is no reason to believe that the old Scandinavians ever had any systematic ideas about the after life, which would also be in accordance with the state of affairs in most other religions. We hear about people who have drowned who go to an abode by the goddess Ran, we hear about people who are thought to live an afterlife in the mound in which they were buried. And there are many other conceptions.

So neither the poetic language nor the actual ideas were probably very precise. From an existential point of view there is no doubt that this uncertainty was common. This is supported by all the different ideas expressed in the sources, which should not initially be interpreted historically.[21] This considered, it is evident, however, that the way Valhǫll and Hel are described by Snorri is not coincidental. These two abodes seem to be structural inversions, and not only in relation to those who dwell there and the way they have died. One could argue that two abodes, one beyond and positive and the other below and negative, might be inspired from Christianity. But although this cannot be ruled out completely with regard to some details, there seems to be more. On the one hand, Valhǫll is characterised by masculinity, i.e. the activities there can be classified by masculine ideals:[22] the inhabitants have died fighting, which is obviously a male activity, and are ruled over by a masculine ruler, Óðinn. Hel, on the other hand, is ruled over by the goddess of the same name and the activities there, as far as we can speak of activities at all, seem to be far from the ideals of a masculine life. There is neither a hint that Hel should be a place of punishment, nor that Valhǫll should be one of reward for something that can be interpreted in an ethical way. Thus, even though we

[19] Nordberg 2003: 273–274.
[20] Steinsland 1997, 97–123.
[21] Cf. Nordberg 2003, 36–41.
[22] Whether there were women in Valhǫll, besides the valkyries, is hard to decide. But it is not convincing to argue from *argumenta ex silentio* that this was not the case. The slave girl who, in Ibn Fadlan's account, is killed in order to join her dead master is no doubt expected to go to the same place as the chieftain.

meet the same dualism in certain aspects (i.e. up vs. down, pleasure vs. gloominess), there are other aspects that cannot be seen as Christian, and there is no reason to reject the information we get from Snorri as altogether unreliable.

This means that there are reasons to accept Andreas Nordberg's argument, that the basic ideas concerning the relation between Óðinn and Valhǫll are not of late origin. Quite on the contrary there are reasons to believe that these basic ideas are very old, and some of these reasons are associated with the "guests" who go to Valhǫll, and Óðinn's relation to them—also as living persons. It is underlined several times that those who go to Óðinn are noble persons (e.g. *Hárbarðsljóð* 24, *Gesta Danorum* II, vii, 22). We must ask what this actually means; what kind of persons can expect to go to Óðinn? It is obvious from several sources that kings, princes and other ruling persons join Óðinn after their death. But it also seems as if warriors in general or, at least, some warriors go to meet him after they have been killed.

Who were the Einherjar?

We thus know from *Eiríksmál* 5 that not only Sigmundr was with Óðinn, but also Sinfiǫtli, who was definitely not a king. Sinfiǫtli was a hero, though, and a great warrior. Yet he did not fall in battle, so we must ask how this is in accordance with Snorri's statement that only those who fall in battle can go there. In other words: how can we explain that people who did not fall in battle go to the warrior paradise of Valhǫll? One possibility is, of course, to reject Snorri altogether or to accept that there could have been other versions of the death of Sinfjǫtli. But, as mentioned, there seems to be a genuine structural pattern in Snorri's systematisation of the two abodes of the dead, and the account of the death of Sinfjǫtli also resembles a genuine myth, so perhaps we should look for another explanation.

If warriors, as well as kings, went to Valhǫll, and if warriors who did not fall in battle could go there, too, it should be possible to find some common features for these different groups, and, perhaps, some features which are not in opposition to the structure related by Snorri. The key, I believe, is to be found in another work by Snorri, namely the *Ynglinga saga*. Here we have two statements that may have a huge explanatory value, namely in chapter 6, in which we learn about the *berserkir*, and in chapter 9, in which we are told about Óðinn's and Njǫrðr's death.

The *berserkir* have occasioned much debate amongst historians of religion. Who were they? Are our sources reliable as an expression of pagan ideas or are *berserkir* a pure literary fiction?

In a paper read at the Saga Conference in Bonn in 2003, and later published in a slightly different form as an article "Berserks in history and Legend",[23] Anatoly Liberman attacked most of the ideas that have been prominent among scholars (especially Weiser and Höfler) concerning *berserkir*. He started out by telling us that even if there is a striking parallel in the stanza from Þórbjǫrn hornklofi's *Haraldskvæði* 8 between the mentioning of the *berserkir* and the *úlfheðnar*, they should not be understood along the same lines. Whereas he apparently accepted that the *úlfheðnar* in pagan times had some religious significance, this is not the case with the *berserkir*.[24] After discussing some tendencies in the interpretations of the *berserkir* problem, he concluded:

> At the end of the ninth century, some warriors were still called *berserker* (the word is probably old). They either resembled or were identical with *úlfheðnar* 'wolf coats'. Both groups roared and howled when they fought. They may have worn animal masks, but this need not be the reason they were called *berserker* and *úldfheðnar*. Despite the closeness of the words *berserker* and *úlfheðnar, berserkr* more probably means 'bareshirt' (= 'fighting without armor') than 'bearshirt' (= 'fighting with a bear mask/bearskin on'). No evidence supports Snorri's statement that ancient berserks were ever looked upon as Odin's associates. The berserks of the family sagas resembled the berserks of old only in name, and nothing in their behaviour can be used for reconstructing the institutions of the past. At no time did berserks form unions, and, to become a berserk, no initiation was required. The way from elite troops to gangs can be demonstrated with some confidence. All the rest (cultic languages, eating poisonous mushrooms, and so forth) is (science) fiction.[25]

Much could be said about Liberman's article, but it is not possible to go into details here.[26] What is of direct interest for the subject of this chapter, however, is Liberman's statement about Óðinn's role

---

[23] Liberman 2005.

[24] Liberman mentions the Sigmundr-Sinfjötli episode in *Völsunga saga*, and those interpretations that see initiation to some sort of group of *ulfheðnar* as an important element. He does not argue against that, but only that this episode can be taken into account as we are discussing the *berserkir* (2003, 339).

[25] Liberman 2005: 411.

[26] I actually agree with Liberman on several points, not least with much of his criticism directed against Höfler, but his general conclusion seems too bombastic to me.

in the *berserkir* complex, in which he denies a relation between the wild hunt, the *einherjar*, and the *berserkir*. He concludes: "It is safe to assume that myths of Óðinn's berserkers did not exist".[27] It is admittedly true that there is not much evidence of warrior bands which were ultimately linked by some religious bond to Óðinn, but does that really mean that it is "safe" to deny such a relation? The source situation concerning Old Norse religion should warn us against exaggerated use of *argumenta ex silentio*. And I believe that there is textual evidence to support the idea that notions about a link between *berserkir* and Óðinn actually can be reconstructed. Admittedly, "proofs" cannot be given, but if "proof" is to be understood in a narrow sense, it is hard to accept any sort of proof which has to do with historical reconstruction of religions. There is also further evidence to be taken into account, which is not referred to by Liberman. He does include some of the saga accounts in his considerations and finds, rightly, a certain pattern according to which *berserkir* are exclusively filling the role of antagonists, thus allowing the brave Icelander to be better perceived. However, Liberman also mentions *Hrólfs saga kraka* and the "Hrólfr kraki type of stories". He says: "When berserkers are projected to a semi legendary past, they appear as a king's retinue, as happens in *Hrólf's saga*".[28] So let us take a closer look at this saga.

The only element that is mentioned by Liberman in the saga is the *berserkir*, sitting in the king's hall. We know that the saga is late, probably from the late fourteenth century or even later; and there is no doubt that, as Liberman also writes, the perception of *berserkir* at that time was very negative. Nevertheless, the author of the saga describes them as Hrólfr's retinue, and thus they seem to have been elite troops. Contemporary negative attitudes, however, make them into opponents to the true heroes of the saga, namely the *kappar*, the group to which both Svipdagr, Böðvarr, and the other individualised heroes belong. Only one incident breaks this pattern, namely when Svipdagr and the leader of the *berserkir* are about to go into a fight and the king intervenes and says that they should be seen as equals and that they should both be his friends "*Ok eftir þat sættust þeir ok eru jafnan á einu ráði,*

[27] Liberman 2003: 339. Perhaps it should be mentioned here that Liberman does not accept the statement of Snorri in *Ynglinga saga*. It is said that Snorri "described berserkers according to the 'folklore' of his time" (2003: 338).

[28] Liberman 2003: 338.

liggja í hernaði ok hafa sigr, hvar sem þeir komu".[29] This suggests that the opposition is perhaps not as clear-cut as one would think, a view supported by the fact that, in the hall, the *kappar* Bǫðvarr, Hjalti, Svipdagr, Hvítserkr and Beigaðr are seated next to the king on both sides, and next to them the *berserker*,[30] although we would expect that the rest of the *kappar* mentioned in chapter 49 is seated there. Thus it seems as if the *berserkir* and the *kappar* are somewhat mixed up: probably because the *berserkir* at the time of writing of the saga could not be pictured in a positive way. But Liberman, as we saw in his conclusion, accepted that it is likely that they were elite troops. What he did not accept was that the *berserkir* should have had any religious function; nor did he accept that they could be connected to Óðinn, or that the compound *ber-* could have denoted 'bear' in pagan times.

However, if we take a closer look at the entire saga, it seems obvious that, firstly, bears play a prominent role and that, secondly, Óðinn too has a major role. As regards the bear, it is mostly elaborated in connection to Bǫðvarr Bjarki, who is the leader of the *kappar* (who might in turn be identified with the *berserkir*): His father was named Bjǫrn and was transformed into a bear by magic; and Bǫðvarr himself has the ability to transform himself into a bear. Furthermore, we are told by Saxo that the monster which Hǫttr has to kill in a clearly initiatory way was in fact a bear.[31] All of this is without doubt best explained by accepting that these elements are not just coincidences—but that they represent a pattern which fits the traditional way of looking at the *berserkir*, namely as warriors who in some way were associated with bears. It is impossible to tell whether they fought in bear-skins or whether they were perhaps only transformed into bears during the initiations, just as Sinfjǫtli was transformed into a wolf (cf. below). However, this would not prevent them from roaring like bears when fighting the actual battles—which was probably rather frightening. Of course, the belief that these warriors were bears only has to do with the ritual transformation: being a warrior of this special kind would demand that they were strong and savage like bears.[32] From this we

[29] Chapter 22. "*And after that they kept peace, and from that time on they always agreed, they were in the army and had victory wherever they came*".

[30] Ch. 37.

[31] *Gesta Danorum* II, vi, 11.

[32] Thus there is no reason to imagine that these *berserkir* were ever thought of as bears in any essential way. Animals and other natural species are, as was maintained by Lévi-Strauss many years ago, "good to think with", because they may illuminate

could easily imagine how notions, perhaps expressed in myths or semi-myths along the lines of *Bǫðvars þáttr*, could develop. Another element which, in my opinion, strongly indicates that there is a relation between bears and *berserkir*, probably in connection with initiations, is the way the *berserkir* arrive in the hall. The first thing they do is to go to all the men in the hall and ask them if they think that they are as strong as the *berserkir* themselves.[33] Kris Kershaw has suggested that this is a pattern in the initiation,[34] and there is no doubt that the way these incidents are described in the saga have a ritual aura, which would indicate that, in order to become a member of the band, one would have to fight a *berserkr*. Eventually, if the monster that Hǫttr "kills" in the saga was actually a bear, this may be a variation or a supplement to fighting with a real *berserkr*: if you are able to kill a bear, you have ritually been transformed into a warrior who is not afraid of fighting *berserkir*.

All these bear incidents in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, which certainly form a pattern that is parallel to what we know from initiations of warriors in many different societies, are almost impossible to explain unless we accept that the author of the saga had some more or less precise knowledge of old traditions about the men surrounding the king who were compared to bears and who, whether the etymology is accurate or not, were eventually labelled *berserkir*.

We shall now return to the other point which was rejected by Liberman, namely the role of Óðinn in relation to these warrior bands. According to Liberman, this relation is only present in *Ynglinga saga* chapter 6. This may be true if we have to rely on direct evidence only. There is, however, much indirect evidence that should be taken into consideration; and one source is certainly *Hrólfs saga kraka*. As already mentioned, this saga is very late and, of course, some interpretation is needed in order to get behind the medieval setting. One important feature is the picture of Hrólfr as a "noble heathen". Hrólfr was not religiously committed to the pagan gods. Nevertheless, he did have a

---

how different groups of people are related to each other, namely in the same way as different groups of animals are related. Accepting that certain groups of warriors were thought of as bears does not necessarily mean anything else than accepting that players from a certain football club may be called lions or sharks or similar names. They are not thought of as lions or sharks, but when playing football they act like these animals in a metaphorical way.

[33] Cf. chapters 22 and 37.

[34] Kershaw 2000, 57–58.

certain relation to Óðinn which can be seen in chapters 39 and 46, where the king and his *kappar* and many other men come to a farmer called Hrani, who turns out to be Óðinn. During their first visit, he gives them good advice by testing their endurance and telling the king to send home all the men except the *kappar* who, as we have seen, can hardly be separated from the *berserkir*. During the second visit, on their way home from Aðils, he offers them weapons, which, however, are refused by the king. This last incidence may be due to the Christian setting,[35] but the first one is significant. Only the king and those who have shown endurance proper for a warrior are chosen on the advice of the god. And these are the king's *kappar/berserkir*. A relation between Óðinn and the *berserkir* therefore does not seem to be too far-fetched. Further, it should be noticed that the one who recognises that Hrani is actually Óðinn is Bǫðvarr, who, as we have seen, is particularly "bearlike".

In another fornaldar saga, *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* the hero Ásmundr is about to be sacrificed by some *berserker*,[36] but escapes. However, the god to receive the sacrifice is Óðinn, and the reason for sacrificing Ásmundr to this god is to secure victory. Ásmundr himself, with the surname *berserkjabani*, is said to have been killed by Óðinn with a spear[37] in much the same way as other Odinic heroes, for instance Sigmundr. In the saga narrative Ásmundr is certainly not a friend of Óðinn, but by having killed *berserkir* and by being taken home by Óðinn, it seems likely that what is at stake here is a vague memory of some legendary hero who had a special relation to Óðinn during an initiation which made him an Odinic hero—an initiation which consisted in "killing" one or more *berserkir* who would sacrifice him, that is initiate him to the god by whom he is killed in the end.

Thus the warriors who were initiated to Óðinn and had lived their lives as Odinic warriors were taken home by the god himself. But the sources tell us that there is yet another way through which one could

---

[35] It may be significant, though, that as the men suspect that it might have been Óðinn, they know that they have done something silly and try to find Hrani again, but he has disappeared, and they understand that they will not be victorious in the future. Thus even though Óðinn is said to be an evil spirit, they accept his power: that they have cut the bond to the god means that their war-luck has ended.

[36] Chapter 8. Later in the same chapter, after he has escaped, it is said that he killed twelve men, including the berserker.

[37] Chapter 18.

secure (after-) life in Valhǫll, narrated in *Ynglinga saga* chapter 9. Here it is said that Óðinn himself, when he was about to die, "*lét hann marka sik geirsoddi ok eignaði sér alla vápndauða menn, sagði hann sik mundu fara í Goðheima ok fagna þar vinum sínum*".[38] And later in the same chapter, we hear about Njǫrðr that "*lét hann ok marka sik Óðni, áðr hann dó*".[39] It is thus possible to go to Goðheimr, which we must no doubt see as a parallel to Valhǫll, if one is marked with a spear. This is frequently, and no doubt correctly, seen as a parallel to the ritual of throwing out a spear in order to dedicate the enemy to Óðinn. This throwing is in accordance with Snorri's statement that those who die in battle will go to Valhǫll, although it is not said explicitly that a spear was thrown at them. But it is also in accordance with the idea that one could be marked in order to go to Óðinn. Underlying the statement that "*allir þeir menn er í orrosto hafa fallit frá upphafi heims eru nú komnir til Óðins í Valhǫll*" is therefore the knowledge that these men had been dedicated to the god. According to the sources, then, this could happen by either throwing a spear at the enemy or, if a person would die in bed, by marking him with the spear. As is well known, the spear is an attribute of Óðinn, so all this appears quite logical. But both the marking and the throwing are variants of dedications to Óðinn and so, of course, is the initiation that has no doubt preceded the acceptance in the *Männerbünde*, whether these are seen as *berserkir, úlfheðnar* or something else. There is thus no reason to believe that everybody in Valhǫll was initiated to the god through a initiation ritual proper, since it seems as if a whole army of the enemy could be dedicated by the throwing of a spear.

Nevertheless, exactly these initiated men, being professional warriors of course, are the proto-examples of Odinic warriors. This is no doubt the reason why they were in focus in the legendary narratives from a much later period, in which much had been forgotten and only a vague memory is left. It is obvious that we cannot expect that the authors of these narratives from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were aware of the sociological and socio-religious background of these incidents with animal symbolism, initiatory rituals and so forth. It is eventually up to us to try to reconstruct this background,

[38] "*. . . . he had himself marked with the point of a spear, and he decalred as his own all men who fell in battle. He said he was about to depart to the abode of the gods and would there welcome his friends*." (Hollander 1964: 13).

[39] "*He had himself marked for Óthin before he died*". (Hollander 1964: 13).

and although we shall never be able to make these reconstructions perfectly correspond to the reality of the Viking Age and earlier, we should try with the means that are at our disposal.

To return to Óðinn, I believe that these groups of warriors who surrounded the king or the chieftain together with their leader (this king or chieftain) were the basic stock in Valhǫll. Whether every man who was killed by a weapon was supposed to go there, or whether this is a late element, can hardly ever be decided, but my main purpose here has been to show that there was probably a relation between the notions of Valhǫll and some groups of warriors and their leader (the king or chieftain), including the element of marking oneself with a spearhead, or being dedicated to Óðinn by the enemy. However, as mentioned, the initiation proper, to which we shall return in the next section, was probably reserved for only a few select warriors and their leaders.[40]

There are a number of traits that are important in connection with the symbolism at work here. It is definitely no coincidence that the recurring feature is a weapon. Firstly, the spear, as mentioned, is an attribute of Óðinn's and secondly, it kills. It does not surprise that somebody about to die is killed symbolically, but as an element in the initiation complex, we cannot avoid seeing it as an expression of the universal symbolism[41] of initiation, namely the one comprising death and resurrection.[42] As is well known, Óðinn himself was stuck by a spear when he was hanging on the world tree,[43] and King Víkarr is sacrificed to him by being stabbed as well.[44] This makes it likely that killing with a spear (and/or by strangling) on the symbolic level is related to the cult of Óðinn, whether we are talking about sacrifices or initiations.[45] It can thus be argued that the very existence of the spear

---

[40] It is possible that we get an glimpse of a historical development, in the sense that in the Iron Age only the very elite was thought as being able to go to Valhǫll, whereas in a later period warriors in general were supposed to go there.

[41] "Universal", not in the sense that it can be depicted in all rituals of initiation, but that it is found in all parts of the world, and as such must be seen as a symbolism which is not specific for certain cultures.

[42] Cf. Eliade 1975.

[43] *Hávamál* 138–141.

[44] *Gautreks saga* ch. 7. In Saxo's version (*Gesta Danorum* VI, v, 7), the weapon is a sword, but including the whole symbolism surrounding Óðinn, the saga seems to be the most reliable.

[45] The relation between these two important ritual phenomena has been discussed by me earlier (1993). In short, we can state that in initiations there are always some

in these situations binds together the cult of Óðinn and the admittance to Valhǫll.

To summarise so far, we can state that those who venerated Óðinn were those who were initiated (in a more or less direct and a more or less spectacular way) to the god. And they were those who could expect to go to Valhǫll after their death. This means that being initiated to Óðinn was also a way of securing an ideal life after death.[46]

Initiation into the Männerbund: *the example of Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli*

The notion of initiation has been discussed a lot in the previous pages, and it may well be asked whether there is any evidence for such rituals of initiation in connection with warriors. The answer would be, even if there are no direct and explicit descriptions, that there certainly is. Once again we have to turn to the fornaldar sǫgur. As I have shown in earlier articles[47] even in *Hrólfs saga kraka* it is possible to find the pattern of initiation. However, here I shall take the *Sinfjǫtli*-episode in *Vǫlsunga saga* which is without doubt the most famous passage in the context of warrior-initiations, as an example. It has been examined extensively by both Weiser[48] and Höfler[49] with regard to elements of initiation. But before we comment and expand their analysis, I shall give a short summary of the relevant passages from *Vǫlsunga saga*.

King Sigmundr is a son of *Vǫlsungr*, who owes his birth to Óðinn. Sigmundr has nine younger brothers and one sister, Signý. In *Vǫlsungr*'s hall there is a great tree. Siggeir, the king reigning in Götaland, wants to marry Signý. Signý opposes the union, but submits to her father's

---

characteristics which can also be found in most sacrifices, and I would not hesitate to maintain that symbolically and structurally the two phenomena are related (see also Schjødt 2008: 184–202).

[46] The difference between the solutions proposed here and those of Weiser and Höfler is basically that whereas they saw the relation between the groups of dead warriors and those of the living warriors as metaphoric, I suggest that it should be se seen metonymically: the *berserkir become einherjar*, exactly because they *have been berserkir*. But to be sure: *berserkir*, understood as the members of the war bands were not the only category that would go to Valhǫll. Both kings and probably also individual warriors could go there, too, just as 'ordinary' warriors who would die on the battlefield, after having been consecrated to Óðinn, would join the 'god of war'.

[47] Schjødt 2000 and 2003.

[48] Weiser 1927: 70–72.

[49] Höfler 1934: 197–206.

wish. The wedding-feast is held in *Vǫlsungr*'s hall. In the evening a man whom no-one had ever seen before enters the hall. He is old and one-eyed, and thrusts a sword into the tree, up to the hilt. He then announces that the man who is capable to pull out the sword shall have it as a gift, and that it is a particularly good sword. However, no-one manages to pull the sword out of the tree, until Sigmundr tries his luck. He has no difficulty drawing it out. Siggeir wants to buy the sword from Sigmundr, but only gets a scornful refusal. So Siggeir decides to avenge himself, and when Siggeir is about to leave, he invites *Vǫlsungr* and his sons for a visit three months later.

When *Vǫlsungr* and his followers arrive, Signý warns them that Siggeir had mobilised a powerful army, and begs them to return home. To her regret, *Vǫlsungr* refuses with a proud answer. *Vǫlsungr* and his followers are duly attacked and all die except for *Vǫlsungr*'s sons who are taken prisoner. Signý begs Siggeir not to kill her brothers, but to put them in the stocks instead. This is done, in a forest where every night a big female wolf appears who devours one of them. After nine nights in a row, only Sigmundr is still alive. With Signý's help Sigmundr manages to kill the wolf. He then moves into an earth-house in the forest, getting provisions from Signý.

Siggeir believes that all *Vǫlsungr*-sons are dead. He has two sons with Signý. When the elder one is ten years old, Signý sends him out into the forest, where he shall help Sigmundr to take revenge on Siggeir. The boy now has to pass a test: Sigmundr gives him a sack of flour and asks him to bake bread. However, the boy does not dare to do this because of what is inside the sack of flour. Since he shows a lack of courage Signý asks Sigmundr to kill him. The same happens to the younger son.

Later Signý changes appearance with a *seiðr*-woman and goes to her brother in the forest. They lie together for three nights. After she returns home and takes on her own appearance again it is obvious that she is pregnant. She gives birth to a baby-boy who gets the name Sinfjǫtli. When he is ten years old, Signý send also him out into the forest, where he has to pass the same test as her two other sons. Sinfjǫtli starts kneading the dough, and Sigmundr admits that there is a venomenous snake in the flour. (Here the saga says that Sigmundr is fully immune to the poison, while Sinfjǫtli can tolerate it on his skin.)

Father and son now live in the forest for a time. Sigmundr is unaware of the boy's parentage. Once, when they are hunting in the forest, they notice two king's sons sleeping, with their wolf-skins hanging next

to them. Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli pull on the wolf-skins, and cannot get them off anymore. They become like wolves and understand their language. They agree that they shall fight against up to seven people alone, and call upon each other if they encounter more. Sinfjǫtli however attacks eleven men on his own and is injured. When Sigmundr arrives, Sinfjǫtli mocks him because he asks for help against seven, while Sinfjǫtli attacks eleven. Sigmundr jumps on him and bites him into the throat, and carries him home in this way. A raven arrives carrying a leaf for him. Sigmundr presses this against Sinfjǫtli's injury and he recovers immediately. Back in the earth-house Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli take off the wolf-skins and burn them.

Then the two attempt to take revenge on Siggeir, but he takes them prisoner, locking them up in a mound. With Signý's help and using the extraordinary sword Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli manage to escape. They go to Siggeir's hall and set it on fire. Now Signý tells Sigmundr how Sinfjǫtli was conceived. But she wants to die, and goes into the burning hall.

Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli return to the lands of their own family, where Sigmundr becomes a great king. He sires two more sons, Helgi and Hámundr. The ensuing passages focus on Helgi, recounting how he goes to war against King Granmarr. Sinfjǫtli's role in this is to have a fight with Granmarr. After Helgi's victory they return home. Sinfjǫtli becomes a famous warrior who travels around fighting and raiding. During a quarrel over a woman he kills a brother of Borghildr, Sigmundr's wife. When Sinfjǫtli comes home Borghildr wants to avenge her brother and attempts to kill Sinfjǫtli with a poisoned drink. Two times Sinfjǫtli refuses the drink and lets Sigmundr have it instead, but the third time he drinks and falls down dead. Sigmundr picks up his body, and carries it until he reaches a fjord. There he meets a man in a small boat who offers to ferry the body across. But the man can only accept one passenger at a time. He takes Sinfjǫtli's body and vanishes afterwards.

So much for the story about Sinfjǫtli. As said, both Weiser and Höfler examined the episode in detail with regard to elements of initiation, and in many points their analyses are similar. Weiser summarises her view of the episodes in these three points:

> In dieser Geschichte ist einmal eine vollkommene Initiation erzählt: 1. Die Knabenprobe, eine Mut- und Standhaftikeitsprobe. Wie ernst es mit dieser Probe gemeint war sieht man daraus, wie es den beiden anderen Knaben erging. 2. Die Lehrzeit in Tierkleidung und mit

> Tierbesessenheit, in der Kriegsführung und Ausdauer erlernt wird und in der Sinfjötli 3. die Mannhaftigkeitsprobe, sieben bis elf Feinden Stand zu halten, ablegt.[50]

Weiser also correctly underlines that the author of the saga did not understand anymore the significance of many of the elements in the episodes. As the quote shows, Weiser stresses the importance of the apprenticeship, and she finds many comparable examples from other cultures. Höfler adds that Sinfjǫtli's killing and 'rebirth' are highly significant. In his view, it is not by chance that Sinfjǫtli is accorded an honourable place in *Eiríksmál*. Rather, this is explained by the fact that he is to a certain extent an Odinic hero, who is therefore also in death collected by Óðinn himself. However Höfler warns that the part of the saga which describes the probations "suffered rather late changes"[51] so far as the form of the text is concerned.

I do therefore not have any objections against the elements underlined by Weiser and Höfler. Yet there are additional points which merit consideration when we want to gain a more systematic understanding of the elements of initiation in the text.

Initiation commonly concerns the transition of a subject from one state of existence to another which is qualitatively different, and the following elements can always be found, whether they are expressed directly or not:

(1) In the final condition the subject has achieved an irreversibly higher status than in the initial condition.
(2) The process can be subdivided into three phases: one where the subject leaves the 'natural' world; one where the subject is in 'another' world (frequently described as akin to death or as a sojourn outside the world of humans); and one where the subject returns to the first world.
(3) The relation between the two worlds is explained in a number of binary opposition pairs.
(4) During the process some sort of numinous knowledge is acquired.[52]

---

[50] Weiser 1927: 70–71.
[51] Höfler 1934: 201.
[52] I have dealt with the criteria in several publications. References can be found in Schjødt 2008: 72–84.

If we apply these elements to the story related above we note that not only Sinfjǫtli, but also Sigmundr goes through a process that shows many of the characteristics of an initiation. We cannot go into the details here, and we shall only point out the fact that also Sigmundr is an Óðinn-hero. Óðinn had played a role in Sigmundr's birth (his mother was probably a valkyrie), Óðinn arranges the trial through which Sigmundr obtains the magic sword, and Óðinn takes Sigmundr 'home'.

Turning back to Sinfjǫtli, we note that he, too, is an Óðinn-hero when we look at the conclusion of the story: Óðinn himself takes him back after his death. We can probably partly explain Sinfjǫtli's affiliation to Óðinn with his descent from the god through father and mother alike. In addition, as Weiser and Höfler have pointed out, Sinfjǫtli went through a number of trials which recall initiation rituals. An analysis of the process shows, firstly, the young Sinfjǫtli who moves out into the forest to Sigmundr, where he passes his first test (the flour). This whole sequence needs to be seen as a sojourn in another world: Sinfjǫtli and Sigmundr live in solitude and outside the civilised world. The character of this world as 'another' is underlined by the fact that Sinfjǫtli literally leaves his human shape. He becomes a wolf and learns the language of wolves. In this shape he passes a test which is rather important for a warrior, daring to attack superior numbers. At the same time though, he also learns that there should be a sensible relation between the warrior and the number of opponents, since he is severely punished and dies of these wounds. It seems that the episode with Sigmundr, who bites Sinfjǫtli into the throat and then heals him again with the leaf, describes a symbolic death and rebirth. Thus death is not absolute, but leads to a rebirth—which is also the case with the *einherjar* in Valhall.[53] Immediately after his rebirth Sinfjǫtli can take off his wolf-skin and be human again. The burning of Siggeir's hall may be yet another trial. It is in any case after this event that Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli return 'home' to the world where they originally came from, and where they enjoy the respective status of ruler and warrior. So we see a process where the untried warrior moves out into another world, where he experiences extreme challenges to warriors (the wolf-skin), and where he learns what a warrior should and should not do.

[53] Cf. Schjødt 2008: 387–393.

This culminates in his death and rebirth as a 'genuine' warrior, a function which he shall fulfil for the rest of his life.

This allows us to discern the binary opposition pairs that characterise the relation between 'this' and 'the other' world: culture versus nature, human versus beastlike, life versus death, and a pair which we always find in the ideology of initiation, the world above versus the world below. Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli live in an earth-house, which is the only possibility to depict the world below in a 'realistic' (or ritualistic) scenario.

Thus we note that all of the above four elements are present: an irreversibly higher status (as warrior) in the final condition; three phases in the horizontal structure; the manifestation of a number of binary opposition pairs; and the acquisition of knowledge or ability, in the first instance through the metamorphosis into wolves, but also indirectly through learning the wolves' language.

The analysis could easily be continued. For example, it is striking that both ravens and wolves play a central role. As is well known, both animals are associated with Óðinn. It might also be interesting to compare more closely Sigmundr's and Sinfjǫtli's roles during the final phase. Sigmundr becomes a famous king whereas Sinfjǫtli is certainly not a king, but exclusively a warrior.[54]

We should beware of postulating that the episodes quoted from *Vǫlsunga saga* correspond to any ritual as actually conducted. Our lack of knowledge of Nordic rituals during the Viking Age does not permit such claims, even if there may be elements that were actually played out in some kind of ritual performance. On the other hand, we need to accept the following inescapable conclusion: during the late (and probably also early) pagan period in Scandinavia there existed an idea that the genuine warrior, in order to fulfil his functions, on the one hand needed to have a special relationship with Óðinn, and on the other hand needed to be prepared for his position through an introduction to the genuine character of a warrior. Consequently, even if we cannot say what precisely would have happened during an initiation ritual, we can claim that the literary and semi-mythical sources show which thoughts and concepts form the basis of such rituals. For example that physical prowess alone was not enough, but that some

[54] This difference has been analysed in greater detail in Schjødt 2008: 310–312.

religious 'knowledge' was required as well—a religious knowledge[55] which one could only acquire through communication with 'the other world', by becoming an animal and experiencing a beast's ferocity.

Conclusion

It is obvious that on the basis of the information given in such literary work as the fornaldar sögur and other textual genres within and outside the Old Norse area, we will not be able to establish a coherent set of notions concerning the warrior bands or the initiation rituals, participation in which was a prerequisite for joining the former. Our failure is due to at least two reasons. Firstly, these sources were written and orally transmitted by people who had been Christians for their whole lives, and who had probably never attended the rituals described. Nevertheless, the basic traits must have been orally transmitted in narrative disguise since the pagan era, with all the transformations that one would expect, but still retaining the basic structures. Thus what we witness here is a process taking us from rituals to history.[56] This process obviously blurs the picture we can form of the rituals, and it is therefore up to us, the scholars of modern times, to create the models from which it becomes possible to grasp the pagan setting in the medieval stories.

Secondly, even if many contradictions can be explained with reference to the character of the sources, we also have to take into consideration that there probably never was a single coherent view on these matters. Just like religious people nowadays hold different views on many issues within a certain religion (take, for example, Christianity or Islam) views in pagan times differed from person to person and from one society to another, even though there were some stable structures as well. Views in pagan times varied probably even more than today, since there were only traditions, and no canonical scriptures. Thus, we should not expect a coherent 'dogmatic' system in these religions.

---

[55] This sort of privileged knowledge which we may also call 'numinous' is not as easy to see in this narrative as is the case in many other 'initiation' scenarios, for instance the one in which Sigurðr is the protagonist, later in *Vǫlsunga saga*.

[56] 'History' here corresponds to fiction in the title of Dumézil's book on Hadingus *From Myth to Fiction*. Fiction would be a contemporary term, whereas 'history' is what it was seen as in the Middle Ages (cf. the conclusions in Meulengracht Sørensen 1993).

It may be hard to decide whether discrepancies within our sources are due to the first or the second of these reasons, for instance regarding the question of whether the warrior bands were connected especially to bears *or* to wolves: are we facing misunderstandings in some of our sources, or were some bands simply connected especially to wolves while others "preferred" bears? Or was there a more systematic division, connecting certain warriors to bears, but others to wolves? We will never know for sure, but it appears beyond reasonable doubt that warrior bands as well as initiations into these did exist as an important element in the Scandinavian (and probably the Germanic) conception of the warrior, together with the mythic concept of Óðinn as the god who would give him the mental skills which were necessary for fulfilling his functions.

Bibliography

Sources

ADAM OF BREMEN *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, ed. by B. Schmeidler, 3rd edn. Hannover and Leipzig 1917.

—— *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. F. J. Tschan. New York 2002.

Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana.Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda III. Ed by Guðni Jónsson. Reykjavík 1954.

Gautreks saga. Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda IV. Ed. by Guðni Jónsson, Reykjavík 1954.

Hrólfs saga kraka. Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda I. Ed. by Guðni Jónsson. Reykjavík 1954.

SAXO *Gesta Danorum* ed. by J. Olrik and H. Ræder. Copenhagen 1931.

SNORRI STURLUSON *Ynglinga saga, Heimskringla I. Íslenzk Fornrit* 26. Ed .by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík 1941.

—— *Ynglinga saga. Heimskringla. History of the Kings of Norway*, trans. L. M. Hollander, 2nd. edn. Austin 1992.

—— *Gylfaginning. Edda 1*. Ed. by A. Faulkes, 2nd. edn. London 2005.

—— *Edda*, trans. A. Faulkes, London 1987.

Vǫlsunga saga. Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda I. Ed. by Guðni Jónsson, Reykjavík 1954.

Studies

Bertell, Maths 2003. *Tor och den nordiska åskan: föreställningar kring världsaxelen.* Stockholm.

Dumézil, Georges 1958. *L'idéologie tripartie des Indo-Européens.* Bruxelles.

—— 1971. *Mythe et épopée II Types épiques indo-européens. Un heros, un sorcier, un roi.* Paris.

—— 1985. *Heur et malheur du guerrier.* 2nd. ed. Paris.

Eliade, Mircea 1975. *Rites and Symbols of Initiation.* New York.

Höfler, Otto 1934. *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* 1. Frankfurt am Main.

Kershaw, Kris 2000. *The One-eyed God. Odin and the (Indo-)Germanic Männerbünde*. Washington D.C.

Liberman, Anatoly 2003. *Berserkir*: A Double Legend, *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages. Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference Bonn/ Germany, 28th July–2nd August 2003.* Ed by Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer, Bonn 337–340.

—— 2005. Berserks in History and Legend, *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 32.3–4, 401–411.

Lundager Jensen, Hans Jørgen and Jens Peter Schjødt 1994. *Suveræniteten, kampen og frugtbarheden. Georges Dumézil og den indoeuropæiske ideologi.* Aarhus.

Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben 1993. *Fortælling og ære. Studier i islændingesagaerne.* Aarhus.

Nordberg, Andreas 2003. *Krigarna i Odins sal. Dödsföreställningar och krigarkult i fornnordisk religion.* Stockholm.

Näsström, Britt-Mari 2001. *Fornskandinavisk religion. En grundbok.* Lund.

Schjødt, Jens Peter 1990. Det sakrale kongedømme i det førkristne Skandinavien, *Chaos. Dansk-norsk tidsskrift for religionshistoriske studier* 13, 48–67.

—— 1993. The Relation between the two Phenomenological Categories Initiation and Sacrifice as Exemplified by the the Norse Myth of Óðinn on the Tree, *The Problem of Ritual.* Ed. by Tore Ahlbäck, Åbo, 261–274.

—— 2000. Balder og Höt—om guder, helte og initiationsritualer, *International and Scandinavian Studies in Memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber*. Ed. by Michael Dallapiazza et al. Trieste, 421–33.

—— 2003. Myths as Sources for Rituals—Theoretical and Practical Implications, *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society.* Ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross. Odense, 261–278.

—— 2004. Kosmologimodeller og mytekredse, *Ordning mot kaos. Studier av nordisk förkristen kosmologi.* Ed. by Anders Andrén et al., Lund, 123–133.

—— 2008. *Initiation between Two Worlds. Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion.* Odense.

—— forthcoming. Diversity and its Consequences for the Study of Old Norse Religion—What is it We are Trying to Reconstruct, *Title of publication not decided.* Ed. by Leszek Slupecki, Rzeszow 2009.

Steinsland, Gro 1997. *Eros og død I norrøne myter*, Oslo.

—— 2005. *Norrøn religion. Myter, riter, samfunn.* Oslo.

Weiser, Lily 1927. *Altgermanische Jünglingsweihen und Männerbünde. Ein Beitrag zur deutschen und nordischen Altertums- und Volkskunde.* Baden.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ÓÐINN, VALHǪLL AND THE EINHERJAR. ESCHATOLOGICAL MYTH AND IDEOLOGY IN THE LATE VIKING PERIOD

Anders Hultgård

Introduction

The present contribution investigates the role played by eschatology in the religious beliefs and politics of the ruling elites of Scandinavia in a period when a decisive religious change is already underway: the late Viking Period. The focus will be on the idea of Óðinn welcoming his heroes in Valhǫll, and on the cultural and political circumstances under which this myth functioned as ideology.

Two poems of the tenth century, *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*, tell us about the welcoming of a king in Valhǫll. Together with some stanzas of *Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál* they are the first witnesses to the idea of a glorious afterlife in the hall of Óðinn.[1] They are the basis for Snorri's presentation in his *Prose-Edda* and ultimately also for the modern understanding of the Valhǫll idea. The myth of Óðinn and Valhǫll has been treated repeatedly in previous research and it is not my purpose to reconsider it in every detail.[2] Some aspects, however, deserve to be more profoundly investigated, and especially the significance of the political and social contexts could be emphasised in a different way than has been done hitherto.

Strangely enough *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* were composed in honour of two Norwegian rulers whom tradition regarded as having been Christian. Information gleaned from medieval historiography may help to elucidate this paradox. Before addressing the eschatology of the two poems it seems appropriate to give a short survey of the variety of afterlife beliefs found in the sources.

---

[1] Cf. Neckel 1913: 53. The eddaic poems *Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál* describe the topography of Valhǫll and the life of the otherworldly warriors, the Einherjar, but not the welcoming of fallen heroes by Óðinn.

[2] Among the many contributions the following have a particular significance: Neckel 1913; Ellis Davidson 1943; Nordberg 2004; Dillmann 2007.

Afterlife ideas among the ancient Scandinavians

The concept of eschatology includes both the afterlife (individual eschatology) and the end and renewal of the world (cosmic or universal eschatology). Little is known about the genuine afterlife ideas of the ancient Scandinavians; whereas Christian medieval eschatology is well documented in Old Norse texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, although they include fewer descriptions of the end of the world than of heaven and hell. In native Scandinavian tradition cosmic eschatology is represented by the myth of Ragnarǫk which also includes the idea of a renewal of the world.

Old Norse sources hint at a wide variety of afterlife beliefs ranging from coming to the realm of Hel below, to survival after death in mounds and hills, and to living with the gods in their dwelling places.[3] There was, as it seems, a more widespread Germanic belief in a nether world, called Hel (Gothic *halja*; Old English *hell*, Old High German *hella*; Old Norse *hel*) where the dead went, men as well as women, irrespective of the way they died.[4] Even gods could end up in Hel as the Baldr myth shows. Although, unlike Christian hell, Hel was not a place of pain and punishment, medieval mythography depicted it in dark and inhospitable colours.[5] It seems however that Hel was not as gloomy and exempt of joyfulness as some sources make it. The eddic poem *Baldrs Draumar* paints another picture.[6] In Scandinavian mythology Hel was also considered to be a goddess.[7] Reminiscences of Hel as a general afterlife-place are found in the concept and custom of *binda helskó* i.e. to tie a particular pair of shoes on the feet of the dead with which to walk to the other world.[8] According to the short redaction (M) of *Gísli saga* 14, Þorgrímr says to Gísli: "*þat er tizka… at*

---

[3] For an overview, see Neckel 1913; Ellis Davidson 1943: 65–99; Hultgård 2002; Nordberg 2003: 69–73; Simek 2006; Dillmann 2007; cf. also Schjødt 2007: 140.

[4] This can be seen e. g. from *Atlamál* 97; cf. Fjeld Halvorsen 1961.

[5] Snorri's description in *Gylfaginning* 34 is a well known example; cf. also de Vries 1956–57 § 581 and Simek 2003: 209 who assume a Christian influence on this passage of the Prose-Edda.

[6] See for this Nordberg 2004: 72.

[7] Expressions like "*the halls of Hel*" in *Vǫluspá* 43 and "*the house of Hel*" in *Baldrs Draumar* 3 indicate this personification; for a discussion of this personification see Simek 2003:208 and Nordberg 2004: 70–73.

[8] On this idea and custom, see Strömbäck 1970.

binda mǫnnum helskó, þá er þeir skulu ganga til Valhallar."[9] In the longer redaction (S) we find a somewhat different though more genuine version without the mention of Valhǫll: "*þat er nú siðr… at binda helskó at fótum mǫnnum áðr í haug eru lagðir því at þat var þá mælt at þeir skyldi til heljar fara*."[10] The use of the word *menn,* which should be translated as "people", indicates that women too are considered to be included.

We have no reliable evidence on which categories of people went to Hel. The statement of the *Prose Edda* that those who died of sickness and old age were sent to her is often cited, but this appears rather as a rationalization by Snorri.

By contrast another Germanic idea, that of a *post mortem* existence in the green meadows of the other world can be deduced from the use of the Old English term *neorxnawang* for the Christian paradise. The first element is unexplained, but the term *wang* "field, meadow" (Old Norse *vangr*) corresponds with Gothic *vaggs* that renders the Greek *parádeisos* in the Bible.[11] The term *wang* was most probably chosen because it had an eschatological connotation in pre-Christian Germanic culture.

Ideas of the afterlife also seem to be related to differences in social position and occupation in life. The well known statement of *Hárbarðslióð* 24 that Óðinn owns the *jarlar* who fall in battle but Þórr the slaves (*þræla kyn*) is a contrastive device belonging to the genre. As for Þórr it is certainly biased, as can also be inferred from the archaeological record (see below). The god Þórr appears to have been the main deity worshipped by the free farmers, the *karlar*, as well as by many members of the local elite.

Allusions to the destiny of women beyond death are extremely rare in the literary sources. In view of the richly furnished female graves

---

[9] "*It is a custom… to tie Helshoes on people when they shall walk to Valhǫll*". The mention of Valhǫll in this context reflects the idea of many medieval Icelanders that Valhǫll once had been a general afterlife-place. If not otherwise stated all translations in the present chapter are my own.

[10] Normalised after the diplomatic text in Loth 1960: 29; "*It is actually a tradition… to tie Helshoes on the feet of people before they are laid in the mound because it was said at that time, that they would go to Hel*".

[11] 2 Cor. 2, 14. The other passages in the Greek Bible where *parádeisos* occurs have not been preserved in the incomplete Gothic Bible.

such as the ship burials of Oseberg in Norway[12] and Tuna in Sweden,[13] we have to ask what the afterlife beliefs of aristocratic Viking Age women were.[14] They must have hoped for something more than a shady existence in a gloomy underworld, perhaps they expected to join a particular god or goddess in the afterlife.

The concept that the dead came to join a particular deity in his or her dwelling place seems to have been the more general belief. The hope for a *post mortem* existence in the abode of a god or a goddess is best attested for the god Óðinn who welcomes rulers and warriors in Valhǫll. For Freyja we have stanza 14 of *Grímnismál* stating that she lives in Fólkvangr where she determines the choice of seats in the hall and also chooses half of the fallen men (*hálfan val*) each day, whereas Óðinn owns the other half. *Egils saga* may indicate a belief of women joining the goddess Freyja in the afterlife. After having been informed of the death of her brother and of Egil's intention not to live any longer, Þorgerðr refuses to take her evening meal saying she will not have it until she shall be with Freyja: "*engan hefi ek náttverð haft, ok engan mun ek, fyrr en at Freyju… vil ek ekki lifa eptir fǫður minn ok bróður.*"[15] If not just a metaphor, the idea that those who have drowned come to Rán, the mistress of the sea, belongs to the same type of afterlife belief and suggests additionally a correlation between the type of death and the *post mortem* existence.[16]

Archaeological material from burials in the Mälar-region in eastern Sweden indicates that both women and men might also have hoped for an afterlife with Þórr. Iron rings to which pendants in the form of hammers were attached have been found in considerable numbers. These iron-rings were most probably worn as necklaces and had been carefully deposed on or around the urn that contained the ashes.[17] This suggests a commitment to Þórr which was thought to continue

[12] For a general presentation, see Christensen et al. 1992 and for an interpretation of its significance as an afterlife symbolism, see Steinsland 1991: 429–431.

[13] Nylén & Schönbäck 1994.

[14] Cf. also Roesdal 1992: 161.

[15] *Egils saga* 78: "*I have not had any evening meal and I shall not have one until I be with Freyja… I do not wish to live after the death of my father and my brother*".

[16] The first attestation of this idea is stanza 7 of *Sonatorrek* composed by Egill Skallagrímsson in the 10th century. The idea is also found in the heroic poems *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* I 30 and *Helgakviða Hiǫrvarðssonar* 18.

[17] For this type of material, see K. Ström 1984.

beyond death. In this context, a slight preponderance of their number in female graves should be noted.

An ethical dimension also seems to have been present in some Scandinavian circles, to the effect that a person's behaviour in this life is related to his or her destiny in the afterlife. Stanzas 38–39 of *Vǫluspá* describe an inhospitable hall in a place called "Corpse-strand" (*Nástrǫnd*) where murderers, those who swear false oaths and those who seduce another man's wife stay. The idea of a *post mortem* place of punishment as expressed in *Vǫluspá* should not be attributed too easily to Christian influence since the basic idea forms part of many cultures worldwide. Stanza 64 of the same poem describing the shining hall at Gimlé, a sort of paradise thought of as a reward for those who have been "trustful", may at first be interpreted as the counterpart to the place of punishment described in the above-mentioned stanzas. Looking closer, however, the 'paradise' of Gimlé belongs to a different context, that of the future world after Ragnarǫk, which therefore still awaits its realisation.

To conclude, the evidence points to afterlife ideas among the ancient Scandinavians varying with social position, cultural milieu and geographical provenance.[18]

The uses of eschatological myths in the creation of ideologies appear most clearly in the case of Óðinn and Valhǫll, and it is to that idea that we will now turn.

The eschatological Óðinn mythology and its sources

With the term 'eschatological Óðinn mythology' I denote the complex of ideas that is centred around Óðinn's role in welcoming rulers and heroes to his hall in the other world, the concept and role of the Einherjar, and finally Óðinn as the chief protagonist of gods and men at Ragnarǫk. At one stage in the development of this mythology which most probably has roots far back in time, the god's dwelling place came to be known as Valhǫll, that is, "the hall of the *valr*", with the Old Norse word *valr* meaning "those who fall on the battlefield".[19]

[18] Cf. Dillmann 2007: 359.

[19] For this interpretation of *valr* and *Valhǫll*, see Neckel 1913:1–30; Nordberg 2004: 56–60; Dillmann 2007: 342.

The two poems focused on here, *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*, are our main evidence for the eschatological Óðinn mythology. We have to bear in mind that these poems also are the *only* explicit Viking Age expressions of that eschatological myth. Other tenth century poems in honour of fallen kings, such as Glúmr's *Gráfeldrdrápa*, do not refer to the Valhǫll mythology. It should however be noted that *Gráfeldrdrápa's* final part is incompletely preserved. No *erfidrápa* (if ever composed) has been transmitted for Hákon jarl and *Vellekla* has no explicit reference to the afterlife. *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* have been preserved in manuscripts dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (or later copies of these manuscripts) and the form of language shows that they belong to that period.[20] The tenth century Old Norse form the poems once had was slightly modified in the process of oral transmission and then written down in thirteenth century language form.[21] This is no hindrance to our interpretation since the modifications did not affect the contents. Following the assertion of *Fagrskinna* 2 that Eyvindr skaldaspillir took *Eiríksmál* as a model for his poem on King Hákon, *Hákonarmál*, scholars have emphasised the relationship between the two poems and discussed similarities and differences, as well as the question of seniority.[22] This discussion will not be pursued here since it is of lesser importance to the interpretation of the poems' religious contents. In my view the differences prevail and the poems also reflect different situations. They should rather be treated as related variant expressions of a specific afterlife concept which, to judge from the provenance of the sources, circulated primarily among elite groups in tenth century Norway.

Eiríksmál

According to *Fagrskinna* 8 Gunnhildr had a poem composed after the fall of Eiríkr, her husband, describing how he was welcomed by Óðinn in Valhǫll: "*Eptir fall Eiríks lét Gunnhildr yrkja kvæði um hann, svá*

[20] The edition used for these two poems is that of Jón Helgason in *Skjaldevers*. I agree with the principles of editing stated by Jón (*Skjaldevers* p. 8), i. e. to normalize the orthography but to keep the language-form as transmitted in the manuscripts.

[21] Cf. Fidjestøl 1999: 238.

[22] Marold 1972; Kreutzer 1986 and 1999a; Nordberg 2004, 48–54. Most scholars follow the author of *Fagrskinna*, but some argue in favour of the priority of *Hákonarmál*, notably von See 1963.

sem Óðinn fagnaði hónum í Valhǫll."[23] The title of the poem has been preserved by Snorri,[24] but the poet's name has not survived. Óðinn appears as the main speaker, in some passages there is a dialogue between Óðinn and Bragi or Sigmundr. In the last stanza, however, the dead hero himself is speaking.

The transmission of *Eiríksmál* is not the best, with exception of stanza 1 which is preserved both in the *Prose Edda* of Snorri and in *Fagrskinna*. Stanzas 2 to 9 survive only in one of the two recensions of *Fagrskinna* which has left us with a rather faulty text.[25] For the problem of changes in the text prior to the time when the poems were written down the first stanza of the *Eiríksmál* is of importance. In this stanza there are differences in wording between the two main manuscript branches. The text in the *Prose Edda* of Snorri runs:

> "What kind of dreams are these, Óðinn said. I dreamt (*Ek hugðumk*), I rose before dawn (*fyr dag rísa*)…"

whereas *Fagrskinna* reads:

> "What kind of dreams are these, Óðinn said, that I dreamt (*er ek hugðumk*) shortly before dawn (*fyr dag litlu*)…"

The main divergence in the following lines is that Snorri has the verbal forms in the subjunctive while *Fagrskinna* gives the indicatives, as shown below:

Snorri's *Edda*	*Fagrskinna*
vekða ek	*vakða ek*
bæða ek	*bað ek*

According to the text preserved in Snorri's *Edda*, Óðinn reports what his dreams were, that he "woke up the Einherjar to clear up Valhǫll…, that he told the *valkyrjur* to strew the benches…"; whereas the meaning

[23] *Fagrskinna* 8: *"After the fall of Eiríkr Gunnhildr had a poem composed for him describing how Óðinn welcomed him in Valhǫll"*. The poem is then cited.

[24] *Snorri's Edda, Skaldskaparmál* 10, 13 (ed. Faulkes): *svá er sagt i Eiríksmálum "it is said thus in the Eiríksmál"*.

[25] The poem is found only in recension A of *Fagrskinna* but not in recension B which is older and better; cf. Jón Helgason *Skjaldevers* p. 8. In stanzas 2–9 the text has to be improved in some passages to be comprehensible; the following words in the editions are emendations: *skalattu* stanza 3, *Eiríki* stanza 4, *gǫgn* stanza 5, g*engr* is added in stanza 7.

of the *Fagrskinna* version is that Óðinn himself performs the acts described by the verbs, "he woke up…, he told" etc., as a consequence of the dreams he had, but the precise content of his dreams is not revealed.

The differences in the above wording could be related to the process of oral transmission. The other differences in stanza 1 may be explained by that process, but could also be interpreted as variant readings produced during the copying of a written text.[26] For several reasons it seems that the text of Snorri is to be preferred.[27]

Irrespective of what text version is used, the purpose of stanza 1 is to show how Valhǫll is prepared for the welcoming of an outstanding person (*vísi*) and his warriors (*fyr vegnu fólki*). The Einherjar shall clear up the hall, and the Valkyries shall rise to strew the benches, to clean the drinking vessels and to bring the wine (*vín bera*).[28]

We are then told that Óðinn expects the arrival of some distinguished men from the world (*ór heimi*) and that this gladdens his heart (2). Bragi then asks what that noise is which sounds like a thousand men or a large multitude moving ahead (*bifisk*); all the bench planks crack as if Baldr was to return (*koma eptir*) to Óðinn's hall (3).

Óðinn admonishes Bragi for his ignorance: he, if anyone, ought to know that the din announces Eiríkr, who is about to enter Óðinn's hall (4). Óðinn tells Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli to rise quickly and go to meet the prince (*gramr*) and, if it is Eiríkr, to invite him in. They shall know that he is the one expected by Óðinn (5). Sigmundr asks Óðinn why he is expecting Eiríkr rather than other kings. Óðinn answers that Eiríkr has reddened his sword in many a country (6). Sigmundr replies, "why did you then take the victory from him, if you thought him able (*snjallr*)"? Óðinn answers by referring to the uncertainty of knowing when the grey wolf will attack the homes of the gods (7). Eiríkr is welcomed by Sigmundr who invites him into the hall and who asks him if he is followed by other princes from the battle (8). The last stanza (9) has Eiríkr speaking: "*Konungar eru fimm—sagði Eiríkr—, kenni ek þér nafn allra, ek em hinn sétti siálfr*".[29]

---

[26] These are *biórker* (R W T) "beer vessels", *borðker* (U, 761) "table vessels", *borker* (A), and *leyðra* "clean" (*Snorri's Edda*) as opposed to *lyðra* (*Fagrskinna*).

[27] Sahlgren 1927: 4–5.

[28] This is the distribution of responsibilities between *Einherjar* and *valkyrjur* that is suggested by the structure of the text.

[29] "There are five kings, I can tell you the names of all of them, I am myself the sixth one".

Much of the scholarly discussion has centred on the ending of the poem and the 'five kings' who accompany Eiríkr (stanzas 8–9). The argument that one expects the names of these kings to have been mentioned leads to the conclusion that the poem is incompletely preserved.[30] On the other hand if the expression 'five kings' is regarded as a conventional poetic device and does not refer to historical kings, the poem has an appropriate ending and we should not expect anything else to follow.[31]

Hákonarmál

This poem is preserved both in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* and has thus a more solid manuscript basis. It was composed by Eyvindr Finnsson skáldaspillir, but we do not know who commissioned the poem. Perhaps Eyvindr himself took the initiative, being at the same time a relative and a close friend of the king. The date of composition would be some time after the battle at Fitjar in 960. The unity of the poem has been questioned but most scholars accept the poem in the way it now stands.[32]

The poem opens with the statement that Óðinn sent two valkyries, Gǫndul and Skǫgul, to choose who among the kings of Yngvi's kin should come to him and be in Valhǫll (1). They find Hákon prepared for struggle and in the good company of the Northmen (2 and 3). Before starting the battle the king throws his mail-coat on the ground (4). The intensity of the battle is then described with traditional skaldic imagery (5 to 8). The poet depicts the desolation after the battle, the heroes sit with damaged armour and the host on the way to Valhǫll is not in a good mood (9). Gǫndul proclaims that the retinue of the

[30] This is the more common view, e.g. Sahlgren 1927: 24; Harris 1984; Kreutzer 1986; Downham 2004: 63.

[31] Thus Seeberg 1978–81 who also suggests that the topic of the "five kings" ultimately derives from the Bible. We may note that the expression "five young kings lay on the battle-field" occurs in the verse description of the battle at Brunanburh (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* version A for the year 937). In the *Hǫfuðlausn* of Óttarr svarti 18 it is said that Óláfr now rules the land which five kings (*fimm bragningar*) once possessed. Based on other arguments de Vries 1964:141 considers that the preserved stanzas represent the original composition.

[32] Sahlgren 1927 distinguished two independent poems (*Hákonarmál I*, stanzas 3–9 composed in málaháttr, and *Hákonarmál II*, stanzas 1–2, 10–20 (21) in ljóðaháttr. The first one is a victory poem, the second one is a memorial lay. The reasons he adduces are worth considering but the hypothesis rests on presuppositions that can be questioned.

gods would increase when they invite Hákon home with his host (10). When the king hears what the Valkyries say, he complains that he did not get any help from the gods. Skǫgul replies that the Valkyries nevertheless decided that his enemies would flee. The two Valkyries ride to the verdant realm of the gods to announce to Óðinn that a great ruler shall come and stand in his presence (11–13). Óðinn tells Hermod and Bragi to meet King Hákon and to ensure that he enters the hall (14). The king, coming directly from the battle and stained with blood, replies that Óðinn appears most untrustworthy to him and his followers, and that they fear his intentions (15). Bragi promises the king that he would have the peace of all the Einherjar and that he could therefore safely drink beer with the gods, his eight brothers being already present in the hall (16). King Hákon is still wary and says that he shall keep his weapons at hand (17). The attitude of the gods changes when it is made known how well Hákon had respected the holy shrines. All the gods now welcome the king (18). The three stanzas that follow praise Hákon (19–21). It is said with reference to Hákon that the person is born in a lucky hour who has achieved for himself such a great heart, his time will always be spoken of as good (19). The uniqueness of Hákon is further underlined by a formula that refers to Ragnarǫk:

> Free from his ties the wolf Fenrir will rush against the dwelling-places of men until a king as good as Hákon follows in the empty track (20).

Finally the desolate situation after his death is described in stanza 21. Cattle and men die, the country is ravaged; since Hákon joined the heathen gods people suffer oppression.

Additional sources

For the myth of Óðinn welcoming fallen heroes into his hall *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* are the primary witnesses.[33] *Grímnismál* refers implicitly to the myth by stating that Óðinn chooses slain warriors in Valhǫll: "*en þar Hroptr kýss hverian dag vápndauða menn*".[34] As we have seen the poem further states that Óðinn shares the fallen men

[33] For an overview of the sources on Valhǫll, see Dillmann 2007.
[34] *Grímnismál* 8: "*And there Óðinn chooses every day men killed in battle*".

with Freyja.[35] Another implicit reference to the eschatological Óðinn mythology is given by the tenth century poet Glúmr Geirason who says of a contemporary ruler (either Eiríkr blóðøx or Haraldr gráfeldr) that he ravaged in Scotland and sent a multitude of slain warriors to Óðinn.[36] A similar phraseology is used in *Hákonardrápa* of Þórleifr jarlsskáld, where we are told that Hákon jarl sent nine noble chieftains to Óðinn.[37] The same ruler is said to have given a new *valr* to Óðinn.[38]

Other sources are later and in general secondary. The poem *Krákumál* inserted in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is dated to the twelfth century. It may testify to a continuity of the Valhǫll idea in some circles or it may just be a literary convention based on knowledge of earlier written texts.

Apart from the first part of *Heimskringla* only a few passages within the genre of kings' sagas mention the Valhǫll idea, *Fagrskinna* 7 and 13, and *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum* 9. The descriptions in Snorri's *Prose Edda*, in the first place *Gylfaginning* 38–41, do not seem to have an independent value as a primary source except for some mythic details.[39] The references to Valhǫll in the Icelandic family sagas and the Fornaldarsǫgur (*Hervarar saga* 3 is the most important) are rare and of varying value.

Christian rulers in a pagan paradise

As noted above, according to medieval sources the two kings to whom the poems were dedicated had adopted Christianity, albeit under different circumstances. Yet their poets promised the kings an afterlife in the paradise of the most prominent non-Christian deity. How can we

---

[35] *Grímnismál* 14: "*hálfan val hón kýss hverian dag en halfan Óðinn á*", that is: "*she (Freyja) chooses every day half of the fallen men but Óðinn owns the other half*".

[36] *Heimskringla, Saga Hákonar góða* 5 where the stanza is cited and related to one of the sons of Eiríkr, probably Haraldr gráfeldr, but it might originally have been part of a poem dedicated to Eiríkr, see Finnur Jónsson , *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* A I: 75; Dillmann 2000: 474. Fidjestøl 1982: 90–91 on the other hand considers it wiser to follow the opinion expressed by the medieval sources that have preserved the poetry.

[37] *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* A I, 141.

[38] Tindr, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* A I, 147.

[39] *Gylfaginning* 49 on the *mistilteinn* growing west of Valhǫll; see for this Dillmann 2007.

explain this apparent paradox? We are faced with a problem involving politics, mentality and religious change. In order to approach a solution, we must first look at the way in which medieval historiography described those kings in terms of their Christian behaviour and convictions, as well as their attitudes towards the pagan religion professed by the vast majority of their compatriots. This aspect is part of the cultural and historical setting of the poems.

In addition, the question of personal religion will be touched upon. Is it possible to get beyond the tendentious and partly legendary descriptions found in the later historiographic tradition, and to come close to the personal beliefs of these two rulers? Whether it is possible to answer this question or not, the main problem remains, however: in what way can we reconcile the alleged Christian faith of Eiríkr Bloodaxe and Hákon the good with the fundamentally pagan worldview that permeates their praise poems? The problem is complicated and opens up for different interpretations.

The first king, Eiríkr, nicknamed *blóðøx*, "bloodaxe", receives far less attention than his successor Hákon when it comes to matters of personal belief and religious politics. Some of the sources are entirely silent on this point,[40] while others state quite clearly that Eiríkr converted to Christianity.[41] One may assume that this change of religious adherence which also included his family and followers, would have been a condition for being appointed vassal ruler over Northumbria by the English king Æthelstan, as in fact indicated by the wording in *Heimskringla*. Eiríkr was to protect Northumbria against "Danes and other vikings" and *skyldi láta skírask ok kona hans ok bǫrn þeira ok allt lið hans*,[42] The matter is complicated by the fact that we cannot be certain that the Eiríkr of York mentioned in English and Irish sources is the same person as the Norwegian Eiríkr Bloodaxe. Doubt has recently been cast on this identification by Clare Downham.[43] According to her

---

[40] Theodoricus Monachus *Historia* 2; *Ágrip* 7; *Egils saga* 59.

[41] *Historia Norwegie* 12 says he was cleansed in the spring of baptism: "*fonteque baptismatis lotus*"; *Fagrskinna* 7: states that he was baptized and adopted the Christian faith: "*þar tók Eiríkr skirn ok trú retta*"; *Heimskringla, Hákonar saga góða* 3; cf. also *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar by Oddr Munk* 1 where it is said that the sons of Gunnhildr had been baptized in England.

[42] *Hákonar saga góða* 3: "*He should have himself baptized and his wife and their children too, as well as his retinue*".

[43] Downham 2004 who also attempts to place the Eiríkr of York within the Hiberno-Scandinavian dynasty 'the sons of Ivar' (*Uí Ímair*) who ruled Northumbria for a long period in the 10th century.

hypothesis the two kings were different individuals but were confused in Scandinavian sources from the end of the twelfth century. *Eiríksmál* and skaldic verse related to Eiríkr in *Egils saga* probably refer to Eiríkr of York and not to Eiríkr Bloodaxe.[44] Furthermore the claim of the Scandinavian sources that Eiríkr Bloodaxe ruled over Northumbria with the consent of Æthelstan seems unlikely to be true when compared with the English historical record.[45] To my mind, however, it is difficult to explain why *Eiríksmál* should have been preserved by a Norwegian source if it did not concern Eiríkr Bloodaxe. The statement of the Scandinavian sources that Eiríkr Bloodaxe, his wife and their sons were nominally Christians cannot be easily discarded. And even if we assume that Eiríkr of York was a separate person, he too could not have held his position without having adopted Christianity.

The circumstances of Eiríkr's death are unclear and the type of burial he received is not known.[46] Presumably he died as a Christian, but during the few years he ruled Norway he must have acted ritually in accordance with what a people attached to inherited traditions expected from him. At the time of his death, the fact that his family was Christian would have had a decisive influence on how the fallen king was honoured. They chose to do it in the pagan way, however. The statement *Fagrskinna* makes on the background of *Eiríksmál* should probably be seen to indicate that Gunnhildr herself proposed the Valhǫll topic to the poet, rather than that he himself chose this subject matter. The choice of topic could have been determined by political considerations, the family hoping to regain power in Norway which at this period was predominantly non-Christian. For that purpose the theme of a glorious welcome of the king by Óðinn was well suited, irrespective of the personal convictions held by Eiríkr himself.

Regarding Hákon the Good, medieval historiography displays conflicting tendencies in evaluating his religious politics. Having been

---

[44] Downham 2004: 62–63.

[45] Downham 2004: 58.

[46] Some sources say Eiríkr was killed in Spain during a Viking raid (*Historia Norwegie* 12; *Ágrip* 7), others claim he fell in England in a battle against Óláfr, jarl of king Edmund (*Fagrskinna* 8; *Hákonar saga góða* 4), others again that he lived in England until his death (Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia* 2). One English source, Roger of Wendover, reports that Eiríkr was killed by a certain Earl Maccus "in a lonely place called Stainmore" (see D. & I. McDougall 1998: 59).

brought up as a child with the English king Æthelstan,[47] we may suppose that Christianity had made a much stronger impact on Hákon than on Eiríkr.[48] The stories of his death become a venue for expressing judgements on his religious politics in general and his personal beliefs in particular.[49] When not passing these matters over altogether,[50] medieval historiography shows divergent opinions. On one hand Hákon is severely criticised for being an apostate (*appostata factus*) who came to serve pagan 'idols' and who paid more attention to the inherited tradition (*leges*) and to what people thought than the 'pagan' kings before him had done. For this reason he was loved by the aristocracy (*principes*).[51] This approach, which is that of *Historia Norwegie*, apparently represents the ecclesiastical view-point. It is also reflected in the statement of *Fagrskinna* that in participating, though unwillingly, in pagan sacrifices, Hákon incurred God's vengeance. The country was ravaged by Gunnhildr's sons and by pirates: "*Ok lagðisk þat til hefndar við Hákon af guði eptir þat er hann hafði blótat, at í ríki hans var jafnan ófriðr af sonum Gunnhildar ok ǫdrum víkingum*."[52]

There is a notice in Adam of Bremen which in all probability refers to Hákon the Good, but it appears to be somewhat confusing when compared to medieval Scandinavian historiography.[53] It is said that the Norwegians had him deposed because of his arrogant behaviour, but that the Danish King Harald reinstalled him and made him

---

[47] The first witness to this comes from the poet Sigvatr who in *Bersǫglivísur* 4 says that Hákon was the fosterling of Æthelstan: "*fóstri Aðalsteins*".

[48] *Historia Norwegie* 13 states that Hákon was fostered by the English king who was "very much Christian" (*Christianissimus*); a similar expression, "profoundly Christian", "*vel kristinn*", is applied to Hákon in *Heimskringla*, *Hákonar saga góða* 13. *Ágrip* 5 and *Fagrskinna* 6 also emphasise the fact that Hákon was a Christian. The statement in Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia* 2 that Hákon was fostered by Æthelstan "to learn the customs of the people" certainly implies a Christian education.

[49] The relevant texts (except Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* and *Egils saga*) on Hákon's outward appearance, character, warrior qualities, his activities as a ruler and his attitude towards Christianity have been collected and commented upon by Kreutzer 1999. Here Hákon's religious politics and personal convictions are in focus as they are presented by the historiographic tradition.

[50] So Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia* 2, Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* X, 1, 2–7, *Noregs konungatal*, and *Egils saga*.

[51] *Historia Norwegie* 11. The dating of *Historia Norwegie* to the 1160s proposed by Mortensen 2003 is here accepted.

[52] *Fagerskinna* 10: "*After he had sacrificed a revenge was inflicted upon Hákon by Óðinn in the way that attacks by the sons of Gunnhildr and other pirates constantly disturbed the peace in his kingdom*".

[53] *Gesta Hammaburgensis* II, 25.

favourably disposed towards the Christians. Here, curiously enough, King Hákon's changed attitude towards Christianity manifests itself later in his reign and under Danish pressure. The passage that follows characterises Hákon as cruel and as a descendant of giants. Here, however, Adam seems to have confused information on Hákon the Good with traditions about Harald Finehair:

> *Haccon iste crudelissimus, ex genere Inguar et giganteo sanguine descendens, primus inter Nordmannos regnum arripuit, cum antea ducibus regerentur. Igitur Haccon triginta quinque annis in regno exactis obit, Hartildum relinquens sceptrem heredem.*[54]

This passage may be a later interpolation based on information from Norwegian informants but if so, it cannot be later than the end of the twelfth century to judge from the manuscript evidence.[55] With its negative attitude the passage from *Gesta Hammaburgensis* represents the ecclesiastical view-point and is thus an early witness to the hostile judgement on Hákon as it is also found in *Historia Norwegie*.

On the other hand, Hákon's involvement with pagan ritual and world-view is played down or explained away and his Christian behaviour is correspondingly emphasised. For the sake of his wife who was a non-Christian, and for the sake of the Norwegian people who were opposed to the new religion he deviated much from his Christian faith: "*En hann [Hákon] var kristinn ok átti konu heiðna ok veik mjǫk af kristninni fyr hennar sakar ok fyr vildar sakar við lýðinn, er á mót stóð kristninni*".[56] Hákon is said to have kept the sanctity of the Sunday and fasted on Fridays.[57] *Heimskringla* adds that he made a law that the

---

[54] Adam of Bremen *Gesta Hammaburgensis* II, 25: "*This Hákon, a most cruel man from the Ingvar family, was descended from giant's blood. He was the first to seize the kingdom among the Northmen because they had been governed by earls before that. After thus having reigned thirty five years, he died and left Hartild as heir to the throne*".

[55] The Leiden manuscript (A2) which was copied around 1100 unfortunately lacks most of Adam's Book II. The passage cited above is absent from the complete manuscript A1 copied around 1200, and this is the reason why the passage has been considered an interpolation. However, the manuscript families B and C have it. The manuscript C1 was written around the year 1200, and it may well be that the model for C1 already had the passage on the "cruel Hákon".

[56] *Ágrip* 5: "*Hákon was Christian but he had a pagan wife and deviated much from Christian faith and custom for her sake and for the sake of the people who were against Christianity*". Kreutzer 1999:94 is of the opinion that Hákon's pagan wife, who is mentioned only here, is a literary invention. From the point of view of aristocratic alliance-making the statement of *Ágrip* does not seem dubious, however.

[57] *Ágrip* 5; *Heimskringla*, *Hákonar saga góða* 13.

celebration of the pagan Yule-feast should be moved to the time when Christians held Christmas and people should also celebrate it with a special beer, and keep that time sacred. If they did not, they must pay with cattle: "*Hann setti þat í lǫgum at hefja jólahald þann tíma sem kristnir menn ok skyldi þá hverr maðr eiga mælis ǫl, en gjalda fé ella, ok halda heilagt, meðan ǫl ynnisk.*"[58] It seems not quite clear to what sort of celebration the statement refers. It may be that Hákon, while not prohibiting the pagan Yule-ritual, attempted to introduce a new rite with some Christian elements that should be performed also by his pagan compatriots.

The tradition which attributes to Hákon clear attempts to christianise the country when he arrived from England seems trustworthy.[59] At first, he appears to have proceeded in a more systematic way, having churches built at which he appointed priests.[60] *Heimskringla* explains this procedure as a result of his winning support from some powerful men (*ríkismenn*). Hákon also sent for a bishop and other clergymen from England: "*þá sendi hann til Englands eptir byskupi ok ǫdrum kennimǫnnum*".[61] Part of the tradition is eager to stress the resistance the king met. It is stated that churches were burnt and priests slain: "*En þeir brenndu kirkjurnar ok vágu prestana fyrir hónum.*"[62] Exaggerated as this may be, the stories of Hákon's confrontation with the chieftains and farmers of Trøndelag indicate that Hákon indeed met with opposition. The traditions as recorded in *Ágrip, Fagrskinna* and *Hákonar saga góða* leave us with no doubt about a core of historical truth in general. Yet a particular point at stake is Hákon's participation in the sacrificial ritual that would ensure the linkage between religious rulership, luck for the crops and peace and harmony in society, which was expressed in the ancient formula *ár ok friðr* "for good crops and peace".[63]

---

[58] *Heimskringla*, *Hákonar saga góða* 13: "*He (Hákon) made it a law to keep the Yule festival at the same time as Christians (celebrated Christmas) and everyone should have a feast with malted beer; otherwise they had to pay with cattle. They should keep the time holy while one enjoyed the beer*".

[59] *Ágrip* 5; *Heimskringla*, *Hákonar saga góða 13*. Cf. Kreutzer 1999b: 86.

[60] *Ágrip* 5: "*He had some churches erected in Norway and put learned men to attend them*". Hákon's deliberate planning to introduce Christianity is most clearly described in *Hákonar saga góða* 13. Strikingly enough, *Fagrskinna* has suppressed any mention of Hákon's endeavours to christianise Norway.

[61] *Hákonar saga góða* 13: "*Then he sent for a bishop and other clerics from England*". For the question of Hákon bringing with him a bishop, see Birkeli 1961 and Dillmann 2000: 480.

[62] *Ágrip* 5: "*But they burnt the churches and killed the priests for him*".

[63] For a discussion of the formula, see Hultgård 2003.

Fagrskinna brings out this point most clearly in stating that the farmers of Trøndelag confronted Hákon with two choices (*kosti*): either he should worship according to the custom of past kings and thus approve the ancient laws *til árs ok friðar*, or else he would be driven from his kingdom.[64] The kings' and chieftains' sacrificial performance seems to have been of vital importance in ancient Scandinavian communities. The short notice in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis* stating that king Anund was deprived of his kingship after having refused to worship the gods is a piece of valuable contemporaneous information on the cultic role of kings (and chieftains):[65]

> *Nuper autem cum rex Sueonum* Christian*issimus Anunder sacrificium gentis statutum nollet demonibus offerre, depulsus a regno dicitur a conspectu concilii gaudens abisse, quoniam dignus habebatur pro nomine Iesu contumeliam pati.*[66]

The embarrassment of historiography in dealing with Hákon's religious policy and personal belief can be seen from the stories of his death and burial. The tendency is to present the king as a regretful sinner. For this, his final moments on the Hákonshella are turned into an impressive scene which also includes his last words. Hákon is said to have seriously repented his offences against the Christian god.[67] His (supposedly Christian) friends offered to take his body and give it a Christian burial: "*Vinir hans buðu hónum at føra lík hans til Englands vestr ok jarða at kirkjum*".[68] The answer put into Hákon's mouth explains his refusal to be given a Christian burial:

> *Ek em eigi þess verðr, kvað hann, svá lifða ek sem heiðnir menn í mǫrgu, skal mik ok fyr því jarða sem heiðnir menn.*[69]

---

[64] *Fagrskinna* 9. The close ties between sacrifice and lawgiving are rightly considered a pre-Christian idea by Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1998: 68–70.

[65] *Gesta Hammaburgensis* IV, 27 scholion 140.

[66] "*When recently the king of the Svear, Anunder, who was a convinced Christian refused to present a sacrifice to the demons, he was deposed from his kingdom. One says that he had left the assembly in joy because he thought it worthy to have suffered disgrace for the sake of the name of Jesus*".

[67] *Ágrip* 6: "*þá iðraðisk hann mjǫk mótgerða við guð*"; a similar wording is found in *Fagrskinna* 13; cf. also *Hákonar saga góða* 32.

[68] *Ágrip* 6: While he was still alive but deadly wounded it is said that "*his friends offered him to bring his body westwards to England and bury it at some church*"; cf also *Fagrskinna* 13 with a similar formulation.

[69] *Ágrip* 6: "*I am not worthy of that, he said, I lived in many ways as pagans do. Therefore you shall bury me like pagans*"; *Fagrskinna* 13 has almost an identical formulation."

Ágrip further emphasizes Hákon's Christian piety in adding: "In this way I could expect more mercy at God's hands than I deserve". Similarly *Heimskringla* is anxious to show the king's personal piety:

> *en þótt mér verði lífs auðit, segir hann, þá mun ek af landi fara ok til kristinna manna ok bóta þat, er ek hefi brotit við guð, en ek ef dey hér í heiðni, þá veiti mér hér grǫpt þann, er yðr sýnisk*.[70]

The tendency to present Hákon as a person whose innermost beliefs were after all Christian, despite his pagan behaviour, appears also in the descriptions of his funeral.[71] He was buried in a mound, yet there were no more grave gifts carried into the mound other than his sword Kvernbiti and his clothing.[72] Moreover he was laid in a stone coffin inside the mound.[73]

To sum up: we are faced with two partly contradictory views on Hákon's religious politics and personal convictions. One emphasises his Christian faith and his efforts to introduce Christianity to Norway (*Ágrip, Fagrskinna, Heimskringla*), the other—which seems to be closer to historical facts—regards him as having abandoned his Christian faith to embrace the traditional religion of the majority of his people (*Historia Norwegie*, Adam of Bremen *Gesta Hammaburgensis*). It might be possible to reconcile these views if we assume that Hákon's attitude changed after having been in the country for some time. He first tried to introduce Christianity but then abandoned his plan and became nominally (or by conviction?) a follower of the ancient religion. One may also argue that part of the tradition (*Ágrip, Heimskringla*) overemphasised Hákon's effort to christianise Norway and that consequently *Historia Norwegiae* is nearer to the truth when describing the king as an apostate. In my opinion, the pagan afterlife with Óðinn in Valhǫll

---

[70] *Hákonar saga góða* 32: "*Even if fate spares my life, I shall leave the country and go to Christians to atone for that which I have transgressed against God, but if I die here as a heathen, give me here the interment that you find appropriate*".

[71] His burial is mentioned in *Ágrip*, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* but not in the other texts. Tradition agrees in placing Hákon's death at Hákonarhella and his grave mound in Sæheim in North Hordaland.

[72] *Ágrip* 6: "*Eigi var meira fé borit í haug með hónum en sverð hans Kvernbiti og búnaðr hans*". *Hákonar saga góða* 32: "*urpu þar haug mikinn ok lǫgðu þar í konung með alvæpni sitt ok inn bezta búnað sinn, en ekki fé annat*".

[73] *Ágrip* 6: "*í steinþró var hann lagðr í hauginum*".

promised to Hákon by his poet indicates that the king changed his religious adherence at least in the main period of his reign.[74]

The problem is complicated by the archaeological evidence which shows a growing Christian influence in large parts of western Norway during the tenth century. Fridtjov Birkeli has underlined the significance of the stone crosses in south-western Rogaland as pointing to early Christian influence in this area.[75] The Christian presence in the tenth century in parts of western Norway also raises the question of a double religious communication on the part of the political elites in late Viking Age Norway. They may have wished to display a Christian facet to outward contacts, while preserving pagan rituals when communicating with the native farming population.[76] One might attempt to see also Hákon the Good's religious politics in the light of this model. However, if we accept that there is a core of historical reality behind the tradition of his confrontation with the farmers of Trøndelag, his communication with the pagan population was not smooth.

The sole contemporary source which can give us valuable clues for addressing the problem of Hákon's religious adherence and politics is *Hákonarmál*. It is appropriate, therefore, to look closer at the poem's religious contents.

The eschatology of Hákonarmál *in context*

In the main, the idea of afterlife of *Hákonarmál* is the same as that of *Eiríksmál*, but I will argue that the way in which this idea is presented in *Hákonarmál* is influenced by the circumstance that king Hákon was or had been a Christian, by education or by conviction.[77] The poet himself was close to the king, participated in the battle at Fitjar and

---

[74] Cf. Sawyer 1982: 138 stating that Hákon must have abandoned Christianity "for the poem composed in his honour, *Hákonarmál*, treats him as a pagan king"; so also Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1998: 59–60.

[75] Birkeli 1973.

[76] See Fuglestved & Hernæs 1995.

[77] This line of interpretation has not been worked out previously as far as I know. It is hinted at by Jón Helgason 1953, and Holm-Olsen 1961 who considers the essential motif of the poem to be the "deeply personal description of the king's fear to meet Óðinn in Valhǫll", referring to the statements of the sagas that Hákon was a Christian. Compare also Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinnson 1998:59: "The fear felt by King Hákon is an indication that he had not been true to Óðinn all his life". Kreutzer 1999a: 397 indicates the possibility that Hákon's fear of Óðinn might have its explanation in the king's Christian background.

would know well the king's personal convictions and his religious politics.[78]

To begin with, we note the fact that the king and his men are presented as being unsure about their reception in Valhǫll. According to stanza 15 Hákon and his followers think of Óðinn as most untrustworthy and they fear his intentions:[79]

Illúðigr miǫk
þykkir oss Óðinn vera,
siám vér um hans hugi

Óðinn appears to us much ill disposed,
we fear his thoughts

Bragi replies that he will have the truce (*grið*) of all the Einherjar and that he has already eight brothers in Valhǫll. Hákon is not reassured by the answer. The king and his men still want to keep their weapons with them (stanzas 16–17). Why would the poem stress Hákon's fear of Óðinn and his reluctance to enter Valhǫll if not for the personal Christian background of the king? The poet expresses with much psychological insight the feelings Hákon would have when coming to Óðinn as (or having been) the adherent of an alien god. The tone of the encounter changes however when it is made known how well Hákon had respected the pagan holy places and the king is now saluted with a full welcome (stanza 18):

Þá þat kyndisk
hvé sá konungr hafði
vel um þyrmt véom,
er Hákon báðo
heilan koma
ráð ǫll ok regin

Then it was made known how well this
king had respected the sacred places,
when all the gods, the governing powers
welcomed Hákon.

One question which still remains to be addressed is whether stanza 9 should be interpreted in the context of Hákon and his host fearing to meet Óðinn in Valhǫll. The text of the stanza runs as follows:

Sáto þá dǫglingar
með sverð um togin
með skarða ski†ldo
ok skotnar brynior,
vara sá herr
í hugom er átti
til Valhallar vega

The nobles sat with drawn swords,
with slashed shields and mail-coats cut
through. The army, on its way to Valhǫll, was
not in a good mood.

[78] Cf. Neckel 1913: 70; Olsen 1916; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinnson 1998: 60.
[79] All citations from *Hákonarmál* are from the edition of Jón Helgason.

Based on his conclusion that the actual *Hákonarmál* is composed of two poems,[80] Sahlgren proposed to read stanza 9 as a reference to the defeated ones, i. e. to the sons of Eiríkr who were put to flight and sat in their ships, and thus to their slain warriors left on the battle field who were also on their way to Valhǫll.[81] This interpretation is possible even without accepting the hypothesis of two independent poems, but the linkage with the following stanza rather suggests that the reference is to *all* fallen warriors, thus also including Hákon and anticipating his death from his wounds some time after the battle. It should also be noted that the last part of the stanza permits two interpretations:

a) the host (*herr*) was not in a good mood *because* it was on its way to Valhǫll, or
b) the host *that was* on its way to Valhǫll was not in a good mood because of their bad condition after the battle as it is described in the first part of the stanza.

It seems to me that the latter interpretation is to be preferred since the afterlife concept of coming to Óðinn basically meant something good and desirable, as implied in stanzas 13 and 18, and in the *Eiríksmál*.[82] The fear of Óðinn felt by Hákon has, as I have suggested above, other reasons.

If we accept, as most scholars do, that stanza 21 belongs to the original poem, the use of the word *heiðinn* "heathen, pagan" applied to the gods of the ancient religion by a non-Christian poet seems peculiar. The term *heiðinn* is a Christian polemic term (cf. Latin *pagani*, Greek *ethnē*, Hebrew *goyim* meaning 'pagans') and was coined from the perspective of the Judaeo-Christian tradition to denote the adherents of "polytheistic" religions, often in a derogative sense.[83] The term

[80] Sahlgren 1927. Stanzas 3–9 in málaháttr, *Hákonarmál I* ("segerdikten") was composed immediately after the battle at Fitjar whereas stanzas 1–2, 10–21, *Hákonarmál II* ("gravkvädet") in ljóðaháttr was composed for Hákon's funeral and most probably recited by Eyvindr himself on that occasion.

[81] Sahlgren 1927: 89. The stanza formed the conclusion of the 'victory poem'.

[82] Cf. also Nordberg 2004: 54. Neckel 1913: 25 and 54 stresses the general fear that surrounded Valhǫll and points particularly to its expression in *Hákonarmál*. Marold 1972: 24 points to the fact that in *Hákonarmál* a gloomy image of Valhǫll seems to be juxtaposed to a more attractive one. This problem is solved by our interpretation of the poem's context.

[83] The Old Norse term is frequently attested in the earliest Christian literature in the vernacular, in particular the *Icelandic Homily Book* and the *Old Norwegian Homily Book*.

probably reached Scandinavia by the intermediary of Old English *hæþen* but it is also attested in Old Frisian and Old High German. The expression *heiðin goð* in stanza 21 implies a contrast with other divine beings, i.e. the Christian god(s). However, it is not used here in a polemic way, contrary to what we find for example in the *Older Law of the Gulathing* 29 where the prohibition to worship the pagan gods, *heiðit guð* is stated. In my opinion the use of *heiðinn* here can only be explained if we consider it within the context of the complicated relationship between the penetration of Christian elements into tenth century Norway and the personal situation of Hákon. Eyvindr could have deliberately chosen the expression *heiðin goð* to emphasise Hákon's commitment to the ancient gods, thus converting the negative connotation of *heiðinn* into a positive one.

In conclusion, *Hákonarmál* must be understood in the context of the historical and cultural situation in the tenth century, with Christianity, supported by part of the political elites, already penetrating into western and southern Scandinavia. At the same time native religious traditions in Norway were strong enough to resist any serious attempt to impose a new official religion. For that reason, it appears, the choice of a Christian eschatological theme for the poem was not possible.

The Einherjar concept and the meaning of the eschatological Óðinn mythology

Eiriksmál and *Hákonarmál* are interesting also because of the connection they make between individual eschatology and cosmic eschatology. *Eiriksmál* is more explicit, but *Hákonarmál* alludes to this with some formulations as well. The connection the poems make is intimately bound up with the concept of the Einherjar. Much has been written on this concept and its origins, ranging from the Roman gladiators in the Colosseum to the Germanic war-bands and "Männerbünde".[84] It is not my intention to reconsider this discussion here. Rather, I want to pursue the theme of the Einherjar as an important clue for the meaning of the eschatological Óðinn mythology.

A short overview of the sources and the image they paint of the Einherjar will be appropriate. With the exception of the singular *einheri*

[84] See Neckel 1913: 68–74; Olsen 1931; Höfler 1934; de Vries 1956–57 §§ 406, 407, 409, 582, 167, 159; Nordberg 2004: 215–222; Dillmann 2007: 352–354, and Schjødt in this volume.

used of Þórr in *Lokasenna* 60, the term always occurs in the plural. It is rather uncommon and the primary attestations are found in eddic and skaldic poetry.[85] Different explanations of the name have been proposed such as "those who fight alone", "those who fight together" or "unique or prominent warriors".[86] There is most probably a reference to the host of the Einherjar and to the last battle in the mention of the cock Gullinkambi who awakens the champions with Óðinn in *Vǫluspá*,[87] and in the assertion of Helgi that he must cross the sky bridge before the cock Salgofnir awakens 'the victorious people' in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II.[88]

Mentioned in close connection with Óðinn and his hall, the main activity of the Einherjar consists in practising armed combat. According to *Vafþrúðnismál* 41 they fight each other each day at the court of Óðinn, and choose who are going to be slain (*val þeir kiósa*). Then they ride from the battle and sit once more together in peace (*sitia meirr um sáttir saman*). *Grímnismál* 18 raises the question what the Einherjar live on but alludes at the same time to the meat from Sæhrímnir who is cooked by Andhrímnir in Eldhrímnir. The Valkyries bring beer to the Einherjar.[89] Their eschatological task for which they have practiced day after day is hinted at in stanza 23 of *Grímnismál* which in the first half mentions the 540 doorways of Valhǫll. Then it is stated that eight hundred Einherjar march together out from one doorway "*þá er þeir fara at vitni at vega*".[90]

As can be seen, the information gleaned from eddic and skaldic poetry on these champions of Óðinn's is merely allusive in character, but we may assume that the poets drew upon a broader mythic tradition on the Einherjar. There is evidence to show that one need not die on the battlefield in order to join the group of the Einherjar.[91]

Another interesting concept which belongs in the context of the Einherjar myth is that of *óskasynir* and *óskamegir* with reference to Óðinn (*Gylfaginning* 20), where it is said that the god is also called Valfǫðr since all who fall in battle are his 'adopted sons', *óskasynir*.

---

[85] *Eiríksmál* 1, *Hákonarmál* 16, *Vafþrúðnismál* 41, *Grímnismál* 18, 23, 36 and 51, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 38. Secondary attestations in the *Prose Edda* of Snorri, *Gylfaginning* 20 and 38.

[86] See for the different interpretations Elmevik 1982 and Nordberg 2004: 217.

[87] *Voluspá* 43.

[88] *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 49.

[89] *Grímnismál* 36; cf. *Eiríksmál* 1.

[90] "*when they go to fight the wolf*".

[91] See Schjødt 2007.

The term is not attested in tenth century poetry for those who come to the hall of Óðinn, but we find it in early vernacular homiletic texts. An example is the *Icelandic Homily Book*, which speaks of God the Father having redeemed men from sin and making them his spiritual *óskasynir*.[92] The motif is discussed by Nordberg[93] who admits on the basis of earlier research[94] that the word may be a Christian loan, but that the idea of Óðinn being a foster-father for his heroes is much older. In my opinion the term *óskasynir* may well be of pre-Christian origin since it is perfectly congruent with this idea.

One line of interpretation has been worked out by scholars like Gustav Neckel and Edith Marold who see the meaning of becoming one of the Einherjar essentially as an apotheosis or deification of dead rulers or heroes. They were thought to join the community of the gods, that is, they become gods themselves.[95] Marold argues with a particular reference to *Hákonarmál* and the notice in Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* on a king named Erik being deified by a council of gods, and whom the Svear, having built a temple for him, then worshipped as a god.[96]

While this line of interpretation can be followed insofar as it stresses the idea that becoming one of the Einherjar implies an elevation into a particular category in the Other World, the great number of Einherjar who have come together in Valhǫll[97] makes it unlikely that all these champions of Óðinn were thought of as a kind of deities. The notion of a semi-divine *post mortem* status would seem more plausible for single powerful rulers from society's top layer. The meaning of the Valhǫll myth has also been seen in the hopes of viking warriors to come to the 'paradise' of Óðinn if they fell in battle.[98]

However, instead of the deification motif or an incitement for bravery it is the theme of Óðinn gathering a group of distinguished heroes for the eschatological battle that to my mind gives us a clue to the meaning of the Valhǫll and the Einherjar ideology. *Eiríksmál* is very

---

[92] *Icelandic Homily Book* 13v 9; cf. in Christian poetry: *óskamey dróttins* for Maria in *Máríuvísur* I, 23.

[93] Nordberg 2004: 219–220.

[94] Kuhn 1971.

[95] Neckel 1913: 68f.; Marold 1972.

[96] *Vita Anskarii* 26.

[97] *Grímnismál* 23; *Snorri's Edda*, *Gylfaginning* 38.

[98] Ellmers 1995: 171: "The strong belief in Valhǫll seems to have been a major reason for the bravery and defiance of death with which the Vikings introduced themselves into world history in the late 8th century".

clear on this point. When Sigmundr reproaches Óðinn for depriving Eiríkr of his victory in spite of his ability, the god replies by referring to the uncertainty of knowing when the grey wolf will attack the homes of the gods (stanza 7):

því at óvíst er at vita
—sagði Óðinn—
nær úlfr enn hǫsvi
< gengr> á siǫt goða.[99]

Because one cannot know, said Óðinn,
when the grey wolf shall walk towards
the homes of the gods.

The underlying sense is that Óðinn needs Eiríkr as a prominent (*snjallr*) warrior for the last battle at Ragnarǫk. This is also what is intended by the words of Gǫndul in *Hákonarmál* 10:

vex nú gengi goða,
er Hákoni hafa
með her mikinn
heim bǫnd um boðit

The retinue of the gods will now grow
strong, when the divine powers have invited
Hákon with a large host to their home.

The meaning is, I suggest, that the retinue (*gengi*) of the gods will increase in number and quality when Hákon with his host is invited to join the divine powers. The Valkyrie is hinting at the support which the king and his men can give to the gods at Ragnarǫk. The word *gengi* means 'following, troop' but has also the sense of 'support, help'. In this context it refers to the following the gods have, the troop of the Einherjar, and not to the community of the gods as suggested by some scholars.[100] It is worth noting that the idea of Ragnarǫk is also explicitly referred to in stanza 20, in the praise formula in memory of Hákon:

mun óbundinn
á ýta siǫt
Fenrisulfr fara,
áðr iafngóðr
á auða trǫð
konungmaðr komi

Free from his bonds the Fenriswolf shall
rush against the homes of men,
before a man of royal kin as good (as
Hákon) shall follow in the empty tracks

[99] The text needs to be amended by a verb in the last line, Jón Helgason suggests *gengr*, Sahlgren *sœkir*, Finnur Jónsson *greypr*.

[100] Neckel 1913: 69 "Der Genitiv 'der Götter' (*gengi goða*) besagt, daß es aus Göttern besteht". Marold 1972: 25 though more cautiously: "Wird er (Hákon) vielleicht einer von ihnen? Die Worte *Vex nú gengi goða* könnten in diesem Sinn ausgelegt werden: die Schar der Götter wächst".

The meaning of the Einherjar myth should be sought primarily in its association with cosmic eschatology. To be in the ranks of the good forces at the side of the gods during the great battle at the end of time was the glorious task that awaited the Einherjar.

This Scandinavian myth seems to have roots far back in time. The idea of an otherworldly host prepared to fight against evil powers at the end of time has analogies in other religions with a developed eschatological tradition.[101]

A common Scandinavian afterlife mythology for the highest strata of society?

We have to address the question whether the Valhǫll myth as we know it from Old Norse sources, in particular from *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*, was a widespread afterlife idea among Scandinavian elite groups. The written source material to base such a claim on is extremely scanty, but burial customs and iconography have been interpreted as expressing a belief in the Valhǫll myth.

Burial customs

A number of male high status graves (mainly rich chamber graves) from the late Viking Age which are distributed all over Scandinavia but are especially prominent in Denmark have been interpreted as indicating a particular afterlife idea. They show common features as

[101] For example the Iranian tradition, where we find the closest parallels. Ancient Iranian religion is characterised by a cosmic eschatology that in many respects recalls the Scandinavian Ragnarǫk tradition. The concept of chosen persons who at the end of time will help the good powers in the last battle against the evil forces appears in many variants in Iranian tradition and was actualised in different periods of Iranian history. Already the earliest sources dating from about 1000 B.C.E. refer to the concept of a group of redeeming figures, *saošiiant-*, who will take part in the last battle against the evil powers and help the supreme god in bringing about the renewal of the world. In one of the old sacrificial hymns dating from at least the sixth century B.C.E. the final saviour figure, Astvatarta, is surrounded by many companions (*haxai-*) who will fight with him against the Evil Spirit and his demons when the world draws near its end. On the basis of the more detailed Pahlavi-tradition it can be assumed that these figures of the early texts are thought to dwell in the other world while waiting for the eschatological battle. This stronghold is described in other Pahlavi texts and can be compared with the Valhǫll of the Scandinavian tradition. This theme will be treated in more detail in a forthcoming publication.

to the character of the grave goods, consisting of horses, riding equipments, weapons (but no mail-coats and helmets), food in containers, and objects of leisure.[102] These horsemen's burials are considered to be so stereotypical and socially distinctive that they should be linked to specific eschatological beliefs.[103] The boat- and ship-burials in seaworthy boats dating roughly from the sixth to the tenth centuries that mostly contain horses, and equipment for riding or drawing wheeled vehicles, have also been related to particular afterlife ideas.[104] As suggested by Oscar Almgren with reference to the ship burials and by Else Roesdal for the stereotyped late Viking Age graves, the idea inspiring the characteristic composition of the grave goods in the male burials is the hope of an afterlife existence in Valhǫll.[105] The correspondences between the archaeological material and the Old Norse Valhǫll myth are not so clear-cut as to establish a relationship, however.[106] The scholars who argue for the connection between the Gotlandic picture stones and the Valhǫll myth are in a better position. We therefore have to discuss briefly this proposed connection.

The picture stones of Gotland

Several picture stones from the early viking period present a specific type of imagery which scholars usually refer to as the 'the Valhǫll scene'. A man on a horse (with four or eight legs) is met by a woman holding a drinking horn in her hand. A building is sometimes depicted, which can be conceived of as a hall. The ship shown on practically all the picture stones belongs to the same iconographical theme. The interpretation of this imagery as showing the dead arriving at Valhǫll on Óðinn's horse, where he is welcomed by a Valkyrie, is widely accepted.[107] The rider is sometimes identified with Óðinn who himself brings the fallen hero to his hall, the latter being present in the picture in the form of a lying or curved human figure above the rider.[108] The

[102] Roesdal 1992: 131.
[103] Roesdal 1993.
[104] Almgren 1940.
[105] Almgren 1940; Roesdal 1992: 161 and 1993: 131.
[106] Cf. also Dillmann 2007: 362–363.
[107] For example Almgren 1940; de Vries § 380; Buisson 1976: 88–109; Steinsland 1991; Andrén 1992: 41; Ellmers 1995; Nordberg 2004: 43–45. Also Lindqvist 1941: 86, 96 but with reservations about the identificiation of the building with Valhǫll.
[108] Buisson 1976:88–90 who refers to the stones Ardre VIII and Tjängvide I.

main argument in favour of the Valhǫll interpretation is based on a comparison with *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*. It is assumed that these texts state (or in the case of *Eiríksmál* presuppose) that the fallen king arrives in Valhǫll on horseback.[109] The expression of stanza 13 *riða vit nú skolom* "we two shall now ride" uttered by the Valkyrie Skǫgul is misunderstood as including Hákon. Rather, the dual form refers to the two Valkyries who appear on the battle-field.[110] Neither *Eiríksmál* nor *Hákonarmál* mention the way in which the fallen kings make their journey to Valhǫll; only the last stage of the journey is described, the arrival in Valhǫll and the welcoming by Óðinn. The journey to Valhǫll is seen as taking place first with a ship and then on horseback, or either vehicle.[111]

The central motifs depicted on the Gotlandic stones, the woman with a drinking horn and the man arriving on horseback are less prominent (Valkyries) or absent (arrival on horse to Valhǫll) in the tenth century poems. Thus, the configuration of images and the emphasis put on the motifs mentioned corresponds less well to the Valhǫll ideology as expressed in the West Scandinavian texts.[112]

We should, therefore, be open for different interpretations of the afterlife scene on the Gotlandic picture stones.[113] I suggest that this scene reflects a widespread Indo-European mythic motif which we may call 'the woman from beyond'.[114] The ancient Iranian myth of the *daēna* who encounters the dead person and accompanies him or her to paradise is but one, yet important, variant of this mythic complex, to which also the *keres* figures of Greek mythology and the Vedic *apsaras* belong. Literary reflections of the motif are found in the Irish tradition, and in Plato's *Kriton* where Socrates in the night before his death sees a woman in white garment.[115] Saxo reports that the night after Balderus had been mortally wounded, he saw the death goddess stand at his bed and announce that she would take him in her arms three days later.[116]

---

[109] Ellmers 1995:166; Buisson 1976:90 n 10; Steinsland 1991; Andrén 1992: 47.
[110] Correctly pointed out by Dillmann 2007: 347–348.
[111] Ellmers 1995; Almgren 1940.
[112] Cf. also Dillmann 2007: 360.
[113] See for example Steinsland 1991; and cf. Dillmann 2007: 361.
[114] This will be developed in a forthcoming publication.
[115] Plato *Kriton* (44b).
[116] *Gesta Danorum* III, 3, 7: "*Postera nocte eidem Proserpina per quietem astare perspecta post triduum se eius complexu usuram denuntiat*".

Eschatological myth as an element of ideology

Not all eschatological myth came to be used as ideology. However, the myth of Óðinn welcoming his heroes in Valhǫll, to be part of the Einherjar contingent, can be interpreted as part of a pronounced male warrior ideology associated with the uppermost strata of west Scandinavian society. By connecting individual eschatology with cosmic eschatology an afterlife ideology of a wider outlook was created which would have strongly appealed to Scandinavian warrior elites of the Viking Period.

The Valhǫll myth becomes ideology through its function of supporting the ruling families' claim to power and prestige. The male aristocracy could use the eschatological Óðinn mythology to point out their close relationship with the god in the afterlife, and thus anticipate their elevated position and make use of it for their political agenda in this world. In earthly life rulers and chieftains had a key position because of their power to choose the members of their retinue, the *hirð*; which could later grant their followers a glorious afterlife in the hall of Óðinn. Thus apart from its religious message the eschatological myth of *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* was an impressive instrument of propaganda for gaining political power. The funeral rituals of the aristocracy certainly included references to their destiny in the afterlife. Snorri may not be wrong in stating that ritual speech and ritual performance guided the dead Hákon to Valhǫll: "*mæltu þeir svá fyrir grepti hans, sem heiðinna manna siðr var til, vísuðu honum til Valhallar.*"[117]

The poems expressing the Valhǫll ideology were dedicated to rulers who in one way or another became involved in the confrontation between Christianity and ancient Scandinavian traditions that were still vibrant in the tenth century. By the early eleventh century, the afterlife hoped for by most of the ruling elites seems to have changed, and now clearly conveyed Christian eschatological ideas. This can first be seen in the eleventh century praise poems and in runic inscriptions from the same century. Both types of sources hint at the new afterlife concept by using similar expressions. These early attestations are allusive in character but I suggest that the underlying eschatology is much the same as the one we find in the early vernacular descriptions of

[117] *Heimskringla*, *Hákonar saga góða 32: "They spoke in front of his grave as it was the custom of heathen people and guided him to Valhǫll*".

heaven and hell. In fact, vocabulary and main points of emphasis support this hypothesis. Generally it is a European medieval eschatology transposed into the vernacular, but in style and expression adapted to a Scandinavian context.[118] A rupture in afterlife ideas among rulers at the top level can be observed for the early eleventh century in Norway (in Denmark the late tenth century) but the same cannot be assumed for local chieftains and the common people.

Bibliography

Sources

ADAM OF BREMEN *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, ed. Bernhard Schmeidler, 3rd ed. Hannover and Leipzig 1917.
Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sǫgum. Fagrskinna—Nóregs konunga tal, Bjarni Einarsson gaf út (ÍF 29), Reykjavík 1984.
Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning A I–II ved Finnur Jónsson. 1912–15.
Eddadigte I–III udg. af Jón Helgason. Oslo, Stockholm, København 1971.
Gísla saga Súrssonar, Nordisk Filologi, serie A (tekster) bind 11, udg. af Agnethe Loth. København 1956 (M redaction).
—— *Membrana regia deperdita* ved Agnete Loth. København 1960 (S redaction).
Historia Norwegie, ed. by Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen. Copenhagen 2003.
Morkinskinna. The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157). Translated with Introduction and Notes by Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade. Ithaca and London 2000.
Skjaldevers udgivet af Jón Helgason, København · Oslo · Stockholm, 3. oplag 1968.
SNORRI STURLUSON *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by A. Faulkes, London 1998.
—— *Heimskringla I*. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson gaf út (ÍF 26), Reykjavík 1941.
Histoire des rois de Norvège, traduite et annotée par François-Xavier Dillmann, Paris 2000.
The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Translated and edited by Michael Swanton. London 1996.
THEODORICUS MONACHUS *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensum*. Translated and annotated by David and Ian McDougall, with an introduction by Peter Foote. London 1998 (Viking Society for Northern Research vol. XI).

Studies

Almgren, Oscar 1940. Resan till Valhall, *Uppländsk bygd. En samling studier tillägnade W. von Essen*. Uppsala, 29–37.
Andrén, Anders 1992. Doors to the Other Worlds: Scandinavian Death Rituals in Gotlandic Perspectives, *Journal of European Archaeology* 1: 33–56.
Birkeli, Fridtjov 1961. Hadde Håkon Adalsteinfostre likevel en biskop Sigfrid hos seg?, *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norwegian) 40: 113–136.
—— 1973. *Norske steinkors i tidlig middelalder: et bidrag til belysning av overgangen fra norrøn religion til kristendom*. Oslo.

[118] Cf. Paasche 1914: 35–40.

Buisson, Ludwig 1976. *Der Bildstein Ardre VIII auf Gotland. Göttermythen, Heldensage und Jenseitsglaube der Germanen im 8. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* Göttingen.
Christiansen, Arne Emil et al. 1992. *Osebergdronningens grav. Vår arkeologiske nasjonalskatt i nytt lys*. Oslo.
Dillmann, François-Xavier 2000, see Sources, Histoire des rois de Norvège.
—— 2007. Valhǫll. *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 35: 341–366.
Downham, Clare 2004. Eric Bloodaxe—Axed? The Mystery of the Last Scandinavian King of York, *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 14: 51–77.
Ellis Davidson, Hilda 1943. *The Road to Hel. A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature*.
Ellmers, Detlev 1995. Valhǫll and the Gotland Stones, *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia*. Ed. by Ole Crumlin-Pedersen & Birgitte Munch Thye. Copenhagen, 165–171.
Elmevik, Lennart 1982. Fisl. Einherjar 'krigare i Valhall' och några andra fornnord. sammansättningar med ein-', *Saga och Sed*, 75–84.
Fidjestøl, Bjarne 1982. *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*. Øvre Ervik.
—— 1999. *The Dating of Eddic Poetry*. Ed. by Odd Einar Haugen. Copenhagen
Fjeld Halvorsen, Eyvind 1961. Hel. *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* 6: 304–305.
Fuglestvedt, Ingrid & Hernæs, Per 1996. Rituell kommunikasjon i yngre jernalder, *Nordsjøen. Handel, religion og politkk*, red. J. F. Krøger & H. R. Navey. Stavanger, 140–150.
Harris, Joseph 1984. Eiríksmál and Hákonarmál, *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* 4: 414–415.
Holm-Olsen, Ludvig 1961. Hákonarmál. *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* 6: 50–51.
Höfler, Otto 1934. *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen*. Frankfurt am Main.
Hultgård, Anders 2002. Mythische Stätten, Tod und Jenseits, *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 20: 472–477.
—— 2003. *Ár*—"gutes Jahr und Ernteglück"—ein Motivkomplex in der altnordischen Literatur und sein religionsgeschichtlicher Hintergrund, *Runica—Germanica—Mediaevalia*. Ed. by Wilhelm Heizmann & Astrid van Nahl. Berlin, New York, 282–308.
Jón Helgason 1953. Norges og Islands digtning, *Nordisk Kultur* VIII B.
Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1998. *A Piece of Horse Liver. Myth, Ritual and Folklore in Old Icelandic Sources*. Reykjavík.
Kreutzer, Gert 1986. Eiríksmál, *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 7: 54–57.
—— 1999a. Hákonarmál, *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 13: 394–398.
—— 1999b. Valhall—Himmel—Hölle. Das Bild des Königs Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri in der nordischen Literatur des Mittelalters, *Die Aktualität der Saga. Festschrift für Hans Schottmann*. Ed. by Stig Toftgaard Andersen. Berlin, New York, 85–110.
Kuhn, Hans 1971. Philologisches zur Adoption bei den Germanen, *Kleine Schriften II*.
Lindqvist, Sune 1941. *Gotlands Bildsteine*, Bd. I. Stockholm.
Marold, Edith 1972. Das Walhallbild in den Eiríksmál und den Hákonarmál, *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 5: 19–33.
McDougall, David & Ian, see Sources, Theodoricus Monachus.
Neckel, Gustav 1913. *Walhall. Studien über germanischen Jenseitsglauben*. Dortmund.
Nordberg, Andreas 2004. *Krigarna i Odins sal* . Stockholm, 2nd edition (1st ed. 2003).
Nylén, Erik & Schönbäck, Bengt 1994. *Tuna i Badelunda: guld, kvinnor, båtar*. Västerås.
Olsen, Magnus 1916. Fortjener Hákonarmál's digter tilnavnet skáldaspillir? Cited after the author's *Norrøne Studier* 1938: 204–212.
—— 1931. Valhall med de mange dører, Cited from *Norrøne Studier* 109–129.

Paasche, Fredrik 1914. *Kristendom og kvad*. Kristiania.
RGA = Ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Guenich & Heiko Steuer. Berlin, New York, 198?–2007.
Roesdahl, Else 1992. Princely Burial in Scandinavia at the Time of Conversion, *Voyage to the Other World. The Legacy of Sutton Hoo*. Ed. by C. B. Kendall and P. S. Wells. Minneapolis, 155–170.
—— 1993. Pagan Beliefs, Christian Impact and Archaeology—A Danish View, *Viking Revaluations*. Ed. by Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins. London, 128–136.
Sahlgren, Jöran 1927. *Eddica et Scaldica. Fornvästnordiska studier I–II* Lund.
Sawyer, Peter 1982. *Kings and Vikings. Scandinavia and Europe AD 700–1100*. London and New York.
Schjødt, Jens Peter 2007. Óðinn, Warriors, and Death, *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World. Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*. Ed. by Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, 137–151.
See, Klaus von 1963. Zwei eddische Preislieder, *Festgabe für Ulrich Pretzel*. Ed. by W. Simon et al. Berlin, 107–117 (reprint in von See, *Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung* 1981, 318–328 with addendum 522–525).
Seeberg, Axel 1978–81. Five Kings, *Saga-Book. Viking Society for Northern Research* 20, 106–113.
Simek, Rudolph 2003. *Religion und Mythologie der Germanen*. Darmstadt.
—— 2006. Totenreiche. *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 31: 89–92.
Steinsland, Gro 1991. Dødsbryllupet. Betraktniger omkring død og eros, "hellige hvite stener", gotlandske billedstener og Oseberggraven, *Heidersskrift til Nils Hallan*. Ed. by Gulbrand Alhaug et al. Oslo, 421–435.
Ström, Krister 1984. Thorshammerringe und andere Gegenstände des heidnischen Kultus, *Birka II: 1 Systematische Analyse der Gräberfunde* hrsg. von Greta Arwidsson. Stockholm, 127–140.
Strömbäck, Dag 1952. Att binda helskor. Anteckningar till Gisle Surssons saga, *Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskaps-Samfundet I Uppsala. Årsbok*, Uppsala, 139–148. Cited after Dag Strömbäck, *Folklore och Filologi*. Valda uppsatser utg. av Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien, Uppsala 1970: 192–200.
Vries, Jan de. 1956–57. *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte I–II*. Berlin.
—— 1964. *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte I*. Berlin.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FAMILY MATTERS? THE *CULTUS* OF THE SCANDINAVIAN ROYAL MARTYRS

Joanna A. Skórzewska

1. *Introduction*

The following discussion focuses on the *cultus* of three royal saints in medieval Scandinavia, Óláfr II Haraldsson (995–1028/30), Knútr IV Svensson (1043–1086) and Eiríkr Játvarðarson (1120–1160). The main questions addressed in this chapter concern the way in which the veneration of these kings influenced the construction of a specific ideology; the ideology of power which legitimised a particular family's rights to the throne. In particular, I shall examine the role of the royal successors of Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr in the cults of the three saints. These successors were at the same time close family members: sons, brothers and half-brothers of the dead royal martyrs.

The phenomenon of royal sainthood has often been referred to as a "Germanic" tradition, and research on royal sainthood has focused on the areas of modern Germany, France, and England, to some extent also on Scandinavia.[1] Between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries the majority of the saints who were the object of a local cult in this large region were high-born, powerful individuals.[2] The phenomenon, however, already began to appear several centuries earlier in those areas. Its manifestations vary greatly, and it comprises a wide spectre of aspects such as objects and rituals as well as the spread of an ideology with the aid of texts.

In discussions of royal sainthood the issues addressed most frequently are: the charismatic aspects of the institution of monarchy as such (that is: the potential saintliness of all sovereigns), the religious

[1] Apart from the leading publications by Graus 1965 and Hoffmann 1975, the issue has been discussed by e.g. Nelson 1973, Rollason 1983, Ridyard 1988 and Klaniczay 2002. As far as Northern Europe is concerned, royal sainthood has been examined by e.g. Steinsland 2000 and Phelpstead 2007.

[2] Vauchez 2005: 173.

eagerness of particular kings, the conflict between Christianity and heathenism, and family ties and inheritance.[3] The first issue mentioned, extraordinary religious qualities implied by the very office of kingship, is especially problematic in the case of medieval martyrs, including the three Scandinavian kings under consideration here. As Susan Ridyard has observed, Christian sanctity, unlike the sacrality of pagan rule, was not an *assumed* attribute of the Christian king.[4] Thus, neither on the Continent nor in the Insular context was sanctity considered an inevitable feature of royal power.[5] A Christian king had to become saintly; he was no saint *because* of his kingship alone. While their secular leadership was given to a king by God, and while he was the "Lord's Anointed" and God's representative on earth; he was not a being equipped with in-born supernatural qualities. Or, in the words of František Graus: "they [the holy kings, especially royal martyrs] were not saints in virtue of their royalty, but *in spite of* it".[6] Despite their privileged position, they had to earn their saintliness.

A Christian king could gain saintly fame already during his life through exceptional piety, justice exercised in accordance with Biblical principles, or missionary activity. However, none of these deeds could compete with the most outstanding achievement, death for the Christian faith, which would make the king resemble the saints, or even Christ, 'the Heavenly King', himself.

This brings us to the notion of martyrdom. The three Scandinavian royal saints under consideration here, Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr, were all proclaimed martyrs. Yet the circumstances of their deaths, however violent, differed significantly from the deaths of early Christian martyrs who suffered brutal executions at the hands of pagans without resistance. Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr could thus only have been considered martyrs because the concept of martyrdom had changed substantially in the meantime, potentially to refer to anyone who suffered a violent death.[7] As the analysis of the three Scandinavian kings will show, the hagiographical texts concerning Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr present

[3] Those aspects of sacral kingship in the North specifically are discussed in this volume, see e.g. Steinsland.

[4] See Hultgård, Steinsland, Sundqvist in the present volume.

[5] Ridyard 1988: 74–95, Higham 1997. This issue was debated a few decades earlier, after Karl Hauck had suggested the "continuity" in his seminal thesis from 1950, which was criticized by František Graus in 1965.

[6] Graus 1965: 390.

[7] Gunnes 1972: 191–2, see also Haki Antonsson 2004.

a large number of arguments in favour of the kings' martyrdom and ensuing saintly status. This was supposed to guarantee the respect of the masses for the deceased rulers, as well as for their successors who revered them as their patrons.

Finding the right arguments to prove a king's saintliness, however, could often prove to be problematic already in early Middle Ages. The first hurdle to be taken could, paradoxically, be the life-conduct of the king, as can be seen with the earliest example of a 'holy king' in the medieval period, that of St Sigismund (d. 523), king of Burgundy. He had, rather "unsaintly", strangled his own son Sigeric. Next, the circumstances of the canonisation process might cause controversy. An interesting example here is that of Charles the Great. Frederic Barbarossa (1122–1190) had him canonised in 1165. Yet at the same time, Barbarossa pronounced the new Saint Charles to be his heavenly protector in his conflict with Pope Alexander III (1100/1105–1181)—a rather plain mingling of religious feelings and political interest. Returning to the death of kings, in order to support a king's saintliness even such an "argument" as a "feeling of pity" might be harnessed. That was, allegedly, the reason for the—albeit little successful—attempts of proclaiming Dagobert II (d. 680), Charles the Simple (d. 929) or Edward II (1284–1327?) holy. These kings, less than popular during their lifetime, were pitied after their miserable deaths. Having been inefficient rulers, their popularity was consequently largely due to their manner of death.[8]

The differences between the cults of particular kings who were proclaimed holy do not only relate to the context of their lives and deaths as such, but frequently also to the specific situation in which their saintliness was officially announced. The official proclamation also reveals the interests of particular groups: the clergy and the ruling classes with the current monarch (who, at the same time, was also the relative of the potential saint). The typology of sainthood is influenced by the social and political structures of the country or region where it developed, not only by the "dialectical relationship between the clergy and the faithful".[9] In the medieval local cult (as opposed to the universal cult) the influence of the ruling classes was much stronger. The veneration of Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr can be classified

[8] Vauchez 2005, Evans 2006.
[9] Vauchez 2005: 157. Ridyard 1988: 234–252.

as (primarily) local, and it may be assumed that it was influenced by the ruling classes in accordance with a specific ideology.[10] Numerous sources concerning those three royal martyrs seem to strongly indicate a leading role of the saints' direct successors: their sons, brothers and half-brothers seem to have been decisive for the creation and development of the cult.

Generally speaking, the texts describing the initiative of the successors may be interpreted as showing the successors' effort to legitimize their right to rule through the *cultus* of the royal martyrs; or, more specifically, through the veneration of their relics. The sources provide us with two types of information about that aspect: on the one hand the "facts", that is, what reportedly happened; and on the other hand the authorial reflections. In both cases an interesting aspect of the *cultus* can be noticed: the tendency to rely on tradition, which may imply pre-Christian past.[11] It is an interesting fact that family ties between particular monarchs which include mythical and pre-Christian ancestors are reported in texts concerning Christian martyrs. It would seem logical to assume that a royal martyr would bring enough status into the genealogy of his successor, thus rendering references to pre-Christian personages superfluous. The latter's inclusion is also particularly surprising since it occurs in texts clearly bearing hagiographical features, and written a century or two after the introduction of Christianity to Scandinavia. On the other hand, we must not forget that the conversion of Scandinavia was a lengthy and complex process. The existence of syncretism for a relatively long period of time must be assumed, and the fact that pre-Christian and Christian motifs intertwined in Scandinavian culture should not be surprising.[12] This can probably most clearly be seen in the case of Óláfr Haraldsson, allegedly a converted Viking and an eager missionary king. Holiness and leadership were obviously not perceived as opposites in northern European mentality; quite the opposite, these two qualities seem to have been well established in the pre-Christian culture, and might in

[10] Although St Óláfr 's *fama sanctitatis* spread to many countries, the interest in the construction and development of his cult was at first local.

[11] The issue of constructing or referring to impressive genealogies is discussed in this volume especially by Steinsland, Beuermann, and Sundqvist.

[12] Cf. especially the discussion by Hultgård, in this volume.

fact be considered the decisive factor in adapting and then accepting Christianity.[13]

The intertwining of pre-Christian and Christian motifs also concerned other elements. Mentions of acts of his heathen predecessors were clearly important in order to prove the legitimacy of reigning monarch since they referred the reader back to periods of time considered crucial, such as the unification of the country (or at least efforts aiming at it), or the conquest of new territories. In short, the formation of one's identity was achieved, or at least began with these heathen ancestors. This identity was first and foremost dynastic, but later in the Middle Ages it often developed into a national one.[14] Therefore those heathen, mythical leaders did not pose any threat to the Christian, holy kings; quite the opposite, their religious affiliation, or, rather, "religious unawareness", would be perceived as a natural course of events which the later saintly monarch changed.

The successors of all three Scandinavian royal martyrs discussed here, Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr, attempted to legitimise their power through a focus on the relics, which, amongst other, implied concentration of the territorial power. They are all said to have ordered reliquaries, had churches built in which the relics of their father or brother were buried, to have built new royal residences in proximity to these relics, and, finally, to have planned their own burial *ad sanctos*, close to the relics. We do not consistently see direct succession from father to son or even primogeniture (see the example of Óláfr Haraldsson and Haraldr Sigurðarson), but there was always an agnatic relationship between predecessor and heir—another feature inherited from the pre-Christian period.[15] The loyalty towards the deceased holy king would legitimize the right of his successor to the throne, and to rule over a particular territory, while the opposition and the victory of an unjust ruler brought disaster to his subordinates. These concepts have been depicted with the use of allusions to pre-Christian beliefs (bad seasons caused by an inappropriate ruler) as well as to Christological

[13] The issue has been thoroughly examined in Steinsland 2000. Such depictions of saints were modelled on the *interpretatio norroena* of Christ as a mighty king and warrior; an alternative to a forgiving martyr who surrenders to his opressors. As demonstrated below, these two types of saintliness often intertwined or were juxtaposed in various texts concerning one and the same saint.

[14] Geary 2006: 326, Mortensen 2006: 258.

[15] Steinsland 2000. She refers to the agnatic relationship, that is, inheritance in the male line, as characteristic for Nordic society in general (see Steinsland this volume).

metaphors (the Judas-like betrayal), which once again underlines the role of different types of tradition.

That said, it shall be argued here that the general impression of a leading role played by the successors of the Scandinavian royal martyrs in their cults is not supported by a closer examination of the written sources. On the one hand, there are significant differences between the purely hagiographical texts and in the chronicles. And even when texts suggest influence by the successors, their role does not seem to have been the main force behind the origin of the veneration of Óláfr, Knútr or Eiríkr.

2. *The source material*

One may argue that all the texts on which this discussion is based bear hagiographical features. Writing, compiling and interpreting texts was mainly in the hands of the Christian priesthood. It is, then, on the one hand tempting to argue that a saint-king was to a large extent "created" by that priesthood.[16] On the other hand, such possible clerical "creation" often seems to have been balanced by significant influence of secular actors on the development of the *cultus*.

The cult of royal saints could be initiated by and beneficial to both the clergy and the successors of the holy king. In general, a new king might wish to initiate a *translatio* or commission a saga or a hagiographical text, thus profiting from his predecessor's saintly fame. And without the support of the clergy, the process would obviously not be possible. But in particular, the cases where texts significantly postdate the death of the saint-king are interesting. There the role of the saint's family in the development of the cult is debatable, especially as far as the direct successors are concerned. Did they have an interest in and were they in fact actively encouraging the cult? Descriptions of their efforts might to a large extent be inspired and influenced by the conditions of the time during which the texts were written, and by the kings who reigned at that later time, rather than by old oral and written tradition going back to the period immediately following the saint's death. With this in mind, let us turn to the texts about Óláfr Haraldsson. *Óláfs saga helga* developed from the confluence of two lines

[16] Ridyard 1988: 77.

of historical writing in medieval Norway and Iceland: the religious-historical tradition of saints' lives and the secular-historical tradition of royal biography. The saga was composed and copied in many different versions during the period 1180–1230. The growth in number of both the liturgical and non-liturgical texts started in 1150s. The fact that so many sources concerning Saint Óláfr date from the second half of the twelfth century could be interpreted as a natural development of the cult. However, we should not overlook the important political events that took place at that time. The foundation of the archiepiscopal see in Niðaróss in 1152/53 was followed by Scandinavia's first coronation in Bergen in 1163/64, through which the Church gave divine sanction to Magnús Erlingsson's (1161–84) royal position, the primary duty of which was to uphold the law as a just ruler. The first two national assemblies in Norwegian history were called in order to set the seal on the aforementioned events. Among others, a law determining the right of succession, which in all probability came out of the meeting of 1163/64, laid down that a national assembly should choose the king. The eldest legitimate son of a deceased king should have the first right to the Crown, and after him, other legitimate sons. The context of the coronation points to a co-operation between the monarchy and the Church, but the Norwegian Church also took the first step towards a position marked out by the Gregorian papacy. This meant the election of bishops/appointment of priests, financial control, and jurisdiction over the Church matters, were left entirely to the Church.

The version of Óláfr's *vita* ascribed to Snorri Sturluson is the best preserved one.[17] It survives both as a separate saga and as a part of *Heimskringla*, the compilation of sagas about Norwegian kings.[18] The *Separate Saga*'s main part is nearly identical with the saga in *Heimskringla.* Its initial chapters, however, outline the history of the kings of Norway from Haraldr *hárfagri* to Óláfr Tryggvason, and its final chapters report on Óláfr Haraldsson's successors down to Haraldr *gilli*. The *Separate Saga* was most probably completed in the years

[17] Phelpstead 2007: 17. The discussion of sources concerning Óláfr Haraldsson here is based on this publication, which also examines the problematic issue of Snorri's authorship of the saga (pp. 17–22), as well as on Ekrem et al. 2000.

[18] Two groups of *Heimskringla* manuscripts are distinguished: K and J. None of the J manuscripts contains the *Heimskringla* version of *Óláfs saga helga.* Group K comprises the *Kringla* fragment, dated to c. 1258–1264, the oldest extant manuscript of any part of *Heimskringla*.

1220–1230, and *Heimskringla* around 1235.[19] In both cases the story about St Óláfr was incorporated into narratives on other Norwegian kings. St Óláfr thus served as a historical link between generations of kings. At the same time, his unique position of *rex perpetuus Norvegiae* and of a royal martyr is underlined by a number of hagiographical motifs.

The earliest evidence for the veneration of St Óláfr is preserved in skaldic poetry composed soon after his death, and also quoted in *Heimskringla,* for example Þórarinn loftunga's *Glælognskviða* (c. 1032). The extant source material shows wide interest in different aspects of Óláfr's cult from the moment of his death onwards, and the cult's use for both religious and political purposes. The following discussion is based on the aforementioned sagas as well as on two sources considered purely hagiographical: *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* and *Legendary Saga of St Óláfr*. *Passio* is a *vita* attributed to Eysteinn Erlendsson, Archbishop of Niðaróss 1161–1188, the story of Óláfr's martyrdom and a collection of miracle stories.[20] The *Legendary saga* is the only saga from Snorri's time (or before) which survives complete.[21] Snorri's text concerning St Óláfr and the *Legendary saga* have so much in common that his use of a similar work has been suggested.

The material concerning Saint Knútr is less extensive. The first source, *Passio Sancti Canuti Regis et Martiris*, was written around 1095. E. Albrectsen has suggested that the *Passio* was very likely written by an English priest employed at the church, who must have witnessed the *elevatio* since the ceremony is described so precisely.[22] M. Cl. Gertz has discussed both potential Danish and English origin of the author of the *Passio*.[23] The text most probably postdates Óláfr Sveinsson's death (18 August 1095), and was probably written in the winter of 1095–96, because it does not mention "the good years" following the bad season.

Secondly, *Historia ortus, vitae et passionis Sti. Canuti*, is a chronicle dating from 1122 and written by the English priest Ælnoth (*recte*, Ailnoth) from St Alban's church in Odense. He was born in Kent/

[19] The oldest manuscript of the *Separate Saga* is dated to c. 1250–1300.

[20] It is preserved in only one manuscript, dating from c. 1200. The text was probably composed during Eysteinn's exile in England (1180–1183) and comes from Fountains Abbey.

[21] It survives in one Norwegian manuscript dating from c. 1250.

[22] Albrectsen 1984: 14.

[23] Gertz 1907: 64–5.

England, and after his arrival in Odense in 1098 or 1099 the chronicle was completed only in 1120s, possibly in 1122. It is the first proper historical work concerning Danish events.[24] Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has suggested the dating of this text to the years between 1104 and 1134, most probably 1124.[25] The third legend, the *Younger Passio*, was written down c. 1220 and is based on Ælnoth's text, but the political perspective and rhetoric is missing. The text is a more general depiction of Knútr's life and miracles, death and cult.[26]

1095, when the first source, *Passio Sancti Canuti Regis et Martiris*, was begun, saw important events. It was the year when Knútr's brother Eiríkr I became king and began his career by moving the saint's body into a wooden coffin which was placed in the newly built cathedral church (whose building Knútr himself had started). Eiríkr I Sveinsson (Evergood/Ejegod/*inn góði* 1095–1103) applied for his brother's canonization; and when the new church was finished, an official *translatio* took place on 19 April 1100. Thus, the second source concerning St Knútr, *Historia ortus, vitae et passionis Sti. Canuti*, would seem to mirror the development of the cult. Those two texts, *Passio* and *Historia*, are the main ones on the cult of St Knútr used in the following discussion.

Next to the new stone church finished by Eiríkr Sveinsson where King Knútr's body was placed, Eiríkr founded St Knútr's monastery. The majority, if not all of the monks there came from the Benedictine monastery of Evesham in England. Albrectsen maintains that these monks greatly contributed to the spread of the cult and to the composition of the hagiographical texts. He also suggests that these monks were responsible for the first ever recording of the king's death, *Tabula Othiniensis* (see below). The text was engraved on a metal plaque and placed in the stone coffin together with Knútr's remains when the coffin was temporarily placed in the crypt of the new St Knútr's Church. This plaque was moved on 19 April 1101 with the relics to the new reliquary on the high altar in the newly built church consecrated to the Virgin Mary, St Alban and St Knútr.

Another short account is mentioned in a similar context. In chapter 36 of the chronicle Ælnoth himself writes that an inscription was

[24] Albrectsen 1984: 18.
[25] Meulengracht Sørensen: 119.
[26] *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* 8: 597.

placed in the coffin together with the king's body. This statement is made directly before mentioning the contents of a text called *Epitafium*. Gertz suggests, therefore, that Ælnoth himself is the author of it.[27] Whether the two inscriptions were engraved on separate plaques or on the same one, is unknown (the latter being more likely).[28]

Regarding the sources for Saint Eiríkr, the text of the legend, the main hagiography, dates from the reign of Magnús Birgersson (1275–90), most probably from 1277, but an earlier version must have existed.[29] It is assumed that the legend was written for liturgical purposes and based on an earlier work, and the authorship is ascribed the Uppsala canon Israel Erlendsson.[30] The text begins with Eiríkr's election as king. Its context clearly suggests that it was written at at time when the country had no ruler (*regno vacante*). Contrary to the Danish legends, there are no implications that opponents were still alive when the text was composed. The legend was written down more than a hundred years after the saint's death, and it may seem that the author of the legend would rather pass over the conflict between the families of Eiríkr and Sverker: there does not seem to be a pronounced tendency to contrast the two families in order to legitimize Eiríkr's successors to the throne.[31]

In the following, we shall examine the role of the close family members in the development of the *cultus* of the Scandinavian royal martyrs in the different stages of this cult: at the saint's death, during his burial, during his translation, and for his legacy.

---

[27] Gertz 1907: 81–2.

[28] As far as the poem is concerned, Ælnoth might have been the author himself (fn. 196 on p. 110). Gertz has suggested that the two inscriptions were written on two separate plaques and that there might be no connection between them other than that they were placed in Knútr's coffin (Gertz 1907: 41). Both of the artefacts are missing but copies of the inscriptions have been preserved and taken care of by Ole Worm who published them for the first time in 1626 (Gertz 1907: 27). Other copies have been published in the seventeenth century, but have not been considered particularly reliable (Gertz, pp. 26–36).

[29] Westman 1954: 2. Einar Carlsson had previously suggested that the legend was written down for the process of translation in 1170. His main argument was that the act of translation implied the use of elaborate liturgy to commemorate the new saint's day, which would include the use of a legend. However, Toivo Haapanen observed that this was not necessary: the day could be celebrated with a reading and songs (Westman 1954: 96, ft. 220).

[30] Westman 1954: 46.

[31] Schmid 1954: 167.

3. *The role of family members at the death of royal martyrs*

Already the scenes of the holy kings' deaths give us some indications of their successors' participation in the saints' *fama sanctitatis*.

The very first motif which establishes the martyrdom of saintly kings is their death. The circumstances of the king's death are obviously important; yet no less decisive is the presentation of the potential reasons for his death, and of his killers, especially when family is involved. The role of the family in the death of the king is not particularly contentious in the case of Óláfr Haraldsson, since his main enemies were powerful local chieftains. They joined forces with Knútr the Great king of Denmark, and his Norwegian vassal, Earl Hákon Eiríksson, and expelled Óláfr from Norway in 1028. Óláfr fled to Grand Duke Jaroslav of Novgorod. Encouraged by the message that Earl Hákon Eiríksson had died, Óláfr returned from his exile two years later, raised a small army in Sweden, and crossed into Norway. There, he encountered a large peasant army, and fell in the battle at Stiklestad on 29 July 1030.

However, of the three Scandinavian royal saints Óláfr Haraldsson is the only "martyr" who died on the battlefield, opposed by chieftains. Knútr and Eiríkr were killed under different circumstances. With them, the problem of the role their kin played is much more urgent in the context of their deaths. The Danish king Knútr gained enemies among his subjects when he issued laws to protect the weak, orphans, widows and foreigners, but most of all when he tried to enforce the collection of tithe. As the grandnephew of Knútr the Great, who until 1035 was king of England, Denmark and Norway, he considered the crown of England to be rightfully his. His planned invasion of England, however, never took place. Before his fleet could reassemble at the Limfjord, a peasant revolt broke out in southern Jutland, where Knútr was staying in 1086. He fled to the wooden Church of St Alban in Odense. That, however, did not guarantee his safety, and Knútr was slain there on July 10, 1086. King Eiríkr of Sweden's death in Östra Äros (later New Uppsala), on May 18 (or, more probably, May 5), 1160 was the result of a struggle between two kin-groups.[32] His assassin was most probably sent by the Sverkers who were rivals of Eiríkr's kin, and aspired

[32] The accuracy of the date of Eiríkr's death has been questioned, see e.g. Sundqvist 2002: 350.

to the rulership. King Eiríkr's main enemy, who arranged the assault, however, was his direct rival for the throne, the Danish prince Magnús Henriksson (king 1160–1).

Let us return to Knútr's case for a closer examination. Knútr's enemies were not only his chieftains and subjects, but they included close family members of his: his brother Óláfr Sveinsson, who, although he did not attack Knútr directly, was his rival to the throne and opposed Knútr.[33] The quotation from *Passio* underlines the righteous and legitimate position of Knútr with regard to all his brothers (the king is even compared to the Old Testament's Joseph). Óláfr Sveinsson is specifically mentioned as the one who secretly encouraged people to rebel against Knútr.[34] And in the end, as the author of *Passio* says, everyone was against "God and his anointed".[35] The opposition started amongst the Wends, then the Jutes, and finally also included the inhabitants of Fyn where the king sought refuge in St Alban's Church. The author of *Passio* underlines the seriousness of the situation by stating that no king has ever been assassinated in a church by his own men this way.[36] Ælnoth elaborates the motif of the king's good brother's, Benedikt's, support for Knútr, and describes a scene of Knútr embracing Benedikt in St Alban's church and giving him a kiss shortly before his death.[37] Ælnoth's text underlines the good character of Benedikt in contrast to the fierceness of Knútr's opponents even more when he devotes an entire chapter to Benedikt's martyrdom: Benedikt died alongside Knútr, an act through which he participated in his brother's glory.[38] Earlier in the chronicle both Benedikt and Eiríkr, Knútr's successor, are merely briefly mentioned as Knútr's companions during his journey around the country when the rebellion against the king was growing.[39] Ælnoth's text therefore expresses the idea that Benedikt's sharing of Knútr's martyrdom was a much more important act than any aid he may offered to Knútr while the king was still alive.

In the texts concerning Knútr the motif of betrayal (by his brother Óláfr and by his subjects) is underlined by the very place of Knútr's assassination, St Alban's Church in Odense, similarly to the case of

[33] *Passio Canuti* 2.
[34] *Passio Canuti* 5.
[35] *Passio Canuti* 6.
[36] *Passio Canuti* 7.
[37] Ælnoth, *Historia* 28.
[38] Ælnoth, *Historia* 29.
[39] Ælnoth, *Historia* 25.

Saint Eiríkr who was killed at Holy Trinity Church in Östra Äros. In Ælnoth's chronicle the scene of Knútr's death in Odense is particularly dramatic and full of significant details which show the king's piety. Knútr not only participated in services but offered gold and silver to the church.[40] Knútr is compared to St Stephen and St Sebastian, since arrows and stones were aimed at him, arms which allegedly killed these two saints. Knútr was first hit by a stone thrown through the window, and then by a spear.[41] Knútr's death *ad sanctos* raises the significance of his martyrdom to a still higher level when a spear was thrown at the king, and the blood stained the reliquaries of St Alban and St Oswald. They had reportedly had been brought by Knútr from England and placed in that church.[42] Thus the scene emphasises the king's martyrdom and saintly status in the strongest possible way.

King Eiríkr of Sweden also died of wounds sustained in an attack. The text of his legend underlines his innocence and good will when he met his enemies not suspecting anything wrong. In addition, his assassination reportedly took place on Ascension Day. It is a particularly significant date in this context, since it commemorates Christ's rising to heaven, that is, Christ's victory after martyrdom and death. This motif recurs again and again in the legend. Eiríkr's opponents waited for him outside the church while he was praying. Eiríkr left the church armed, together with his supporters, having made the sign of cross, and began to fight back. When he fell to the ground the Danish prince Magnús Henriksson and his people kept inflicting more wounds on Eiríkr, which led to the earthly death and heavenly birth of the king as a victorious saint.[43] Although the comparison between Eiríkr and Christ is not formulated expressly here, in connection with Ascension Day the symbolism is obvious.

Turning to St Óláfr again, the circumstances surrounding his death on the battlefield are confused. Almost every source concerning Óláfr

---

[40] Ælnoth, *Historia* 26. Ælnoth, *Historia* (*TO*) also mentions sacraments, p. 3.

[41] According to Ælnoth stones were thrown at the king (*Historia* 27). The injury allegedly made the king's cranium recognizable during the analysis of the relics by A. D. Jørgensen in 1887.

[42] The "innocent blood", as the author of the chronicle underlines (ch. 28). The innocence of the king is also very much underlined by *Passio Canuti* 6. On the influence of English tradition of the shaping of the *cultus* of the Scandinavian royal martyrs see e.g. the discussion in Phelpstead 2006: 65 and 70–71. Phelpstead's examination of Knútr's martyrdom is based on *Knýtlinga saga*, which, like the other two texts, underlines the aspects of the king's innocence, piety and holiness (Phelpstead 2006: 72).

[43] *Legenda,* p. xvi.

gives a different version of the event, mentioning various weapons and assassins.[44] Nevertheless, the general message is that Óláfr's death was unjust and heroic. As already hinted at, what makes Óláfr's death substantially different from those of Knútr and Eiríkr is that none of the main sources mention the presence of the king's family or of a rival kin-group at Stiklestad. In *Passio* Óláfr's assassins are introduced anonymously as people of ill will and heathens, only the Danish king Knútr is specifically mentioned as the enemy who bribed some people to take sides against King Óláfr.[45] Sagas are the only sources that mention names; *The Legendary Saga* lists three persons: an anonymous relative of Kálfr Árnason, Þórir *hundr* and Þorsteinn *knarrarsmiðr*.[46] It is possible to identify the first character thanks to other individual sagas. *Óláfs saga* in *Heimskringla* introduces a man named Kálfr Arnfinsson as the son of Kálfr Árnason's brother, Arnfinn.[47] In the same saga Kálfr aimed at St Óláfr's neck, Þorsteinn *knarrarsmiðr* at the leg, and Þórir *hundr* put a spear in Óláfr's stomach, but it is not explicitly stated whether Kálfr Árnason or Kálfr Arnfinsson killed the king. Only *Magnús saga góða* "reveals" Kálfr Árnason as the assassin.[48]

Also, Óláfr's behaviour at the moment of death has been portrayed in different ways. While the purely hagiographical texts underline the king's Christ-like peaceful attitude, *Óláfs saga* portrays Óláfr as a warrior. *Passio Olavi* mentions the spiritual weapon: the armour of faith and the sword of the Spirit (the word of God). Also according to the *Legendary saga* Óláfr decided to face his enemies without any "earthly" weapon and said a prayer for them, while *Óláfs saga* in *Heimskringla* mentions that he asked God for help, but did not hesitate to fight.[49] We note similarly ambiguous presentations in the two texts on Knútr's death: although the comparison of Knútr to Christ is obvious in *Historia*, only the author of *Passio* mentions specifically that the king decided not to fight against his enemies and put down the weapon ("*arma secularia deponit*").[50]

---

[44] See the discussion in Røthe 2004: 280–5.
[45] *Passio Olavi* 1.
[46] *Legendary saga* 81.
[47] *Óláfs saga* pp. 383–5.
[48] *Magnúss saga góða* 14.
[49] *Legendary Saga* 82, *Óláfs saga* 228.
[50] *Passio Canuti* 7. In Ælnoth, *Historia* only one passage suggests directly that the king might have been directly involved in the fight (Ælnoth, *Historia* 27); see Gertz 1907: 71, ft. 1.

It is a paradox that although martyrs themselves are depicted as fearless and not concerned about the fate of their bodies, these same bodies or their remains were considered highly significant. An important aspect in this context is the elaborate political theology concerning "the king's two bodies", that is: the political body and the physical body, which was formulated in 1100s.[51] It was rich in parallels between the dual body of Christ and the body of earthly rulers, which played a particularly significant role in stories about martyrs, especially royal martyrs. The rulers achieved their holiness through the mortification of their bodies, and the relics served both as a religious and as a political symbol (as shall be especially visible in the example of Óláfr Haraldsson discussed below).

It is, therefore, not a coincidence that the death of royal martyrs, especially those involved in the process of Christianisation, is usually depicted with rich Christological symbolism. Many examples could be listed here: in addition to explicit parallels and examples in the texts, the motif of being pierced with a spear/lance, dying with arms stretched out in the form of the cross or praying for the enemies are obvious allusions. However, other motifs such as betrayal could also be debated in a different context.[52] Especially Ælnoth's *Historia* and (Snorri's?) *Heimskringla* make it clear that the kings were representatives of God on earth, thus, a crime against the king was a crime against God. The image of a sanctuary covered with blood seems as horrifying to Ælnoth as the fact that the king was killed by his people.[53] The author's appeal "Fear God, honour the king", seems to be the motto of his work.[54]

In order to be able to compare the kings to Christ and other martyrs, their death had to meet certain requirements: it had to be the result of an unjust fight. Consequently, the royal martyr is usually depicted as surrounded by no or few supporters, and the family members are often absent from that group. This was certainly the case with Eiríkr, who at the moment of death was the only representative of his kin present. Knútr's story is an exception here, since his struggle was to a large extent a family struggle. As far as Óláfr is concerned, it is

---

[51] Kantorowicz 1997.

[52] The motif of thirst and the Judas motif (*Historia* 26). The day of Knútr's death was Friday, the same as Christ's, according to *Passio Canuti.*

[53] Ælnoth, *Historia* 28.

[54] Ælnoth, *Historia* 28. The author was inspired by the biblical texts, see 1. Pet. 2, 17.

worth mentioning that his son was absent from the battlefield. Óláfr's half-brother Haraldr Sigurðarson was present and wounded, but that information is given only in an individual saga devoted to Haraldr.[55] Clearly, Haraldr's role at Stiklestad was not perceived as significant. This, in fact, is a general impression: usually, the role of family members, and thus of the successors of the Scandinavian royal saints at the moment of their death is described as insignificant, unless that death was directly caused by a conflict between family members or rival kins.

Does this general absence of family members which the sources hint at correspond to reality, or is it due to authorial decisions? St Óláfr's closest relative, his son Magnús, was six years old and in a foreign country when his father was slain and buried. Magnús was born in 1024 and in 1028, when his father went in exile, the boy accompanied him to Sweden and then to Russia. There he stayed till 1034 when Einarr *þambarskelfir* and Kálfr Árnason came to King Jaroslav with their following, declared their loyalty to Magnús and took him back to Norway to have him proclaimed the king. St Óláfr's other close relative, his half-brother Haraldr Sigurðarson, was fifteen years old and present at Stiklestad, but seems not to have played any significant role. St Eiríkr's son must have been around ten years old at the time of Eiríkr's death, and the *Legend* does not contain any information about him.[56] St Knútr's brother Eiríkr Sveinsson is only briefly mentioned as his companion on the way to his last battle at Odense.[57] The next time Eiríkr Sveinsson appears in the text is much later, in the description of his rule.[58] Thus, the absence or insignificant role in the texts of the close relatives of the Scandinavian royal martyrs at the moment of their death might, in majority of cases, indeed correspond to facts: it might have been due to the relatives' young age. The only exception here would be Eiríkr, who was overshadowed by another brother, Benedikt. Why the texts do not grant Eiríkr Sveinsson a more important role than the participation in Knútr's last expedition is difficult to answer.

In general however, even if Óláfr's, Knútr's and Eiríkr's relatives did in fact historically not play an important role in their deaths, this can,

[55] *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* 1 and 99.
[56] It is assumed that he lived ca. 1150–1195.
[57] Ælnoth, *Historia* 25.
[58] Ælnoth, *Historia* 32.

in our view, not quite explain their utter insignificance in our sources. That no writer mentions any single divine sign or other miraculous circumstances connected to the closest relatives of the royal martyrs is surprising: it would be a more than credible adherence to "nothing but reality" in such texts. Thus, the obvious next question is: were the family members given a different role or function?

4. *The Saint's burial: arranged by family or strangers?*

> The choice of burial place of a medieval king was not something that was decided arbitrarily or on sentimental grounds. It was a decision loaded with religious and ideological significance.[59]

It would be difficult to disagree with Evans's statement. In our context the question of whose initiative the burial was is interesting. In case of the royal martyrs who died a violent death, the decision was frequently taken by the followers of the deceased king who wished to save the body from being disposed of, or by anonymous people who had supported the king during his lifetime. Interestingly, the Scandinavian examples are quite different. Óláfr Haraldsson's story definitely stands out with its element of secrecy. After Óláfr's death his body was abandoned on the battlefield at Stiklestad until the same evening. According to *Óláfs saga* in *Heimskringla*, the body was then taken by Þorgils Hálmuson and his son Grímr who were afraid that Óláfr's enemies might desecrate it.[60] Ironically, the sign of the king's holiness, a bright light burning right above the spot where his body laid, might easily have betrayed the location of the body. Þorgils and Grímr made two coffins (one of which was filled with stones and straw) and rowed across the sea to Niðaróss. There they left the coffin which did not contain Óláfr's body with Bishop Sigurðr, and then, with the real coffin, rowed up the river to a place called Saurhlið where the king was buried, far away from the inhabited area.[61] They were not disturbed by anyone as the Bishop disposed of the coffin he had received immediately (it was thrown into the river), without checking its contents.

Óláfr's remains were subsequently moved several times before they were secretly buried. At first the body was taken to an abandoned

[59] Evans 2006: 25.
[60] *Óláfs saga* 238–239.
[61] *Óláfs saga* 238.

house within a certain distance from the town where it had rested for one night, then to Niðaróss, finally back to Saurhlið for one night, where it was buried in a sand hill nearby.[62]

This secretive burial of a saintly king is rather extraordinary. None of the extant texts concerning Knútr and Eiríkr mentions acts similar to those in *Óláfs saga*. Nevertheless, a certain tension is present in all texts. Knútr's body was buried immediately after the assassination in St Alban's Church in Odense 10 July 1086.[63] Ælnoth's *Historia* reports that when the fight was over, the enemies left the church and the priests who served there as well as the king's faithful servants took care of the body.[64] King Eiríkr's death seems to have been all his assassins cared about as well; it does not seem as if the potential value of the monarch's body occurred to them. When the killers retreated, the king's body was taken by some of the king's men to the house of a poor widow who lived nearby, and then buried in the church.[65]

Just as above in the case of the kings' deaths, so now again regarding their burials, the relatives are unimportant in our texts.

None of the Scandinavian royal martyrs seems to have been buried by a family member, nor do the texts report that any of the bodies or graves was at some point attended by the son or brother before the process of *translatio*. Only the case of Knútr seems an exception here. It is, however, not a blood-relative of the king, and certainly not a relative in the agnatic line, but Knútr's wife, Queen Aðalheiðr, who wished to exhume the body of her husband and bury it in her fatherland, in Gent (at Blandinium monastery).[66] When she entered the church together with a group of men who were going to move the body, a miraculous light filled the church. It was shortly before midnight and the Queen took it as a sign to abandon her plan. The story was most probably constructed later than the main body of the text in order to dramatise the event, similarly to Knútr's brother's (Benedikt's) martyrdom.[67]

Before the bodies of the deceased kings became relics venerated in shrines, their saintliness, so the sources claim, was particularly strongly

---

[62] *Óláfs saga* 236 and 238.
[63] *Passio Canuti* 8 does not mention any specific spot.
[64] Ælnoth, *Historia* 30. The bodies of the retainers were, however, never found during the excavations—see Albrectsen 1984: 94–95.
[65] *Legenda*, p. xiii.
[66] Ælnoth, *Historia* 31.
[67] Albrectsen 1984: 97 (ft. 174).

demonstrated by proto-miracles which occurred due to the power of their blood. Óláfr's blood healed the wound of Þórir *hundr*, one of his assassins, shortly after the king's death on the battlefield.[68] The next person it healed was a poor blind man close to Stiklestad, where Óláfr's body rested for one night. The man touched the body of the deceased king, and the blood of the martyr cured his blindness.[69] An almost identical story is recorded in Eiríkr's legend—after the fight the king's body was taken to the house of a poor blind widow who lived nearby. The woman regained her eyesight by touching her eyes with her fingers stained by the royal blood.[70] Knútr's blood did not serve as a means of healing in any proto-miracle, but it was sanctified by being spilt on the altar in St Alban's Church, close to the relics.

Thus we note the same pattern as for the deaths of the royal saints. Again, the male relatives and successors of Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr are not included in the descriptions of the first miracles. Rather than the family, members of lower classes and even the kings' enemies are said to have been the first ones to witness the first signs of holiness. Looking for possible reasons, one should look at the function of these first proto-miracles. The consistent motif is a beam of light, in the next step, someone receiving his eyesight. This symbolises enlightenment. Might the kings' relatives therefore not be included amongst the first witnesses of miracles, that is, amongst the recipients of this enlightenment, because they would not have required to be enlightened? Their knowledge of the holy kings' merits and their religious awareness would thus be shown as inherently sufficient anyway. This in turn would have been an important tool for legitimising their right to royal power.

Regarding those who did witness the first miracles, with the exception of Þórir *hundr* the people who really benefited from these proto-miracles were in fact not notorious sinners or the kings' enemies. Rather, they were poor, anonymous people. Their role in the cult is symbolic. The predominant convention used in the sources is the spread of saintly fame through poor, otherwise unnoticed individuals, according to the principles of the New Testament.

---

[68] *Óláfs saga* 230.
[69] *Óláfs saga* 236.
[70] *Legenda*, p. xvi.

5. *The role of the Saint's successors in his* translatio *and canonisation*

Having analysed and offered explanations for the insignificant role of family members at the royal saints' deaths and burials, let us now turn to their role in the *translatio* of the kings' bodies and in their canonisation.

Already when his wound was miraculously healed at Stiklestad, Þórir *hundr* noticed that the deceased St Óláfr looked *"sem þá at hann sværi*".[71] The same observation was made by Bishop Grimkell who decided to open the coffin a year after the burial.[72] He made this decision because of signs and miracles, but also because the coffin containing Óláfr's body twice came out of the ground on its own accord, looking brand new. The motif of the uncorrupted body as a sign of holiness is well known in the hagiographical material. It has been linked to the idea of resurrection, vital for Christianity, a religion which decrees the burying corpses (as opposed to cremation) and the preservation of bodies for their resurrection.[73] A. Angenendt refers to Paul the Deacon (d. 787) who, at the translation of Saint Benedict from Monte Cassino to Fleury, argued that only Christ's body had not seen corruption; all other corpses were subject to corruption, with the exception of those that had been preserved without a stain through a divine miracle.[74]

Bodily death and decay were connected with original sin, but the sanctified body was different. The lack of corruption symbolized the inversion: those who on earth mortified their bodies in their attempts to follow the teachings of Christ were able to preserve them.[75] The unusually pristine state of Óláfr Haraldsson's body was mentioned already in *Glælognskviða*, a skaldic poem from 1031/32 by Þórarinn *lofttunga*, the first text proclaiming the king's saintliness, very soon after his death. That does not only confirm the popularity of the motif in northern Europe at the time, but also the early initiative of popularising the *cultus* in a skaldic poem.

---

[71] *"as if he were asleep"* (*Óláfs saga* 230).
[72] *Óláfs saga* 244.
[73] Angenendt 2002: 30. See also Angenendt 1991.
[74] Of special importance for the lack of corruption was the absence of sexual activity, hence the phenomenon is usually mentioned in the lives of abbots or bishops, but kings, such as Charles the Great are no exception (Angenendt 2002: 30–31).
[75] Roest 2002: 166.

Óláfr Haraldsson's body was translated into a reliquary in St Clement's Church in Niðaróss on 3 August 1031. The *Separate Saga* in *Heimskringla* and the Saga of Magnús Óláfsson report:

> *Magnús konungr lét gera skrín ok búa gulli ok silfri ok setja steinum. En skrín þat var svá gört bæði at mikilleik ok at öðrum vexti sem líkkista, en svalir undir niðri, en yfir uppi vétt vaxit sem ræfr ok þar af upp höfuð ok burst. Eru á véttinu lamar á bak, en hespur fyrir ok þar læst með lukli. Síðan lét Magnús konungr leggja í skrín þat helgan dóm Óláfs konungs. Urðu þar margar jartegnir at helgum dómi Óláfs konungs (…) Þá var þat í lög tekit um allan Nóreg at halda heilagt hátíð Óláfs konungs. Var þá sá dagr þegar þar svá haldinn sem inar æztu hátiðir.*[76]

Here now, contrary to death and burial, the role of a close relative and successor is finally prominent.

The text leaves no doubt about the fact that that Magnús Óláfsson was determined to invest substantially in the veneration of his father. The reliquary certainly could be compared to its numerous impressive counterparts from the continent or the British Isles, provided that the description quoted above is reliable. However, Magnús' role begins only with the ordering of the shrine. As discussed above, it was again non-family members, Þórir *hundr* and Bishop Grimkell, who noticed the first signs required for a *translatio*, the uncorrupted body and coffin. Thus, while in the case of St Óláfr's *translatio* his son Magnús plays a significant role, he still only comes "second".

In Denmark St Knútr's body was taken out of the ground already in 1095 and buried in a new, stone coffin. Ælnoth's *Historia* mentions that the king's body rested in the same place for eight years and almost nine months.[77] It was put in the stone coffin and placed in the crypt of the unfinished stone church (a side chapel in the new cathedral church, later dedicated to St Knútr). After the canonisation process was completed in 1100, the king's body was put in a reliquary decorated with gilt silver on 19 April of the same year. The *Historia* informs us that

---

[76] *"King Magnús had a shrine made and mounted with gold and silver, and studded with jewels. This shrine was made so that in shape and size it was like a coffin. Under it was an arched way, and above was a raised roof, with a head and a roof-ridge. Behind were plaited hangings; and before were gratings with padlocks, which could be locked with a key. In this shrine King Magnús had the holy remains of King Óláfr deposited, and many were the miracles there wrought. (…) It was also appointed by law that King Óláfr's holy day should be held sacred over all Norway, and that day has been kept ever afterwards as the greatest of Church days"* (*Óláfs saga* 253, *Magnúss saga* 10).

[77] Ælnoth, *Historia* 32.

Knútr's brother Eiríkr initiated the canonisation process. This is clear evidence for a prominent role of one of the saint's family members.[78] The same text contains an explicit entry concerning the active role of another individual related to Knútr, although again, as above, it is his widow Queen Aðalheiðr, thus someone not related to Knútr by blood. She supposedly sent precious stones to decorate the reliquary which was made after the canonisation process had been completed.[79]

For Sweden, Eiríkr's legend ends with a proto-miracle. The dates of translation as well as the names of individuals who initiated it or who financed the making of the reliquary must be taken from other sources. When compared to the cases of Óláfr and Knútr, the evidence for the veneration of Eiríkr's remains and his family's participation in this process is rather weak. The translation is often dated to 1257, but the date is problematic. The archiepiscopal see was moved to Östra Äros (the "New" Uppsala) and on this occasion the new cathedral church was consecrated to St Eiríkr, St Lars/Laurentius and St Óláfr. It is rather probable that the king's relics were moved there from Gamla Uppsala at the same time.[80] Arthur Bygdén, however, argues that since the *Vallentuna calendar* mentions Eiríkr's death anniversary as a holiday in 1198, it must be assumed that his remains had achieved the status of relics already then.[81] The first information concerning the reliquary is, in fact, a note in *Sverris saga*, dated to around 1220. In the Swedish source material the first information appears only in the second half of the thirteenth century. No source mentions Knútr Eiríksson explicitly as the initiator of his father's *cultus*; it is unknown whether he financed the making of the reliquary or contributed to the veneration in any other way.[82] Thus regarding St Eiríkr, the role of the family members for the martyrs' canonisation and *translatio* does not seem prominent—contrary to the cases of St Óláfr and St Knútr. This perceived insignificance of Eiríkr's relatives

[78] Ælnoth, *Historia* 33.
[79] Ælnoth, *Historia* 35.
[80] There is a disagreement among scholars as far as the dates of *translatio* are concerned because of the inconsistency of the source material. Lauritz Weibull dates the ceremony of *translatio* to 1273 and the moving of relics to 1290. Einar Carlsson suggested the translation and *elevatio* already in 1170s. See also Ahnlund 1954: 121–5. An examination of the relics which took part in 1946 provided information that could support Carlsson's hypothesis; the bones were most probably taken up from the grave within a decade or two after death (Sands 2008: 207).
[81] Bygdén 1954: 321.
[82] For the most recent discussion on the subject see Sands 2008, esp. pp. 207–14.

may, however, at least partially be due to the problematic nature of the sources.

Let us now turn in more detail to the role of the family members in the propagation of miracles connected to the uncorrupted body of the saints.

As mentioned above, the motif of the uncorrupted body was well known in Germanic tradition; the first king whose body supposedly never decayed was Charlemagne. The best-known instances are the reports on the opening of Charlemagne's grave at Aachen by Otto III: the deceased king was found sitting on the throne and Otto ordered his fingernails, which had grown through the glove, to be cut off. Another example is St Edmund, the English king and martyr. Edmund was beheaded by the Danes, but his head was miraculously re-attached to the body, the entire body remained uncorrupted; the head and nails continued to grow and were groomed by a pious woman who cared for the body.

There are no accounts of any special qualities of Eiríkr's remains in the *Legend,* which distinguishes that holy king from his two Scandinavian counterparts.

A story similar to the one about Charlemagne and St Edmund is told about Óláfr Haraldsson, whose hair and nails reportedly kept growing after his death. Apparently, the clipping of both became an annual ritual—and one which was the duty of close relatives. St Óláfr's son Magnús Óláfsson, and later his half-brother Haraldr Sigurðarson were responsible for the care of his body. In *Magnús saga góða* 1, it is stated that Magnús Óláfsson should win back his inheritance.[83] Most probably Haraldr *hárfagri*'s legacy is meant by that.[84] Thus, Magnús should follow Haraldr's and his father's position as the ruler of a large, unified country. The father-son relationship, underlined in *Heimskringla,* is there in order to legitimize Magnús's right to Haraldr *hárfagri*'s heritage, with Óláfr a natural link in this chain. The making of the reliquary supposedly took place immediately after Magnús had become the King of Norway in 1035.[85] From then on he also took on the duty of clipping St Óláfr's hair and nails. Since Magnús was the one to continue the process of unification after his father, also this act

[83] The word *ættland* is used here.

[84] See e.g. the discussion in Røthe 2004: 214.

[85] "*Magnús konungr fór um haustit allt austr til landsenda ok var hann til konunngs tekinn um allt land*" (*Magnúss saga góða* 5, the shrine making is described in ch. 10).

refers to the story of Haraldr *hárfagri* and his vow not to cut his hair before he would unify the entire Norway. In short, a close relative, Magnús, clearly had a significant duty regarding his father's uncorrupted body.

Haraldr Sigurðarson, Óláfr's half-brother, continued the hair and nail clipping. However, in 1066, without any explicitly stated reason he threw the keys to the reliquary into the river.[86] This act was symbolic in two ways: first, it took place shortly before Haraldr's expedition to England in that year, during which he was killed in a battle; second, as the most successful conqueror directly succeeding Magnús and Óláfr on the throne, he had completed the task of the unification of the Norwegian kingdom. Hence, the ritual was no longer needed.

It is interesting that *Heimskringla* uses the motif of posthumously growing hair and nails already mentioned in *Glælognskviða,* a poem from 1031/2. Again, as mentioned above, it may simply be a reference to a certain tradition known from the past, even if that past had been preserved in a skaldic poem influenced by foreign hagiographical texts. At the same time, it might be a reference to a pre-Christian tradition of kin and of a meaningful, predestined death of a ruler, which agreed with the biblical ideas of a similar type.[87]

Yet despite Óláfr's miraculously undecayed body, there were doubts about Óláfr Haraldsson's saintliness. In *Óláfs saga (Hkr)* Queen Alfifa suggested that the growing hair and nails of the king may suggest heathen magic. *Óláfs saga* is by no means the only text suggesting this. In the Old Norwegian Christian Law there was a specific command against the preservation of hair and nails with the intention of using them in magical rituals.[88] The discussion of (especially) the trial by fire by the Queen, as Røthe interprets it, shifts the focus from the King's body through which God's power is demonstrated, to the fire, or the act of putting a spell on it, so that it would not burn the relics.[89]

Also St Knútr's bones were submitted to the ordeal by fire as it was a common wish of the clergy and other people.[90] The ritual, in which the author of *Passio* claims to have participated, meant applying fire to Knútr's bones four times, but it would stop burning every time it

---

[86] *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* 80.
[87] Steinsland 2000: 157–88, Mortensen 2006: 268.
[88] Ngl II: 490.
[89] Røthe 2004: 215.
[90] *Passio Canuti* 32.

touched the bones.[91] No explicit doubts about the king's holiness are mentioned, but the fact that the procedure was demanded indicates that they seem to have existed.

Queen Alfifa's attitude seems to be even more blasphemous when the act of obtaining Óláfr's hair and nails in the same saga is recalled. Contrary to *Magnús saga góða* and *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar,* the clipping of the king's hair and nails was entrusted to a bishop.[92] The saint's relatives or any other laymen are not mentioned in this context at all, the privilege belongs to the clergy. The direct relationship to the holy predecessor's relics was a confirmation of a king's right to the throne. Óláfr Haraldsson's son, Magnús, and his half-brother Haraldr Sigurðarson, were granted a particular role in the care of the martyr's body, which went far beyond the simple ordering of a reliquary. The body's good condition and wholeness was either perceived as representing the indivisibility of the country the king ruled, or it symbolised the king's strife for the country's unification. In *Heimskringla* Óláfr is frequently referred to as following in Haraldr *hárfagri's* footsteps: as a ruler whose life mission was to rule over the whole of Norway. Even after *translatio* the context in which Óláfr's relics are mentioned in the medieval source material never suggests that his body was partitioned, and that can hardly be a coincidence. Although Óláfr Haraldsson's actual connection with Haraldr *hárfagri's* kin is, in fact, a debatable issue, the symbolic meaning of his role has been well used.[93] Knútr is another saint who might fit this pattern. His ambition made him claim the crowns of both England and Denmark, the idea of a joint kingdom being his goal. He was also supposed to have christianised and joined two new areas to his territory: Kurland and Livland (Livonia). Like Óláfr's body, also Knútr's remains were not partitioned.

In Knútr's case, the brotherly relationship is vital. Immediately after Knútr's burial, his brother Óláfr Sveinsson was elevated to the throne; and Óláfr is usually described as a usurper. Significantly therefore, Knútr's translation only occurred when his brother lost his power and died.[94] The author of *Passio* explains that Óláfr's usurpation of

[91] *Passio Canuti* 9.

[92] "Byskup varðveitti helgan dóm Óláfs konungs, skar hár hans og negl" (*Óláfs saga (Hkr)),* 245.

[93] Krag 1999 and 2002, Bagge 2002. Cf. for the body of the ruler representing the territory, and for a comparison between Óláfr and Hálfdan svarti, Steinsland in this volume.

[94] *Passio Canuti* 9, Ælnoth, *Historia* 32.

the crown was the reason for Knútr's death being followed by natural disasters and hunger, a punishment sent by God.[95] Numerous signs and prodigies suggested that Knútr's translation would be the right remedy against this state of affairs, which proved to be true. Apparently, according to the author of *Passio* the Jutes (who previously opposed the king) were the first ones to come and negotiate the translation with the priests and bishops.[96] On the other hand, Ælnoth suggests that conditions improved as soon as Eiríkr *inn góði* became king. Eiríkr is portrayed by Ælnoth as the righteous king whose reign initiated a change of conditions in the country, and Ælnoth praised Eiríkr's wisdom to the extent that he compared him to King Salomon.[97] Thus in Knútr's case, in *Passio* we might again see the pattern that the king's enemies or at least subjects (the Jutes)—and thus not the family members—initiated his *translatio*. Ælnoth's version, by contrast, does ascribe an important role to Eiríkr.

This analysis of the role of the family members with regard to the uncorrupted body of the saints so far seems to point to another possible pattern:

> The successors of the holy kings who did have a role, acted only after they had become kings themselves. The one exception is Magnús Óláfsson, although only according to one source, *Óláfs saga* in *Heimskringla.*

However, an overall assessment of the role of relatives and successors versus that of unrelated people—be they enemies, subjects, or clergy—indicates that even active relatives and successors were at best only one group amongst the initiators of the dead king's canonisation and *translatio*. This is very clearly expressed in *Óláfs saga*:

> *Var þat þá byskups atkvæði ok konungs samþykki ok dómr alls herjar, at Óláfr konungr væri sannheilagr.*[98]

The saga leaves no doubt about the division of rights among the bishop, the king and the assembly. Obviously, elements of the struggle

---

[95] *Passio Canuti* 8.

[96] *Passio Canuti* 8. This motif is not to be found in Ælnoth's *Historia*, where the author hardly indicates any particular individuals or groups as initiators of the *translatio*. Its aim might be the depiction of the former enemy as the witness of the king's holiness. Similarly Þórir *hundr* was granted the proto-miracle in *Óláfs saga.*

[97] Ælnoth, *Historia* 35.

[98] "*After the bishop's recognition, with the king's approbation and the decision of the Thing, it was determined that King Óláfr should be considered a man truly holy*" (*Óláfs saga (Hkr)* 244).

between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, an important issue in the 1200s, influence the saga's description. In our context the saga implies that the decision was "democratic"; but in particular, it shows plainly that the bishop was the first element in the process, having to recognise the dead king's saintliness. Only afterwards does the new king—and relative—approve, which in itself is at least officially not enough; since a decision by the Þing is also required.

Thus in the case of St Óláfr, the strong influence of the clergy was exercised by the secular church—the bishop. In St Eiríkr's and St Knútr's cases, we also note the significant role of the clergy, here however played by the regular church.

It has been suggested that the cathedral chapter of Old Uppsala had Benedictine origins.[99] Allegedly, the Benedictine monks from England had been brought there by King Eiríkr himself. Like the Benedictine monastery at Odense which was the centre for the cult of Saint Knútr (who had brought monks from England there), also Old Uppsala contributed greatly to the veneration of St Eiríkr.[100] They exerted strong influence on the origins of the cult of the king, their benefactor. Clerical interest grew even stronger in the archdiocese of (New) Uppsala. As a potential rival of Niðaróss, it might have served as a pilgrimage site and attracted the faithful, which would provide both immaterial and material benefits.[101]

A cult continuity in the veneration of Eiríkr has been suggested in connection with the placement of his remains in Old Uppsala, supposedly an important site for pre-Christian beliefs associated with sacral kingship.[102] Unlike in the case of Óláfr, it is, however, difficult to make any direct connection between a strong pre-Christian cult and the veneration of Eiríkr.[103]

In sum thus, obviously, clerical interests frequently agreed with the royal aspirations of the potential candidates to the throne. Still, there

---

[99] Sands 2008: 209, after Gallén 1976, Helander 2001.

[100] Hoffmann (1975: 38–45 and 1981: 36–38) has suggested the influence of English spirituality on Eiríkr's legend, which was also discussed by Hallencreutz 1996: 137. See also Nyberg 1981: 103–4 and Fröjmark 1996.

[101] Ingrid Lundegårdh has suggested that the *cultus* of St Eiríkr was meant to replace the *cultus* of Saint Óláfr in the northern Swedish provinces, which paid *Olavsskatt* to Niðaróss, although they were under the ecclesiastical authority of Uppsala (Lundegårdh 1997).

[102] See e.g. Lindqvist 1996: 236–7.

[103] The issue has been discussed by e.g. Lindqvist 1996, Fröjmark 1996, Steinsland 2000 and Sundqvist 2002.

is no doubt that the holders of secular power depended on the decisions of the clergy in terms of proclaiming the holiness of the deceased kings. Thus we hardly ever see family members described as initiators of translation or canonisation. It was the secular or regular clergy who began the process, possibly after the dead king's saintliness manifested itself to poor anonymous members of their flock. Óláfr's, Knútr's and Eiríkr's family members and successors then merely joined them.

Their male relatives who wished to be perceived as the righteous rulers and followers of the saints, relied on external symbols of power which, at the same time, underlined the connection with the saints. Financing reliquaries and appeals to the Pope, but also church building and planning their own burial in the proximity of relics became almost standard.

6. *The family and the legacy of the Saint*

It was customary for the king to bury his predecessor.[104] As discussed, the three Scandinavian examples, however, show another pattern: Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr were buried by random people, while their successors only took an active role in the cult later, at some stage in the process of translation. Although the circumstances under which the royal martyrs died go a long way towards explaining the relatives' absence at the martyrs' burial, it is still rather surprising that the sons and brothers of the holy kings were not accorded a greater role in spreading the *fama sanctitatis*. As argued here, it was other laymen who witnessed the first miracles and the final decision about the status of the deceased was left to the clergy. The translation of relics was literally the removal of them from one place (a more or less temporary grave) and placement in another one (on an altar, in a church, preferably a newly built one).[105] Until the official process became standardised and the prerogative of the Pope, it was treated as the outward recognition of heroic sanctity, equal to canonisation.

The contribution of the successors of the royal martyrs in the *cultus* of Scandinavian royal martyrs seems to be a symbolic act. It seems significant that there are parallels between the beginning of their reigns and the official recognition of the sanctity of their predecessors. The

[104] Evans 2006: 142–4.
[105] *Translatio primo, translatio secundo.*

texts under consideration appear to follow the same scheme: death—burial—miracles (most often spread by anonymous people, the so-called "common opinion")—approval of the clergy—*translatio*, and only at this last stage the relatives/successors become active. Why did they assume an active role precisely then? The desire to be buried *ad sanctos*, that is, among the saints, was a common practice in medieval Europe, which gained in significance after the doctrine of purgatory had spread. However, for the members of royal families, being buried next to their forefathers who had the reputation of being holy, had an additional meaning. It could serve the manifestation of their power as legitimised in two ways: by royal blood and by spiritual power. An extreme example of the manifestation of royal power by family ties is the case of Westminster Abbey in England. It was founded by Edward the Confessor, whose body, according to the legend, never corrupted. He was the first king buried there. Westminster became the rival of Canterbury, the pilgrimage site which commemorated Archbishop and Saint Thomas Becket, killed by King Henry II's knights. Westminster Abbey may safely be called "a consistent royal necropolis from the thirteenth century onwards."[106] It is hardly a coincidence that Henry III, the son of Henry II, promoted the cult of Edward as a dynastic saint of the English kings. He developed the Abbey and chose to be buried there.[107]

The very act of burying kings within abbey churches indicated the sacral element of medieval kingship; it has even been suggested that the practice of burying royalties in raised tombs "mimicked the burial of saints."[108] David Rollason maintains that in the tenth and eleventh centuries the English church was not disposed to regard royal confessors as saints and gives the example of Edward the Confessor as a proof of this hypothesis.[109] However, considering the way Westminster Abbey developed it is difficult to agree with Rollason's argument.

A necropolis as big as Westminster abbey never existed in Scandinavia. Yet certain tendencies to concentrate royal power around the relics of

---

[106] Evans 2006: 26.

[107] It is also rather interesting in this context that Henry III tried to popularize the idea of "the royal touch" in England and, apparently, performed miracles himself, although Guibert of Nogent (1124) clearly stated that while the French kings had the ability, their English counterparts certainly did not (Evans 2006: 179). Thomas Becket was clearly perceived by many as an "anti-royalist" saint (Evans 2006: 190).

[108] Binski 1996: 25.

[109] Rollason 1989: 140.

the royal martyrs can be observed. *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* mentions the following:

> *Magnús konungur Ólafsson lét gera Ólafskirkju í Kaupangi. Í þeim stað hafði náttsætt verið lík konungs. Það var þá fyrir ofan bæinn. Hann lét þar og reisa konungsgarðinn. Kirkjan varð eigi alger áður konungur andaðist. Lét Haraldur konungur fylla það er á skorti. Hann lét og efna þar í garðinum að gera sér steinhöll og varð hún eigi alger áður hann lést. Haraldur konungur lét reisa af grundvelli Maríukirkju uppi á melinum, nær því er heilagur dómur konungsins lá í jörðu hinn fyrsta vetur eftir fall hans. Það var mikið musteri og gert sterklega að líminu svo að varla fékk brotið þá er Eysteinn erkibiskup lét ofan taka. Heilagur dómur Ólafs konungs var varðveittur í Ólafskirkju meðan Maríukirkja var í gerð. Haraldur konungur lét húsa konungsgarð ofan frá Maríukirkju við ána þar sem nú er. En þar sem hann hafði höllina látið gera lét hann vígja hús það til Gregoríuskirkju.*[110]

According to *Óláfs saga kyrra*:

> *Ólafur konungur lét gera steinmusteri í Niðarósi og setti í þeim stað sem fyrst hafði verið jarðað lík Ólafs konungs og var þar yfir sett altarið sem gröftur konungs hafði verið. Þar var vígð Kristskirkja. Var þá og þannug flutt skrín Ólafs konungs og sett þar yfir altari. Urðu þar þá margar jartegnir".*[111]

These "family burials" gain even more significance having considered the fact that, according to various source material, Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr were initially buried in the churches which were either built at their command, finished during their reign, or to which the kings had

---

[110] "*King Magnús Óláfsson built Óláfr's church in the town (Niðaróss), on the spot where Óláfr's body was set down for the night, and which, at that time, was above the town. He also had the king's house built there. The church was not quite finished when the king died; but King Harald had what was wanting completed. There, beside the house, he began to construct a stone hall, but it was not finished when he died. King Haraldr had the church called Mary Church built from the foundations up, at the sandhill close to the spot where the king's holy remains were concealed in the earth the first winter after his fall. It was a large temple, and so strongly built with lime that it was difficult to break it when the Archbishop Eysteinn had it pulled down. Óláfr's holy remains were kept in Óláfr's church while Mary Church was building. King Haraldr had the king's house erected below Mary's Church, at the side of the river, where it now is; and he had the house in which he had made the great hall consecrated and called Gregorius Church*" (*Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* 38).

[111] "*King Óláfr had a church of stone built in Niðaróss, on the spot where King Óláfr's body had first been buried, and the altar was placed directly over the spot where the king's grave had been. This church was consecrated and called Christ Church; and King Óláfr's shrine was removed to it, and was placed before the altar, and many miracles took place there*" (*Óláf kyrres saga* 6).

a particular connection of some other kind. Óláfr had St Clement's Church built in Niðaróss; Knútr had allegedly brought St Alban's relics from England and placed in Odense church where he later was murdered and buried. Eiríkr finished building the cathedral church in Gamla Uppsala which his predecessors had begun to build. He also installed priests there. This is where he was buried and where his reliquary was placed for a hundred years, before it was moved to the new Uppsala.

There seems to be a strong connection between succession to the throne directly after the royal martyr and burial in the proximity of the relics. While Óláfr's son and half-brother succeeded him directly, the situation was quite different for Knútr's and Eiríkr's relatives. Knútr Eiríksson did not succeed his father on the throne directly, but came to power only after Magnús Henriksson (1160–1161), the assassin of his father, and Karl Sverkersson (1161–1167). Unlike his father, Knútr was not buried in (New) Uppsala, but in Varnhem. The successor of Saint Knútr, his half-brother Eiríkr did not follow him directly either, as mentioned above, as Knútr's other brother, Óláfr, who opposed Knútr, "usurped" the throne 1086–1095. Eiríkr was not buried in the proximity of his brother, but the circumstances of his death are rather unique; Eiríkr died on a pilgrimage which led to Jerusalem via Rome, where he supposedly applied for his brother's canonisation. The place of his death, Paphos in Cyprus, was also the place of his burial.

Again it must be underlined that it is interesting to observe that of the sources concerning Saint Óláfr, it is only the separate *Óláfs saga* in *Heimskringla* that mentions his successors as contributors to Óláfr Haraldsson's saintly fame. As far as church building is concerned, the *Separate Saga* does not mention Magnús's contribution. The text only refers to the reliquary making and the establishment of the feast as well as to the keeping of Óláfr's reliquary, also by Haraldr Sigurðarson.[112] Of all the three kings praised by their individual sagas, only Óláfr *kyrri*'s church building is described in *Óláfs saga* in *Heimskringla*. It is a significant fact that all those kings related by blood to Saint Óláfr built new churches and moved his relics to them, were also buried *ad sanctos*, in the proximity of those relics. This information, however, is also available only in the individual sagas devoted to those kings.

[112] *Óláfs saga* 253 and 270.

Heimskringla's royalist ideology concerning the Norwegian monarchs is certainly shared by Ælnoth's *Historia*, dedicated to King Níkulás Sveinsson of Denmark. According to this source King Eiríkr Sveinsson applied to the Pope for Knútr's canonization (ch. 33).[113] In the letter to King Níkulás, which at the same time is a prologue to the *Historia*, it is underlined that the King is St Knútr's brother. He is encouraged to imitate Knútr's honourable deeds and is presented not only as the saint's follower, but also a participant in his saintliness. It is quite clear from the prologue that Ælnoth's aim was to write the history of the royal family and of the country. Although the story is, in principle, about Saint Knútr, the saint's glory is without doubt beneficial for the current monarch, to whom the chronicle is dedicated. Ælnoth's aim was to spread the idea of the royal power as sent from God.[114] Also the role of Knútr's brother Benedikt and his burial *ad sanctos*, close to Knútr, is only mentioned by the *Historia*, the source according to which Benedikt participated in Knútr's glory through his own violent death.[115]

In sum, it appears that the relatives/successors of Sts Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr become actively involved in the dead kings' sainthood only at the moment of *translatio*, not before. There are on the one hand probably reasons relating to the power-sharing between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* for this: a cleric was required for the first steps of the cults. In addition, it was at the stage of *translatio* that the cult gained real ideological significance for the successors, with the physical creation of a centre for the royal cult and its consequences for ensuing royal burials. Whether we want to call such a site a royal necropolis also in a Scandinavian context, can be discussed.

---

[113] The first appeal was directed at Pope Urban II in 1098, during Erik's trip to Italy, but without much success as the pope died a year later. Then it was renewed and sent to Pope Paschalis II (1099–1118).

[114] Albrectsen 1984: 122–3.

[115] A. D. Jørgensen disagrees on this with Gertz, see Gertz pp. 74–5. Jørgensen maintained that the passage concerning the martyrdom of Benedikt and the 17 supporters which is to be found on *Tabula* was originally a part of *Passio* but was removed as the Pope refused to have them canonised together with Knútr. Could the "illegal" enshrinement of Benedikt by Eiríkr Sveinsson, against the Pope's decision be emphasised only to underline the family ties (Gertz 1907: 94–5)?

7. *Conclusion*

Saints' cults, especially the cults of the royal martyrs, can symbolise both the strength and the weakness of their successors. As Janet Nelson argued, "royal saints, manipulated by the living, provided not just a model but a yardstick of kingly conduct and performance in office".[116] In the first instance royal saints can be seen as heightening still further the standing and prestige of the royal line, and in the second as a means by which doubtful or unreal claims to rule were legitimised or reinforced through reference to the authority and power of the saints.

Three aspects of the cult of saints are significant here: first, the making of saints from the royal line; second, the association between the kings and particular saints (not necessarily royal); third, the royal role in the cult of relics, especially collections of fragmentary relics.[117] With a few changes, this classification suggested by D. W. Rollason in the discussion of medieval English monarchs could be applied to the Scandinavian context. First, this chapter has consistently argued that the making of royal saints was not *initiated* by their successors. The clergy and a wider network of people of different backgrounds and affiliations took a more active part in it. Second, hardly any non-royal saints seem to have been of importance for the Scandinavian royal families or for the identity of a growing/developing kingdom (unlike St Cuthbert in England). Third, there are instances of kings distributing relics and building their power on imported saints, including the royal martyrs themselves. Saint Knútr's import of St Alban's relics proved to be of great importance for his fame.

As Patrick Geary has observed, in the period c. 1000–1300 in Scandinavia kings were "not at all obvious as the only form of political authority".[118] This statement proves true both as far as the actual rule and decision-making is concerned, and when it comes to authority in the religious sphere. The examination of the way in which the cults of Saint Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr were initiated shows that blood ties with the royal martyrs were only to a minor extent used as an argument by their successors to the throne. And in Denmark St Knútr the

[116] Nelson 1973: 43–4.
[117] This seems to apply especially to England after c. 850 (Rollason 1989: 137).
[118] Geary 2006: 327.

king had a rival in the family; it was Knútr the duke (Knútr Eiríksson *lávarðr*) who became the patron saint of the Valdemarian dynasty and according to some source material almost outshone his own paternal uncle.[119]

In general, it is clear that the successors of the three holy kings took some advantage of the ability to legitimize their right to rule with the help of the *cultus*. But, as discussed above, they required the approval of clergy.

Admittedly, some texts do suggest that the participation of sons, brothers and half-brothers was meaningful. Here we have to be critical and ask and to which extent these suggestions were made under the influence of certain powerful individuals. This chapter certainly argues that the relatives/successors participated in the cult rather than initiated it. Although all the prose texts cited agree upon the idea that a king is Lord's anointed, and are rich in Biblical metaphors, only the pseudo-historical texts make a link between the saintliness of the holy kings and particular families. This is connected to the problem that the sources represent different genres: "pure" hagiographies would generally be focused more on the person of the main character and the aspects of his holiness rather than on all the events and persons from his surrounding. The boundary between the two types is, however, often very thin and difficult to define; *Óláfs saga* in *Heimskringla* could be an example here.

Again admittedly, *de facto* the clergy were in principle responsible for a variety of actions and rituals, such as the process of beatification or canonisation, the *translatio*, and possibly even the very act of opening a coffin would not take place without their permission. Thus the kings depended on the clergy, they did not have total control of all stages of a saint's cult, or even of the definition of their (legitimate!?) family ties to their dead ancestor. The relatives/successors needed to co-operate with the clergy who were in charge of the process of sanctification.

What this chapter has shown is that this *de facto* situation is also mirrored in our texts: the overall impression is that the Scandinavian

---

[119] As in Saxo's *History of Denmark (*Friis-Jensen 2006: 195–216). See also Phelpstead 2006: 75 and 2007: 184–193. An elaborate study of the *cultus* of Earl Magnús of Orkney by Haki Antonsson provides another example of a Scandinavian nobleman who enjoyed the status of a saint. The analysis proves that also in this case the impact of the family members had been overrated so far (Haki Antonsson 2007).

successors of the saints might have financed the making of reliquaries and churches, but that the clergy had the decisive influence on how their right to the throne and the family ties to the holy martyrs would be defined. The role of the relatives in the cults of Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr was rather more limited than hitherto assumed.

Bibliography

Sources

Erik den Heliges Legend på Latin, fornsvenska och modern svenska (in) *Erik den Helige. Historia. Kult. Reliker. Studier utgivna under red. av Bengt Thordeman*. Stockholm. 1954.

Haralds saga ins Hárfagra. Íslenzk Fornrit XXVI. Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag. Reykjavík. 1951.

Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar. Íslenzk Fornrit XXVI. Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag. Reykjavík. 1951.

Magnúss saga ins góða. Íslenzk Fornrit XXVIII. Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag. Reykjavík. 1979.

Passio et miracula Beati Olavi edited from a twelfth-century manuscript in the library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford / with an introduction and notes by F. Metcalfe. Clarendon Press. Oxford. 1881.

Passio Sancti Canuti Regis et Martiris (in) Gertz, M. Cl. 1907 *Knud den Helliges Martyrhistorie.* Copenhagen.

Óláfs saga Kyrra. Íslenzk Fornrit XXVIII. Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag. Reykjavík. 1979.

Óláfs saga ins Helga. Íslenzk Fornrit XXVII. Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag. Reykjavík. 1979.

Ór Óláfs sögu ins Helga inni Sérstöku eptir Snorra Sturluson. Íslenzk Fornrit XXVII. Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag. Reykjavík. 1979.

Ælnoths Krønike (Historia ortus, vitae et passionis Sti. Canuti). Oversat og kommenteret af Erling Albrectsen. Efterskrift af Preben Meulengracht Sørensen. Odense. 1984.

Studies

Albrectsen, E. 1984. Indledning. *Ælnoths Krønike*. Oversat og kommenteret af Erling Albrectsen. Efterskrift af Preben Meulengracht Sørensen. Odense.

Angenendt, A. 1991. *Corpus incorruptum*: Eine Leitidee der mittelalterlichen Reliquienverehrung, *Saeculum* 42, 320–46.

Bagge, S. Mellom kildekritikk og historisk antropologi, *Historisk Tidskrift* 8/2–3.

Binski, Paul 1996. *Medieval Death. Ritual and Representation*. London.

Bygdén, Artur 1954. Sankt Eriks skrin genom tiderna, *Erik den Helige*. Ed. Bengt Thordeman. Stockholm. 321–396.

Ekrem, Inger, Lars Boje Mortensen and Karen Skovgaard-Petersen eds. 2000. *Olavslegenden og den latinske historieskrivning i 1100–talets Norge*. Copenhagen.

Evans, M. 2006. *The Death of Kings. Royal Deaths in Medieval England*. London/New York.

Friis-Jensen, K. In the Presence of the Dead. Saint Canute the Duke in Saxo Grammaticus's Gesta Danorum, *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)*. Ed. Lars Boje Mortensen. Copenhagen. 195–216.

Fröjmark, A. 1996. Från Erik pilgrim till Erik konung. Om helgonkulten och Sveriges kristnande, *Kristnandet i Sverige. Gamla källor och nya perspektiv*. Red. Bertil Nilsson, Uppsala. 387–418.
Geary, P. 2006. Reflections on Historiography and the Holy: Center and Periphery, *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)*. Ed. Lars Boje Mortensen. Copenhagen. 323–330.
Gertz, M. Cl. 1907. Om Passio S. Canuti. *Knud den Helliges Martyrhistorie*. 64–80.
Gransden, A. 1985. Legends and Traditions Concerning the Origins of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds, *English History Review*, 100.
Graus, František 1965. *Volk, Herrscher, Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger. Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit*. Prague.
Gunnes, E. 1972. Helgenkongen—et politisk fenomen? Lumen. *Katolsk teologisk tidsskrift*. København. 189–201.
Haki Antonsson 2004. Some Observations on Martyrdom in Post-Conversion Scandinavia, *Saga Book* 28. 70–94.
—— 2007. *Saint Magnus of Orkney: a Scandinavian martyr-cult in context*. The Northern World 29. Leiden.
Hauck, Karl 1950. *Geblütsheiligkeit in Liber Floridus. Festschrift für Paul Lehmann*. St Ottilien.
Helander, Sven 2001. Den Medeltida Uppsalaliturgien: Studier i Helgonlängd, Tidegärd, och Mässa. *Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae* 63. Lund.
Higham, N. J. 1997. *The Convert Kings. Power and religious affiliation in early Anglo-Saxon England*. Manchester.
Hoffmann, Erich 1975. *Die heiligen Könige bei den Angelsachsen und den skandinavischen Völkern. Königsheiligen und Königshaus*. Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins, Band 69. Neumünster.
Kantorowicz, Ernst H. 1997. *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton.
Klaniczay, Gábor 2002. *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*. Trans. Éva Pálmai. Cambridge.
Krag, Claus 1999. Perspektiver på den norske rikssamlingen—et forsøk på en revisjon, *Kongemøte på Stiklestad. Rapport fra seminar om kongedømmet i vikingtid og tidlig middelalder*. Red. O. Skevik, Stiklestad. 11–28.
—— 2002. Myten om Hårfagreættens' odel, *Historisk Tidskrift* 8/2–3.
Lindqvist, T. 1996. Kungamakt, kristnande, statsbilding, *Kristnandet i Sverige. Gamla källor och nya perspektiv*, red. Bertil Nilsson, Uppsala. 217–242.
Lundegårdh, Ingrid 1997. Kampen om den norrländska Olavskulten, *Helgonet i Nidaros. Olavskult och Kristnande i Norden*. Red. Lars Rumar, Stockholm. 115–140.
Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben 1984. *Ælnoths Krønike*. Oversat og kommenteret af Erling Albrectsen. Efterskrift af Preben Meulengracht Sørensen. Odense.
Mortensen, L. B. 2006. Sanctified Beginnings and Mythopoietic Moments. The First Wave of Writing on the Past in Norway, Denmark and Hungary, c. 1000–1230, *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)*, ed. Lars Boje Mortensen. Copenhagen. 247–274.
Nelson, Janet 1973. Royal Saints and Early Medieval Kingship, *Sanctity and Secularity: The Church and the World* (Studies in Church History 10; Oxford). 39–44.
Nyberg, Tore 1981. St Knud and St Knud's Church, *Hagiography and Medieval Literature. A Symposium*. Odense, 100–10.
Phelpstead, C. 2006. Pilgrims, Missionaries and Martyrs: The Holy in Bede, *Orkneyinga saga* and *Knýtlinga saga*, *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)*. Ed. Lars Boje Mortensen. Copenhagen. 53–82.
—— 2007. *Holy Vikings: Saints' Lives in the Old Icelandic Kings' Sagas*. Tempe, Arizona.

Ridyard, Susan J. 1988. *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England. A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*. Cambridge.
Roest, B. 2002. Dealing with Brother Ass: bodily aspects of the Franciscan sanctification of the self, *Invention of Saintliness.* Ed. Anneke Mulder-Bakker. Cambridge. 163–184.
Rollason, D. W. 1989. The Cults of Murdered Saints of Anglo-Saxon England, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 11.
Røthe, G. 2004. *Helt, konge og helgen. Den hagiografiske tradisjon om Olav den hellige i Den legendariske saga, Heimskringla og Flateyjarbók*. A doctoral dissertation submitted at the University of Oslo.
Sands, T. B. 2008. The Cult of Sr Eric, King and Martyr, in Medieval Sweden, *Sanctity in the North. Saints, Lives and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia.* Ed. Thomas A. DuBois. University of Toronto Press, pp. 203–238.
Schmid, Toni 1954. Erik den helige i liturgien, *Erik den Helige, Historia. Kult. Reliker*. Red. Bengt Thordeman. Stockholm. 155–172.
Steinsland, Gro 2000. *Den hellige kongen. Om religion og herskermakt fra vikingtid til middelalder*. Oslo.
Sundqvist, O. 2002. *Freyr's offspring. Rulers and religion in ancient Svea society*. Uppsala.
Vauchez, A. 2005. *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages*. Cambridge.
Westman, Knut B. 1954. Erik den Hellige och hans tid, *Erik den Helige. Historia. Kult. Reliker.* Red. Bengt Thordeman. Stockholm. 1–108.

CONCLUSIONS

THE LONG ADAPTATION OF PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN IDEOLOGIES OF RULERSHIP

Ian Beuermann

1. *Essentials*

Field of research, source problems and possibilities

Through our discussions of different subjects and sources, and with our different methodologies, we strove to gain a better understanding of the ideological aspects of rulership in the Nordic countries during the five centuries from *c.* 800 to *c.* 1300. With this, we aim to contribute something new to the wide field of Nordic viking and medieval studies: a consideration of *Nordic viking and medieval history of ideas*. Contrary to works from the field of history of events, our book does not focus on the social, cultural or material exercise of power as such, but on the *ideological* foundation and legitimisation of power.[1] And contrary to existing works on royal ideology, we do not work within medieval national—especially Norwegian or Danish—confines.[2] Rather, we discuss the ideology of rulership during *both the viking and the medieval period*, and in an appropriately wide geographical *inter-"national" Nordic* setting.

The dangers of such an approach are obvious, and each author had to battle with them. Major problems are posed by the available written and non-written sources. In order to identify viking and medieval

[1] Boje Mortensen (ed.) 2006 falls into the field of literary or cultural history with the discussion of *The Making of Christian Myths* as a "first wave of local self definition" (8). Wanner 2008 comes closer to ideological issues in his analysis of Snorri's Edda as "cultural capital" in thirteenth century Iceland. He discusses that work as a *modus operandi* rather than *operatum*, "played out in time in strategic response to ever changing contexts and needs" (15). Cf. in general Roesdahl 2008, Lund 2008, Lindkvist 2008, Berend 2007, Forte et al. 2005, Helle 2003, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999, Roesdahl 1998, Lund 1997, Sawyer P. 1997, Meulengracht Sørensen 1993.

[2] Orning 2008, Line 2007, Vadum 2004, Hermanson 2003, 2000, Bagge 1996, 1993, 1991, 1987, Gunnes 1971.

ideology of rulership we could not limit ourselves to normative texts. On the contrary, narratives about rituals, legends and myths, as well as mythography, took pride of place, followed by discussions of the archaeological material. Taken together, the chance survival of these sources, their uneven contribution and differing interpretations make comparisons of ideological elements exceedingly difficult. A methodological stumbling-block is not only the question of discerning history of ideas ("ideology") from history of events ("facts"), but also the question of whether we can discern ideology as it existed from ideology as it is represented in our sources—and manipulation occurs in written *and* material sources.[3] A particular problem here, and one which partly explains the prior reluctance to discuss *Viking Age* ideology of rulership beyond the question of sacral kingship, is the late, i.e., medieval, date of all manuscripts and many texts. To mention but one example, how genuinely Viking-Age is the link to Freyr or the identification of the ruler's territory with the dead king's body in Snorri Sturluson's *Hálfdanar saga svarta*? Did this particular ideology *exist* in Viking-Age southern Norway, or is it merely *represented* as such by Snorri in the thirteenth century? Thus Viking Age ideology cannot be examined on its own; in our texts we always see it through a medieval looking glass. An interpretation of material remains with the aim to discern ideological systems which, as carefully as this might be done, refers to textual evidence, faces the same problem.

Rather than baulking at these challenges, authors tried new approaches and discovered new possibilities. In response to the source situation, the focus of many contributions constantly shifts between the viking and the medieval periods. This, we hope, allowed us to identify medieval ideology, discern medieval representations of Viking Age ideology, and finally distil Viking Age ideology. It also meant that we did not, in fact could not, merely discuss which ideological elements existed at which period. Rather, this examination is closely intertwined with a debate of the reasons for their existence, survival, or resurgence.

We tried to take care not to equate Nordic with Scandinavian. However, an element which we should have wished to discuss more within the ideology of rulership is the Sami perspective. The present volume makes a beginning by considering their ideological incorporation

[3] Cf. discussion Walker 2006: 36.

into the medieval Norwegian kingdom, but an analysis of their own views, for example what concepts of ideological centres they had as a nomadic culture, remains for a later stage. And while we include an Irish point of view, we are open to criticism that we left out several areas whose culture either was Scandinavian, or was very similar or at least comparable to the Scandinavian one: Denmark, Greenland, the Isle of Man and Anglo-Saxon England. To this, as well as to other comments on subject matters not included we can only answer that this book is the result of a wide, but nevertheless only a first project, which aims *to present first results and to encourage further research and discussion*. We sincerely hope to stimulate other scholars into engaging with us in this exciting field of ideology and power in the Viking and Middle Ages.

Main results

Different as our contributions are, taken together they support the main hypothesis of our research project: a religiously informed ideology of rulership was an important and adaptable element in the organisation of viking and medieval society. As such it played a vital role in the long process of transition.

Viking Age power, including its structure, exercise and limitations, was based on an ideology deeply grounded in pagan religion.[4] While the relation between the cults of Óðinn and Freyr is complicated, Óðinn appears to be more important for Viking Age rulership, possibly because of the strong west-Norwegian focus on a warrior ideology.

This pagan religious ideology of rulership played an exceedingly important role in Nordic societies from the Viking Age to at least the early Middle Ages. For this long period, from the ninth to the early twelfth century which includes the flowering of a pronounced warrior culture as well as the Christianisation of greater parts of the North, we note a high degree of continuity in the ideology of rulership. Important elements of the pagan ideology survived into the early Middle Ages, either in their original or in a slightly adapted form.

[4] Cf. however Boje Mortensen 2006: 10–11 for the difficulty of separating religion from politics, stressing "the foundational obligatory force of religious phenomena" (11).

When the North acquired a new ideology of rulership in the high Middle Ages, it was no passive recipient, simply importing Christian European ideas. Rather, Nordic authors contributed with native concepts to create a new ideological system. In the thirteenth century, the North formulated is own Scandinavian Christian ideologies of rulership.

This did however not immediately lead to a unitary, one-size-fits-all Nordic ideology. While one debate in Nordic high medieval historiography was between traditional Nordic and new European concepts, other discussions occurred within the North. We note a number of political-ideological, regional, and chronological differences concerning which elements and concepts are included or discarded.

In sum, a sometimes regionally differing, but structurally partially similar religious ideology was a fundamental basis for viking and early medieval rulership in the North. The high Middle Ages may have witnessed a structural change with the emergence of two separate institutions controlling the formulation of ideology: king and Church. And the explosion in the production of ideological texts during this period, i.e., from about the middle of the twelfth century on (a point which shall be taken up below), bears witness to processes of discussion and creation of a new Nordic ideology of rulership. The secular and the ecclesiastical elites, traditionalists, mediators and innovators, centres and peripheries in the North forged a new ideology in response to European influences.

2. *Viking-Age ideology of rulership*

Óðinn: the warrior-rulers' god

Óðinn appears as the dominating god any Viking Age ruler, at least any coastal west-Nordic ruler worth his salt, needed to be associated with. Most frequently, it is descent from Óðinn which serves to confer legitimacy to the ruler (see the kings of Norway and the earls of Hlaðir); otherwise rulers are described as showing Óðinic characteristics (Earl Einarr of Orkney), rulers are ritually initiated to wisdom by Óðinn (Sigurðr Brestisson of the Faeroes, but also King Haraldr hárfagri), or Óðinn is their host in the afterlife (the Christian (!) Kings Eiríkr and Hákon of Norway). The latter involves an element of being judged worthy to join Óðinn in Valhǫll which recalls patterns in royal sainthood (see below).

Also in earthly life, the ideology of rulership found its expression in the hall-culture with its strong masculine warrior-character. Here, the insight that halls were multi-functional should not distract us from the important fact that they were *special* buildings: they were designed for the many functions which are special to expressing an ideology of rulership. Interestingly however, we find evidence for a hall culture also in the agricultural inland areas without a strong cult of Óðinn such as Mälaren, where the cult of the fertile and peaceful Freyr seems to have been predominant. The rise of the hall culture with its associated high seat, may thus rather need to be seen in the context of social changes in the Scandinavian migration period when the elite seem to have strengthened its position,[5] before it merged with the in the Viking Age more and more dominating cult of Óðinn.

In fact, we need to question whether Freyr's association with the Norwegian Ynglingar was a genuine Viking Age phenomenon at all; or rather a thirteenth-century ideological defence of Snorri's against Danish pretensions: by linking the Norwegian royal house to the ancient dynasty at Uppsala *Heimskringla* strengthens the former's position vis-à-vis the Danish kings. But if we follow this line of thought, what does this mean for our appreciation of the evidence for a cult of Freyr in Iceland?

Óðinn is a rather complex deity. As the warrior and wise god he has two sides, and he shares the warrior-sphere with Þórr. Nordic ideology of rulership plays artfully with these various elements. In our texts, we see the kings of Norway (and possibly the earls of Hlaðir) described as warrior-like and wise, while the earls of Orkney are merely—and very—warrior-like, and Icelandic chieftains are merely wise (but show a preference for names with the compound Þórr). Within the martial sphere, Óðinn confers other, special, powers to rulers than to common warriors. He leaves the protection of the cosmic sphere to Þórr, whose power is more physical where Óðinn's is mental. While the latter distinction between these "two gods of war" may be genuinely Viking Age, we need to ask whether the former distribution of Óðinic traits between kings, earls and chieftains owes more to medieval Norwegian views on the proper hierarchy of power. This, in fact, may also have influenced which rulers our texts show as being connected to Óðinn

[5] Cf. for "Timber Halls and Ideological Expression" Walker 2006: 23–45, esp. 26, 37, and the references there. Cf. especially also Fabech 2000.

via descent, appearance, or initiation. Should we take the fact that the earliest sagas, *Orkneyinga saga* and *Færeyinga saga* from around 1200, associate their rulers (earls and chieftains) with Óðinn, whereas in later sagas no chieftain makes such claims anymore, as indicating a certain "de-sacralisation" of rulers in the texts of the Middle Ages?[6] Would the medieval kings of Norway, via the Icelanders writing for them, have deliberately monopolised Óðinic connections, thereby claiming the highest possible position? In this case, Óðinn the high one would have enjoyed a very long life in the ideology of rulership indeed.

Masculine and feminine in the ideology of rulership

While we note a dominating and long-lived warrior ideology strongly associated with Óðinn, not all characters in the ideology of rulership were male. A certain type of female characters seems to have played an important role: an at least initially very independent "foreign", *utgarðr* woman, first referred to as a giant-woman, later a Sami woman, representing non-Norse elements; or a woman of very low social standing, even a slave. The divine and/or the human founding-fathers of the dynasty, for example Óðinn and Haraldr hárfagri, enter into an alliance with these women (Skaði, Snæfríðr, Þóra), a union characterised by a mixture of sexuality and coercion. The same vocabulary is also explicitly used to refer to land: land is the ruler's bride whom he conquers and with whom he enters into a union.

Three ideological elements can be distilled from these mythological and legendary patterns. Firstly, the old marriage-myth of the union with the (giant) *utgarðr* woman underlines the special character of the dynasty—its members are doubly different from all others—and thereby its claim to rulership. Secondly, these tales might then have been transformed into an ideological representation of the forceful conquest leading to a later more peaceful incorporation of "foreign" lands into the earldom of Hlaðir or the Norwegian kingdom. A previously independent element (Sami-people, Sami-land) receives what is deemed its appropriate place. Thirdly, the myth could be adapted to represent the inclusion of lower social classes into the ruling elite.

[6] *Orkneyinga saga* is a more complicated case because of its long period of gestation and alternative non-human origin myth.

Ideologically, the elite were clearly different from "normal people", but not only because of their unusually *high* descent, also because of their unusually *uneven* descent.

While women play an important role in the genealogies of Norwegian kings and earls, as well as in *Færeyinga saga*, they are conspicuously unimportant in *Orkneyinga saga*'s origin myth. The dynasty's special place and claim to rulership is amply legitimised through its giant-genealogy, but the one female member, Gói, only plays a role in the Norwegian context, not in the Orcadian one. Concerning history of events, the jury is still out on the much-debated question whether the incoming Scandinavians "exterminated" or "coexisted" with the native population in Orkney, which includes the problem of how many alliances there were between native Pictish women and Scandinavian men. For our debate of ideology however, the interesting question is not whether the mythological description in *Orkneyinga saga* corresponds to historical reality or not, but *why* reality or unreality would have been depicted in this male-focused way. Thus, remembering the ideological elements discussed above, we should ask ourselves *why Orkneyinga saga* does *not* claim that a female non-Norse (and possibly lower-class?) group of people was conquered and included into the new polity founded by its dynasty? Does the Saga stress the exclusive Scandinavian character of Orkney at all costs, which might have been more important for the diaspora in the British Isles than for Norwegians at home? Or is this also an element of a more homogeneous origin myth than that of the Norwegian kings: purely giant, Scandinavian, and high-class? Finally, the role of the female element in Scandinavian myths and mythography can be contrasted to the place of women in the three Irish texts discussed in our volume. One senses a pagan sovereignty goddess behind the Christian wives whose warnings are ignored by their royal husbands with dire consequences, and who then partially "un-king" their husbands.

3. *Change of religion—new and old in the ideology of rulership*

Christianisation brought fundamental changes to Nordic societies, certainly as far as the history of events is concerned, as well as regarding elements of the history of ideas. An ethnic and more regionally diverse religion focusing on cultic activities and without—we assume—an

organised priesthood was replaced by a universal (but possibly less centralised than hitherto thought)[7] religion focusing on a doctrine of salvation, where an ever more organised institution was streamlining official theology. While our contributions do not concentrate the Christianisation of the North *per se*, we expected this monumental development to have important consequences for the ideology of rulership as well.

Royal saints and martyrs

One much discussed phenomenon is the creation of royal saints in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Almost all of the Scandinavian polities, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Orkney, with the exception of Man, produced their own national royal saints; Iceland knew holy bishops. By contrast, Ireland never had any royal martyrs proper.

Scholars have debated in great detail the similarities and differences between Christian royal saints, and what used to be called pagan sacral kings but should rather be called pagan religiously legitimated rulers. A fundamental difference for the ideology of rulership is that while the latter is born and automatically lives with this religion-based legitimacy, a Christian king may be made a saint, but only after his death, and by the Church. Hence sainthood includes an element of being judged worthy by another institution. Christian royal sainthood is thus not, or at least not only, informed by the rulers' own ideology of rulership; it is to a very large extent dependent on the ideology, and with it to various degrees the initiative by and approval of, a second elite in society—the Church. Hence also royal sainthood shares the idea of a judgement on the king's achievements with the admission-check at the entrance to Óðinn's Valhǫll, but contrary to the latter there is no institutionalised earthly judge different from the ruler.

This is then also not to deny the possibility that the specific popularity of royal *martyrs* in Scandinavia may incorporate elements of the pagan ideology of rulership. If we accept the special kings' destiny of humiliating and ignoble deaths that are in direct opposition to the kings' honourable male warrior status in our texts as depicting a genuine Viking Age concept (see especially the problem of *Ynglingatal*), we might discern parallels with Christian martyrs whose deaths are

[7] Cf. the discussions in Boje Mortensen (ed.) 2006.

equally ignoble, innocent and needless. That Christian royal martyrdom may have agreed well with pagan Scandinavian concepts may also be indicated by the fact that we have very early textual evidence for the concept: Þórarinn loftunga composed *Glælognskviða* already within a few years of St Óláfr's death in 1030.

The concept of royal martyrs may have eased the transition from pagan to Christian kings in another way. Christianity did not agree with all aspects of kingship; notably the latter's warrior-aspect required adaptation to suit the new religion. The Irish texts provide a good example here. While the kings' lack of (forceful) involvement in the Christianisation process, together with an abundance of other native saints, may explain why we do not find any real Irish royal martyrs, the kings' three-fold deaths "cleanse" the warrior elements of kingship and recall Christian martyrdom.

For practical, but also for ideological reasons the Church then favoured a *single strong* Christian king, an earthly mirror of God as the single pinnacle of hierarchy, and a strong sword to protect Christianity. Thus in Scandinavia, *de facto* and ideologically kings and Church agreed on the vital role of the former in the Christianisation of their people in the Scandinavian early Middle Ages (late tenth to early twelfth century), which "naturally" led to the creation of Scandinavian royal martyrs in the interest of both kings and the Church.

One aspect of royal sainthood which the Church may therefore have partly encouraged is the strong connection between saint and *natio*. By stressing the ideology that each kingdom was to have a single king mirroring the divine set-up, the Church would also have supported the identification of a royal saint with a single well-defined kingdom. St Óláfr, the *rex perpetuum Norvegiae*, is usually mentioned in this context. But one may ask the provocative question whether he is the best example here, being venerated by Scandinavians far and wide? On the other hand, the cult of St Óláfr, like those of St Knútr, St Eiríkr and St Magnús, clearly contributed to an ideology of individual nation-building. The international Christian church would have encouraged this general process structurally-ideologically; its local bishops usually supported the specific nation-building. Indeed, the latter's interests might have been more decisive for the establishment of the saints' cults than those of the saints' families. Thus while we have stressed "natural" *regional* differences in the pagan ideology of rulership, royal sainthood as an element of the Christian ideology of rulership arguably contributed to drawing clear borders between

the individual *kingdoms* and their associated royal saints. As also the express association of saint's body and his country shows, this unit of "saint-king-country" underlines the *territorial* definition of the new Christian kingdoms. Interesting parallels to the classic example of the *rex perpetuum Norvegiae* St Óláfr might here be found in the *rex totiae Scotiae* Diarmait mac Cerbaill.

Occasionally, this might then have led to resentment against a saint brought about by reservations against his native kingdom: would the cult of St Magnús in Orkney indicate resentment against an "imperialist Norwegian" St Óláfr? Or, to elucidate such relationships further, how could we contrast this against a possible relationship between the pagan cults of Óðinn and Freyr?

In sum, the Scandinavian phenomenon of royal martyrs seems to have combined elements of the old pagan ideology of rulership with the new Christian ideas of kingship, thereby easing the transition rather than introducing something radically new.

Rex iustus

A major change in the ideology of rulership attributed to Christianisation is the introduction of the concept of a *rex iustus*, the just and legitimate or right king, as God's *eikon* on earth. But while this did entail a fundamentally different concept of rulership to the pagan ideology, the Irish discussion of the potentially pre-Christian *fír flathemon* raises the possibility that not all elements of the *rex iustus* ideology were necessarily linked to Christianity. Whether a similar discussion for the Nordic countries is at all possible is an open question—the source situation would certainly make it very challenging.

Another point in this consideration of old and new ideology of rulership in the wake of Christianisation is the chronological perspective. Whether the *rex iustus* ideology influences the Icelandic Kings' Sagas from the mid-thirteenth century is hotly debated;[8] in analogy to the Irish discussion it would be interesting to consider possible pagan precursors of this ideology here as well. A full-blown expression of the *rex iustus* concept is certainly in Norway in King Hákon Hákonarson's *Konungs Skuggsiá* from around 1250. The ideology reached Norway around the middle of the twelfth century, as King Magnús Erlingsson's

[8] Bagge 1991 and 1994 argues against this, while B. Sawyer 1993 and Ármann Jakobsson 1997 see an underlying influence.

Privilege and his *Law of Succession* show. In other words, there is a long chronological gap between the Christianisation of the elite by *c.* 1000[9] and the appearance of this ideology. This is in clear contrast to the appearance of the concept of royal martyrs which, as discussed above, is evidenced more than a century earlier. Or, while there is no doubt that at least most of the elements of the *rex iustus* ideology are due to the Christian world-view, Christianisation does not seem to have introduced this particular ideology of rulership to Scandinavia very fast.

4. *An explosion in ideological activity*

Divergent perspectives

A good one-and-a-half centuries after the Christianisation of the Scandinavian elite, i.e., from the mid-twelfth century on and into the thirteenth century, we witness a veritable explosion in the production of ideological texts in the North (in Sweden somewhat later). The difficult question of the reasons for this development during that period deserves further research; we would, however, like to point to some elements worth considering here, drawn from our research into the ideology of rulership.[10]

The first aspect to be considered is that by the mid-twelfth century a discussion seems to have begun between the North and Europe. The need to reconcile traditional Nordic and new, by then all pervasive European ideas (also brought home by a new European university-educated native elite), the necessity to adapt these new ideas to the native conditions, as well as to define one's own place within European history and historiography, was probably one factor in the great Nordic historiographical effort of the later twelfth and thirteenth century. In the field of ideology, pagan myths proved highly adaptable to suit new circumstances. Thus, we for example note the survival, transformation and incorporation of genuine pagan myths, or of myths considered to be or at least presented as pagan, in the Icelandic saga-works. Further research is required to discern with which intention the saga authors

[9] When the Nordic *people* were (fully) christianised is still debated, but less important for our discussion of the ideology of rulership.

[10] A general aspect every scholar ignores at his or her peril is the source situation, the growth in literacy and the concomitant rise in the production of all, not just of ideological, texts. Cf. Clanchy 1993, for Scandinavia recently Nedkvitne 2004.

included individual elements in a specific text: for example in order to show the differences or the similarities between Nordic and European concepts; or also in order to support or to protest against a certain ideological direction in the North?

This latter element of the "Nordic renaissance" brings us to the second aspect with a bearing on the explosion in the production of ideological texts, the political and ideological development in Norway and the north Atlantic from King Sverrir's time (1177–1202) on. From the later twelfth century on, we witness an increasingly pyramidical concentration of power within Norway. A new type of kingship was now ideologically propagated *and* progressively implemented. Hand in glove with this, the new Norwegian crown asserted growing pretensions and control over its dependencies in the west. One by one, these polities lost their hitherto (semi-) independent status: Orkney in 1195, Man and the Hebrides in 1209, Iceland in 1262. This process was not welcomed by all parts of Norwegian and overseas society. Hence we may, in addition to the Nordic-European debate discussed above, see an internal Nordic debate between different regional or social groups concerning which type of Christian ideology of rulership the North should adapt. The Norwegian kings, partly through their mouthpieces the Icelandic saga-authors and most famously with *Konungs Skuggsiá*, were proclaiming an expressly monarchical ideology. Did the earls of Orkney, again partly through Icelandic saga-writers, advance a more aristocratic model of an ideology of rulership? Should *Orkneyinga saga's* origin myth, exclusively Nordic and giant, an alternative to the origin myth of the Norwegian kings, semi-southern and divine, be read as a submission of giant (earls) to divine (kings), or rather as a proclamation of more native Nordic traditions of the earls, addressed to kings who had become too southern-foreign-European? Does *Færeyinga Saga* also take up the status of overseas polities vis-à-vis the Norwegian crown with its unique initiation of chieftains to, yet *not*, like the Norwegian kings, descent from Óðinn? Or probably most controversially of all, does Snorri Sturluson introduce an element of criticism into his great history of the Norwegian kings when he begins *Heimskringla* with a saga based on the possibly derisory poem *Ynglingatal*?[11] If so, would Snorri have been influenced by his

[11] Bergsveinn Birgisson 2007. Incidentally, one might then also wonder whether there is an element of derision in the three-fold deaths of the Irish kings.

own tense relationship with King Hákon Hákonarson, by Norwegian opposition to the king's politics (Jarl Skúli?), or by overseas attitudes to the Norwegian crown? The fact that we also discern diverging viewpoints within the same (compilation of) texts further complicates the analysis.

There is a third aspect, equally well-known within Nordic history of events of the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which would have contributed to the explosion in the production of ideological texts: the European conflicts between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* had by then reached the North. In its quest for *libertas ecclesiae*, the Church initially only attempted to become more independent of the secular power, but, as the conflict progressed, the Church claimed to stand above the king. This triggered the formulation of propagandistic texts by both parties; King Sverrir's *Oratio contra clerum Norvegiae* is a famous example. The point we would like to underline here is that with this, we see *two* elites pronouncing themselves differently on the same matter. Now the two most powerful elite groups in society strongly disagreed on the ideology of rulership, on the vital and fundamental question of whether another earthly organisation, the Church, should rank higher than the king. And this seems to happen for the first time. Since we have no indications for a separate organised priesthood during the Viking Age, there would have been no danger of such a disagreement during that period. Conversely, during the first centuries of the elite's Christianisation, the Scandinavian early Middle Ages until approximately the mid-twelfth century, when an organised Christian church began to be formed, *regnum* and *sacerdotium* depended on and supported one another. There would have been a general basic consensus on the ideology of rulership, achieved through compromise from both sides, as for example our discussion of royal martyrs shows. Thus we propose that a dramatic change occurred around the mid-twelfth century when the two most powerful institutions began to disagree on basic issues of the ideology of rulership, which sparked an intense ideological debate. This hypothesis is supported by a contrastive analysis of the three Irish texts discussed in our volume. Albeit slightly earlier there, we discern serious criticism of the traditional warrior-kings by the new, reformed Church. Ecclesiastical and secular ideologies of rulership were diverging.

Centres, peripheries and the formulation of ideologies

The concepts of centre and periphery are usually understood in a spatial sense, and while it might be difficult to pinpoint the centre exactly,[12] in a European-Nordic context the centre is usually sought on the Continent. However, this dichotomy is too simplistic in many ways. Both on the Continent and in the North we find many different centres and peripheries: from the buildings at Uppsala and in Mälaren; the hall at Borg and the Lofoten islands; the earls' court at Hlaðir (or even Hálogaland?) and the Trøndelag; Haraldr hárfagri's farm at Avaldsnes and Rogaland, Birsay and Orkney, Odda and Iceland, to Trondheim/Bergen/Oslo and Norway or indeed the northwest Atlantic. Thus there are several levels in the centre-periphery dichotomy, and as our contributions show, we should not make the mistake of assuming a uniform pan-Nordic ideology of rulership for all centres and peripheries. There are also several types of centres and peripheries: while in some cases, notably with the many "multi-functional buildings" of the Viking and early Middle Ages, political, religious, economic and cultural elements were present in one location, in other cases what we might call mythological centres might be far removed—see Dovre versus Trondheim/Bergen/Oslo or the Faeroes, or Kvenland versus Kirkwall. Lastly, what this discussion also highlights is that the status of centres and peripheries changed over time.

But what about turning matters upside down and considering the concepts of centre and periphery in a chronological rather than a spatial context? At a period when identification still focused on *nationes* and their rulers, rather than on geographically clearly defined territories, might not the antiquity of a people's culture be more important than the spatial location of their homes? For our consideration of ideology of rulership, might this be an additional reason for the incorporation of (*de facto* or perceived) age-old concepts into the new historiography of the thirteenth century? In other words, did the North write itself into the centre by underlining its own antiquity?

[12] Cf. Rydving 2006: 318–9 for the plurality of Christendom's centres.

5. *A new periodisation for the ideology of rulership?*

Should our realisation that another fundamental change occurred in the North around the mid-twelfth century, now regarding who controls the formulation of the ideology of rulership, make us question the classic bipolarisation into Viking Age versus Middle Ages, which we derive from history from events, for our field of history of ideas? Is the break between pagan and (early) Christian ideology exaggerated—also considering the rather slow introduction of novel concepts? Should we therefore consider a different model characterised by more numerous steps, one of which needs to be dated to the mid-twelfth century? Tentatively, based on our research so far, we propose the following elements in the development for the ideology of rulership in the North:

During the seventh and eighth centuries, we already note early influences of Christianity in (western) Norway in the archaeological record. Whether the appearance of Christian symbols indicates their acceptance as religious or as high-status symbols by Norwegian chieftains, we do not necessarily need to assume that the pagan and Christian religions were consistently competing with one another. According to the model of double religious communication it is also conceivable that rulers would have spoken in the appropriate symbolic language to the respective addressee: with Christian crosses to the "foreign outside", with pagan burial mounds to the "native inside". Thus while at this stage we might not yet witness Christian influence on the *content* of the Nordic ideology of rulership, its *expression* would begin to become bilingual.[13]

During the tenth century, the political elite began to accept Christianity. However, most famously the two Christian Kings Eiríkr and Hákon were praised in poems which accorded them a pagan afterlife: their reception as warriors in Óðinn's Valhǫll. This could either indicate a *de facto* Christian-pagan mix in the *make-up* of the elite's ideology—that Óðinn was retaining his position as the warrior-rulers' god also for Christian kings. Or, in analogy to the above, it could indicate an element of double communication addressed to the

[13] For double communication Fuglestvedt and Hernæs 1996. Cf. also Solli 1996, Sanmark 2004, Myhre and Gansum 2003.

pagan members of society—that the pagan *language* of the ideology of rulership could not yet be abandoned.

During the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the emergence of royal martyrs seems to have combined elements and symbols of both the pagan and the Christian ideology of rulership. This ensured the transformation, and therefore survival in acceptable form, of the highly important previously pagan and now christianised and cleansed warrior-aspect of kings.

From the seventh to the mid-twelfth century, the discussion of the Svear elite shows that the special high status buildings—halls and early churches—were multi-functional arenas with similar ideological functions. Content and language of the ideology of rulership, while changing from paganism to Christianity, remained comparable.

In the North around the middle of the twelfth century then, fundamental changes occur within the Christian church. On the one hand, the church would claim to be the highest authority on earth, a position that had been hitherto ideologically reserved for the secular rulers, whether pagan or Christian. On the other hand, theology moved towards a new concept of God with the development of the incarnation doctrine, the changing role of Mary, and the introduction of the suffering Christ. Thus the secular rulers were confronted with important changes in the ideology and theology of the church. We have discussed their response to the former, the explosion of ideological activity at this period, including the incorporation of pagan elements into Christian texts. The effects of the latter require further research. Clearly however, the mid-twelfth century, the transition from the early to the high Middle Ages in the North, marks another important step with the emergence of two elites formulating divergent ideologies of rulership.

In sum therefore, we should consider whether the picture of a sliding scale from pagan to Christian ideologies (sic) of rulership is more appropriate than a rigid juxtaposition.

Ideology and society: final note

Thus, finally, can we still assert that our main hypothesis is supported, that an ideology of rulership, permeated by religious concepts, was a driving power in viking and medieval Nordic society?

Viking Age and medieval ideology of rulership show certain similarities, most notably that both seem to legitimise power from the top

down. Pagan myths let the ruler descend from, be initiated to or associated with, appear like or be received by Óðinn. Christian ideology depicts the king as God's *eikon*, his representative on earth. Thus in both cases, the special place of the ruler is legitimised by his greater closeness to a higher, divine being.

Medieval ideology of rulership is homogeneous in this respect; the king is closely and exclusively associated with God—in this respect it is a divinely based ideology. By contrast, Viking Age ideology is not homogeneous. Also here, the ruler clearly occupies a special place, distinct from other members of society. But contrary to Christian ideology, the pagan ruler's distinctness is not exclusively due to association with a god. Rather, it is attributed to the ruler's association with a unique mix of uneven male and female powers. Thus in addition to the legitimisation from the top down, a legitimisation amongst peers and from the bottom up can be seen in Viking Age ideology of rulership: the gods Óðinn and Freyr figure prominently on the male side, but are complemented by giants, or Sami, or low-ranking women on the female side. Viking Age ideology thus stresses the exclusivity of the ruler by underlining a factor which does not occur in medieval ideology: the ruler is special because of unusual alliances, because he unites in his person various, indeed opposing, high and low, male and female, elements of cosmos and society.

This pagan ideology does not only correspond to cosmic concepts. It also, importantly for our question whether the ideology of rulership was a driving power, mirrors Viking Age society: a society in which *de facto* power had to be built up from the bottom (farmers' support) and maintained through constant alliances with one's peers (chieftains' friendship). Conversely, Nordic high medieval society was more clearly pyramidical, with channels of control running more from the top down, and links of dependence more from the bottom up—corresponding to Christian ideology. Consequently, in both the Viking and the high Middle Ages we note a congruence between ideology and the structure of society. And during a long transitional period there was an intense interaction between new elements in the ideology of rulership and changes in society. A religiously informed ideology of rulership was indeed a vital element in the organisation of Nordic society from the Viking to the Middle Ages.

Bibliography

Studies

Ármann Jakobsson 1997. *Í leit að konungi. Konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna*, Reykjavík.
Bagge, Sverre 1987. *The Political Thought of the King's Mirror*. Odense.
—— 1991. *Society and Politics, Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford.
—— 1993. The Norwegian Monarchy in the Thirteenth Century, in Duggan, Anne J. (ed.) *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*. London: 159–177.
—— 1994. Snorres bilde av det tidlige norske kongedømmet, in Schjødt, Jens Peter et al. (eds.) *Myter og ritual i det førkristne Norden*, Odense: 9–22.
—— 1996. *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed.* Odense.
Berend, Nora (ed.) 2007. *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy. Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900–1200*, Cambridge.
Bergsveinn Birgisson 2007. *Inn i skaldens sinn: kognitive, estetiske og historiske skatter i den norrøne skaldediktningen*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Bergen, Bergen.
Brink, Stefan; Price, Neil (eds.) 2008. *The Viking World.* London and New York.
Carver, Martin 2003. *The Cross Goes North. Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300–1300*, York.
Clanchy, Michael T. 1993. *From Memory to Written Record*, Oxford.
Fabech, Charlotte et al. (eds.) 2000. *Settlement and Landscape*. Proceedings of a Conference in Århus, Denmark, 4–7 May 1998, Århus.
Forte, Angelo et al. 2005. *Viking Empires*. Cambridge.
Fuglestvedt, Ingrid; Hernæs, Per 1996. Rituell kommunikasjon i yngre jernalder. Forslag til modell for forståelse av storhauger og steinkors i brytningstiden mellom hedendom og kristendom in Flemming Krøger, Jes et al. (eds.) *Nordsjøen—Handel, religion og politikk, Karmøyseminarene 1994/95*, Karmøy: 140–150.
Gunnes, Erik 1971. *Kongens ære: kongemakt og kirke i "En tale mot biskopene"*, Oslo.
Helle, Knut (ed.) 2003. *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia:* Volume I, *Prehistory to 1520*. Cambridge.
Hermanson, Lars 2000. *Släkt, venner och makt. En studie av elitens politiska kultur i 1100–tallets Danmark*, Avhandlinger från Historiska institutionen i Göteborg, Gothenburg.
—— 2003. Vänskap som politisk ideologi i Saxo Grammaticus *Gesta Danorum, Svensk Historisk Tidsskrift* 4/2003: 527–548.
Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 1999. *Chieftains and Power in the Icelandic Commonwealth*, Odense.
Lindkvist, Thomas 2008. The Emergence of Sweden, in Brink, Stefan; Price, Neil (eds.). *The Viking World*, London and New York: 668–674.
Line, Philip 2007. *Kingship and State Formation in Sweden 1130–1290*, Leiden.
Lund, Niels 1997. The Danish Empire and the End of the Viking Age, in Saywer, Peter (ed.) *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*. Oxford, New York: 156–181.
—— 2008. Cnut the Great and his Empire, in Brink, Stefan; Price, Neil (eds.). *The Viking World*, London and New York: 665–667.
Meulengracht Sørensen, P. 1993. *Saga and Society*, Odense.
Mortensen, Lars Boje (ed.) 2006. *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)*, Copenhagen.
Myhre, Bjørn and Gansum, Terje 2003. *Skipshaugen 900 e. Kr: Borrefunnet 1852–2002*, Horten.
Nedkvitne, Arnved 2004. *The Social Consequences of Literacy in Medieval Scandinavia.* Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy, Turnhout.

Orning, Hans Jacob 2008. *Unpredictability and Presence. Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages*. Leiden.
Roesdahl, Else 1998. *The Vikings*, rev. edn., London.
—— 2008. The Emergence of Denmark and the Reign of Harald Bluetooth, in Brink, Stefan; Price, Neil (eds.). *The Viking World*, London and New York: 652–664.
Rydving, Håkan 2006. Constructing Religious Pasts: Summary Reflections, in Mortensen, Lars Boje (ed.). *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)*, Copenhagen: 315–321.
Sanmark, Alexandra 2004. *Power and Conversion—A Comparative Study of Christianization in Scandinavia*, Occasional Papers in Archaeology 34.
Sawyer, Birgit 1993. Samhällsbeskrivningen i Heimskringla, *Norsk Historisk Tidsskrift* 2, 223–237.
Saywer, Peter (ed.) 1997. The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings. Oxford, New York.
Solli, Brit 1996. *Narratives of Veøy. An investigation into politics and scientifics of archaeology*. Universitetets Oldsaksamlings Skrifter no. 19, Oslo.
Vadum, Kristoffer 2004. *Dom og straff i Kongespeilet. En analyse av verkets rettslære i forhold til en norsk og europeisk bakgrunn*. Centre for Viking and Medieval Studies, University of Oslo, Oslo.
Walker, Jenny 2005. Articulate Architecture? Timber Halls and Ideological Expression. *Bulletin of International Medieval Research* 11: 23–45.
Wanner, Kevin J. 2008. *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda. The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia*. Toronto.

INDEX

Ægir. *See also* Hlér 49, 115
Ælnoth 336–338, 340–341 342 n. 50, 343, 344 n. 57–58, 346, 349, 350 nn. 78–79, 353 n. 94, 354, 357 n. 97, 360
Ælnoth's *Historia* 343, 346, 349, 354 n. 96, 360
Ängsö 180 n. 71
Æsir 20, 27 n. 27, 50, 116, 193
Æthelstan, king of England 308–310
Ættartala 83 n. 51, 194 n. 144
Aachen 202, 351
accession 9, 25
Aðalheiðr, wife of Knútr, king of Denmark and England 346, 350
Adam of Bremen 34, 168, 197, 199, 205, 207, 271, 272 n. 7, 310, 313, 314
Adelsö 166, 175, 180, 182–183, 187
Aðils 170, 171 n. 27, 194, 197, 284
admonitory texts 212, 214
Adomnán 230, 232, 234, 251 n. 94
adultery 234, 237, 248
adventus. *See* king
Áed Dub mac Suibhne, Irish king 223, 225, 228, 234 n. 60, 247–249, 251, 260
Áed Sláine, son of Diarmait mac Cerbaill 219 n. 29
afterlife 277–278, 297–302, 307, 314–315, 317, 322–326, 370, 381
age of the aristocracy 152
age of the monarchy 152
Aggersborg 8
aggressiveness 117, 122
Agnarr 54–55
agnatic relationship 333
Ágrip 41, 46–47, 59, 61, 63, 308 n. 40, 309 n. 46, 310 n. 48, 311 nn. 56–57, 312, 313 nn. 67–69, 314
Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill ('The sudden death of Diarmait mac Cerbaill') 212, 218, 251
Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca ('The sudden death of Muirchertach mac Erca') 212, 218, 235, 236 n. 64, 241, 251, 256
Ailech Neit (Inishowen) 235, 257
Alexander III, pope 184, 331
Alfifa, wife of Knútr, king of Denmark and England 252, 353
allodial property 21
allvinsæll. *See also* friends 69, 150–151
ancestors
  divine 6, 8, 16, 18, 38, 62, 81, 192, 194, 196, 198, 203, 270, 318, 320–321, 335, 345, 348, 372, 375, 378
  giants 17, 20, 23–24, 28–29, 31, 35, 40, 43–47, 49, 52, 57–61, 115–118, 272–274, 311, 383
  legendary 49, 59, 113, 117–118, 119 n. 28, 121, 170, 211 n. 3, 212–214, 241, 261, 281, 284–285, 308, 372
  mythological 8, 15–18, 21, 28, 35–37, 39 n. 61, 40–41, 43–44, 47, 49, 53, 55–57, 59–63, 113, 115, 117, 121, 126, 129, 272, 277, 372–373, 380
  non-human 6, 116, 121 n. 34, 372 n. 6
Andhrímnir 319
Annals of Tigernach 259
Annals of Ulster 151
Anunder 198, 313
apical figure 28, 34–35, 40
apostate 310, 314
ár ok fríðr. *See also* good harvests 32, 34, 41, 84, 312, 313
Ardre stone 323
Ari Þorgilsson 116
Arnfinn Árnason 342
Arnkell Einarson, earl of Orkney 141 n. 93
Arnórr Þorðarson jarlaskáld 190
Art mac Cuinn 213
Ásgarðr 17, 25, 27–28, 274 n. 11
Asia 19, 116, 193
Ásmundr berserkjabani 284
assembly 72, 85, 90, 173, 198, 313 n. 66, 335, 354
Atlamál 294 n. 4
Audacht Morainn 211, 214–215, 216 n. 22
Augustine 9, 18, 62
Aurgelmir. *See also* Ymir 115, 118

Baile Moling 246 n. 83
Baldr 298, 304
Baldrs Draumar 298
Bárðr Þorkelsson 78
battle of Cerb 240
battle of Cúl Dreimne 247
battle of Fitjar 305, 315, 317 n. 80
battle of Florevág 109
battle of Granard 248
battle of Hafrsfjord 120 n. 31
battle of Hjørungavåg 34
battle of Mag Ratha 218, 241, 245, 247–248
battle of Stainmore 141 n. 93
battle of Stamford Bridge 141 n. 95
battle of Stiklestad 147
battle of Uppsala 147
battle of Örlygsstaðir 98
Bec mac Dé, prophet 223, 225–227, 231, 233, 249, 251
Beigaðr 282
Beiti 122, 122 n. 36
bellum iustum. *See also* just war 119 n. 29
Benedikt Sveinsson 360 n. 115
Beowulf 5–6, 252
Bergen 72, 89, 335, 380
berserkr (sg.), *berserkir* (pl.) 36, 54, 135 n. 77, 276 n. 15, 279–285, 287
Bersǫglivísur 310
binary opposition pairs 273, 290, 292
Birka 166, 175–176, 178, 185, 187, 191, 200
Biskupa sögur 80 n. 39
Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa 80 n. 39
Bjarni Kolbeinsson, bishop of Orkney 154 n. 141
Bjälbö 185
blóthús 167
boat-graves 182
Bǫðvarr Bjarki 282
Bǫðvars þáttr 283
body. *See also* relics, hair and nails, saint, martyr 32, 41–42, 47, 85, 118, 134, 146, 225, 240–241, 244, 259, 260–261, 262 n. 119, 289, 313, 337–338, 343, 345–349, 351–354, 357, 358 nn. 110–111, 368, 376
Book of Armagh 221 n. 33
Book of Lismore 219 n. 29, 220 n. 31, 226
Book of Uí Maine 220 n. 31
Borg (Lofoten) 185, 380
Borg (Östergötland) 168
Borghildr, wife of Sigmundr 289
Borre 5
Botkyrka 179
bottom up 6, 383
bracteates 182, 194
Bragi 303–304, 306, 316
Breiðafjörður 78, 83 n. 51
Breiðfirðingar 83
Brennu-Njáls saga 77 n. 29, 80 n. 39
Bresal, son of Diarmait mac Cerbaill 219 n. 29
Bretha Nemed 213 n. 6
Brian Bóruma, Irish king 211 n. 2
Briathar-thecosc Con Culainn 214
bride 30–32, 41–42, 46, 372
Bro 180
Bromma 184
Brot af þórðar sǫgu hreðu 90 n. 69
bruiden. *See* hall (bruiden) 218, 224–225, 228, 229 n. 49, 230–231, 233, 236, 242 n. 73, 244–245, 247, 251–263
bruighen (fight, contest, quarrel, in a hall). *See* hall
Brunná 76
Brúsi Sigurðarson, earl of Orkney 137–139, 142, 144
Buile Suibhne ('Suibhne's vision/frenzy') 212, 218–219, 221 n. 33, 237 n. 69, 241 n. 71
burial *ad sanctos* 333, 360
burial mounds 6, 9, 27, 41–42, 59, 381
burial. *See also* ship burial 41–42, 59, 134, 143, 229, 240, 264 n. 121, 300, 309, 313, 314 n. 71, 322–323, 333, 338, 346, 348–349, 353, 356, 357–359, 360, 381
Byzantium 150, 181

Cairnech, bishop 235–238, 240–241
Caithness 87, 109, 120 n. 32, 121, 124, 154 n. 141, 156, 159
Canterbury 357
Casán, cleric of Bishop Cairnech 238
central place 5, 58, 166–167, 175, 204
centre and periphery 12, 63, 380
champion 216, 229, 249, 251, 260, 261–262, 319–320
Charlemagne 18, 47 n. 74, 62, 351
chief warrior 253 n. 105, 258
chieftain
  and generosity. *See* generosity
  personal names of 90
  personal qualities 69–70, 73, 84–86, 88, 95–97, 101

sacred origins of 89–90
wise chieftain. *See* wisdom, *vitr, storvitr*
Christian God 3, 18, 313, 318
Christian influence 298 n. 5, 301, 315, 381
Christian punishment 229
Christianisation 18, 20, 38 n. 57, 86, 227, 234, 343, 369, 373–377, 379,
Christianity 2–3, 9–11, 17–19, 29 n. 31, 33, 37, 45, 48, 53, 56, 83, 88–92, 99, 142–144, 147, 154 n. 143, 185 n. 100, 204, 221–222, 230, 260, 278, 293, 307–309, 310 n. 49, 311, 312 n. 60, 314, 315 n. 74, 318, 325, 330, 332–333, 348, 375–376, 381–382
church
antonym of *bruiden* 257
balcony 191, 202–203
coronation portal 203
defence church 184
eclais 221, 257
emporium 191, 202–203
head church 89
private chapel 192 n. 135, 202
proprietary church 168, 177–181, 183–184
Romanesque church 164, 168, 177–178, 189, 192, 201–204
stave church 204 n. 179
western tower 179, 184, 189, 191, 202
church and state 221–222, 231–233, 259
Church law 93, 191, 225
Church reform. *See also* Gregorian reform, *libertas ecclesiae* 92–93, 217, 233, 241 n. 71
Ciarán mac an t-Saoir, monastic founder 220–221, 224, 226, 235 n. 63
Cinall, son of Diarmait mac Cerbaill 219 n. 29
clerical admonition 223
clerical cursing 219, 223, 225, 232, 238, 241
clerical immunity 225–226
clerical violation of royal rights 227
Cletech 235, 256–257
Clonmacnois 220, 221 n. 33, 228–229, 253, 259–261
Cogadh Gaedhil re Gallaibh ('The battle of the Gaels with the Galls') 211 n. 2, 212 n. 5
Collectio Canonum Hibernensis 260
Colum Cille, monastic founder, saint 220, 224, 226–227, 237, 249, 261
comitatus 7
Conaire Mór 213, 218, 245 n. 80
Conall mac Suibhne 233
concept of God 382
Conchobar Mac Nessa 127
Congal Cáech, Irish king 230, 242, 248–249
Congal Claon mac Scannláin 242
Conn Cétchathach, Irish king 213
conquest 16, 30–31, 37, 57, 87, 117–121, 123–124, 126, 153, 333, 372
Constantine 9, 18
contemporary sagas. *See also samtíðarsögur* 96, 98, 100
continuity
in the development of society 99
of function 166, 183
of ritual 192
conversion 19, 45, 143–144, 147, 153, 163, 168, 170, 176 n. 149, 192, 203, 332
Cormac mac Airt 213, 214 n. 14, 256
coronamentum. See coronation
coronation 9, 102, 170, 202–203, 335
cosmology 17, 28, 57, 278
Craeb ruaid (Emain) 235, 257
Cridán, cleric of Bishop Cairnech 238
Críth Gablach 254 n. 106, 256 n. 110
Cú Chulainn 254
cult
Christian 1–4, 7–13, 15, 17, 18–21, 26, 28–29, 33, 36–39, 42, 44–46, 48, 53–54, 56–59, 62–63, 88–92, 94, 99, 102, 127 n. 49, 140 n. 88, 142–144, 147, 154, 164, 166–168, 176–177, 183, 186, 189, 195–199, 201, 203–204, 211, 213, 215–216, 218, 222, 227, 229–230, 232–233, 235, 240, 244–245, 247, 250, 255–257, 259–260, 263, 279, 284, 293, 297–299, 301, 308–309, 310 n. 48, 311–318, 320, 325, 330, 332–334, 352, 370, 373–379, 381–383
cult building 163, 166, 168, 170–171, 173, 176 n. 49, 181, 183, 186–188, 190, 192, 196–197, 203–204
cult house 163, 166, 168, 175, 193, 195, 204
pagan 2–3, 7–9, 11–2, 15, 16 n. 3, 17, 22, 25, 29 nn. 31–33, 35 n. 50, 36, 38, 40, 42–43, 49–53, 56, 58–60,

62–63, 91, 140 n. 88, 143, 164, 166, 169–170, 183, 186, 193, 195, 199, 203, 216, 218, 220–223, 226, 229, 231, 234–236, 244 n. 77, 249, 251–252, 255, 258, 260, 280, 282–283, 292–293, 307–312, 313 n. 69, 314–318, 325, 330, 369, 373–377, 381–383
pre-Christian 1, 11, 15, 17–18, 26, 39, 42, 44, 53–54, 57–59, 63, 90, 163, 166–168, 170, 173, 181–183, 185, 189, 192–193, 196–197, 199–201, 203–204, 215, 233, 256–257, 276–277, 299, 320, 322, 332–333, 352, 355, 376
culture
coastal culture 38
masculine culture 6
pre-Christian culture 28, 59, 332
warrior culture 5 n. 9, 249, 369
cumairce. *See also* protection 243
Cycle of Kings 211

Dál nAraidi/Dál nAraidhe 241–242, 247–248
Davíð Haraldsson, earl of Orkney 125
De Civitate Dei 215 n. 18
death
aided. *See also* violent death 219 n. 27, 230, 233
by burning 220, 223, 229–230, 239–40, 254, 257, 262, 289, 291
by drowning. *See also* in liquid 23, 37, 220, 223, 227, 229–230, 240, 264, 278, 300
by spear 229
by strangling 286
by wounding 220, 223, 229–230
death realm. *See also post mortem* place, Valhǫll, Hel, Ran's realm, Gimlé, otherworld, paradise, *síd* (Irish) 7, 23, 33 n. 43, 36
death-tales 219 n. 29, 230, 233
four-fold death 229
ignoble death 22, 24, 54, 128–129, 374
inglorious death 27, 230
in liquid. *See also* by drowning 230, 261
silly death 127–128
three-fold death 220, 223, 227–230, 232, 375, 378 n. 11
violent death. *See also aided* 38 n. 59, 219, 230, 330, 345, 360
defence church. *See* church 184
deification 320
Dejbjerg 168
demonisation 20
Denmark 5–6, 8, 10, 38, 98 n. 91, 112, 125, 147, 168, 190, 198, 322, 326, 339, 349, 353, 360–361, 362 n. 119, 369, 374
descent. *See also* lineage.
constructed 16, 27 n. 26, 163, 257, 281, 346
divine. *See also* from god, *goðkynningr* 6, 8, 16, 18, 38, 62, 81, 192, 194, 196, 198, 203, 318, 320, 335, 345, 348, 372, 375, 378, 383
from giants 17, 20, 23–24, 28–29, 31, 35, 40, 43–47, 49, 52, 57–61, 115–118, 272–274, 311, 383
from god. *See also* divine, *goðkynningr* 15–16, 28, 60, 70, 84, 101, 117, 227, 360
goðkynningr. *See also* from god, divine 94
high descent 373
legendary 49, 59, 113, 117–119, 121, 170, 211 n. 3, 212–214, 241, 261, 281, 284–285, 308, 336, 342, 372
mythological 8, 15–18, 21, 28, 35–37, 40–41, 43–45, 47, 49, 50, 53, 55–57, 59–63, 113, 115, 117, 121, 126, 129, 272, 277, 372–373, 380
non-human 6, 116, 121 n. 24, 372 n. 6
uneven descent 373
Diarmait mac Cerbaill, Irish king 212, 218–219, 221 n. 33, 230, 234, 247, 252, 376
Diplomatarium Islandicum 91 n. 75, 94, n. 80
Diplomatarium Norvegicum 83 n. 53
dísablót 170
Disir 170–171, 197
Disthingen 171, 197
divine sanction 335
dominus 80
Domnall mac Muirchertaig 211 n. 2, 247
double communication 8, 38 n. 57, 381
drink of death 244, 261, 262, n. 119

drinking 27, 149, 150 n. 127, 190, 199, 229 n. 49, 252, 254–256, 262–263, 304, 323–324
drinking-ceremonies 6, 171, 198–199, 204
dróttinn 80
druid 220, 221 n. 33, 223, 227, 239, 256, 261–262,
Duaibsech, wife of Muirchertach mac Erca 234–235
Dunchad, son of Diarmait mac Cerbaill 219 n. 29
Durham 150
dynastic poem 9
Dýrafjörður 78

earl
  and generosity. *See* generosity
  description of 72
earls of Hlaðir 2, 15, 20, 22, 26–29, 32–33, 35, 37, 38 n. 59, 39, 51, 57–58, 71, 81–83, 116, 121 n. 34, 371
earls of Orkney
  (in)dependence 113, 126, 142, 147, 153–154
  (in)equality 113, 126, 142, 147, 153, 155
earth. *See* land
eclais. See church
ecstasy 272, 275
eddaic poem 8, 22–23, 26, 39, 57, 81, 297 n. 1
Edinburgh 110
Edmund, king of England 309 n. 46, 339, 351
Edward the Confessor, king of England 357
Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana 284, 294
Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar 77 n. 29
Eigenkirchenwesen 177
Eigentempelwesen 181
eign. *See also* property 137
Einarr Rǫgnvaldsson, earl of Orkney 50, 119 n. 28, 131–133, 135, 137
Einarr Sigurðarson, earl of Orkney 119 n. 28, 133, 136, 153, 370
Einarr Þambarskelfir 344
Einarr Þorgilsson, Icelandic chieftain 76–77
einheri (sg.), *einherjar* (pl.) 135 n. 77, 318, 276 n. 15, 281, 287 n. 46, 291, 297 n. 1, 301, 303–304, 306, 316, 318–322, 325
Eiríkr dynasty 196
Eiríkr Haraldsson blóðǫks, king of Norway (and poss. York) 33, 37, 46 n. 73, 307–308
Eiríkr I Sveinsson Ejegod / *inn goði*, king of Denmark 132, 337, 354
Eiríkr Játvarðarson, king of Sweden, saint 195, 329, 341, 350, 355, 375
Eiríkr of York 308–309
Eiríksmál 37, 277, 279, 290, 297, 302–303, 306, 309, 315, 317, 319 nn. 85, 89, 320, 322, 324–325
Eldhrímnir 319
Eldjarn Vardarson 145
elite 6, 8, 15, 16 n. 3, 20 n. 9, 53, 87–88, 164, 166, 168, 173, 184–185, 187, 192, 203, 212 n. 6, 280–282, 286, 297, 299, 302, 315, 318, 322, 325, 370–374, 377, 379, 381–382
Emain Macha 235, 251, 257
emporium. See church
England 3, 98 n. 91, 110, 140, 141 n. 95, 146 n. 112, 150, 177, 202, 308 n. 41, 309 n. 46, 312–313, 329, 336 n. 20, 337, 339, 341, 352–353, 355, 357, 359, 361, 369
Enköping 192
Eorann, wife of Suibhne mac Colmáin Móir 242–243, 245–246
Epitafium 338
Erlendr Einarson, earl of Orkney 28 n. 30
Erlendr Haraldsson, earl of Orkney 73
Erlendr Þorfinnsson, earl of Orkney 136
erotic imagery 31, 34, 37
erotic initiation 55, 60
eroticism 17, 24, 26, 30–31, 37, 41–42, 55–56
eschatology 39 n. 61, 299, 301–302, 307, 318–320, 322–323, 325
  cosmic eschatology 298, 318, 322, 325
  individual eschatology 298, 318, 325
Eskilstuna 175, 183, 186, 189
ethnic religion. *See* religion
euhemerism 19–20, 22, 30, 40, 49–50, 56, 58–59, 121, 193–194
Eusebius 9
Evesham 337
exogamous alliance 23, 57
eyarskjeggjar (island beards) 109

Eyrbyggja saga 77 n. 29, 90, 181 n. 78
Eysteinn Erlendsson, archbishop of Nidaros 77 n. 29, 90 n. 69, 181 n. 78
Eysteinn glumra 116 n. 21
Eyvindr Finnsson skáldaspillir 305

Faeroe Islands 1, 145 n. 107
Fagrskinna 27 n. 26, 41, 43, 44 n. 70, 47 n. 73, 190, 199, 302–305, 307, 308 n. 41, 309–310, 312–314
faith 3, 20, 88, 90–91, 97, 102, 132, 143–144, 308, 311, 314, 330, 342
fama sanctitatis 332 n. 10, 339, 356
Fastakirkia 179
fate 17, 23, 28, 35 n. 50, 38 n. 59, 55, 128, 227–228, 242, 343
feast
  calendric 171, 197
  ceremonial 167, 185, 198
  religious 166, 186, 197
Feis Temro 220, 234, 259
female element. *See* Utgarðr-woman
Fenrir 135, 272, 306
fertility 32, 34, 38, 40–41, 57, 59, 195, 271, 273, 275
feud 98–99
feudalism 138
Fiachnae mac Báetáin, Irish king 230, 248
fief. *See also* len 109, 137–139
filid 212, 213 n. 6
Fingal Rónain 215 n. 16
Finnland 82, 113
fír flathemon. See also truth of the prince 213, 215–217, 376
fírbreth 213 n. 9
five kings 230, 304 n. 29, 305
Fjǫlnir 193
Flasta 203
Flateyarbók 111, 118 n. 24, 126, 152 n. 137
Fled Bricrenn 251, 255
Fled Dúin na nGéd 212 n. 5, 215 n. 17, 236, 255
Fólkvangr 300
follower 74–75, 116, 127 n. 49, 138, 260, 288, 306, 308, 314, 316, 325, 345, 356, 360
food and drink 199
Forggus mac Muirchertaig 247
Fornjótr 49–50, 59, 82, 113, 115–118, 120, 121 n. 34
Fornsigtuna 166, 175, 183, 187–188, 201
Fortíðarsögur. See also sagas about the distant past 96
Fóstbræðra saga 77 n. 29
fosterage 7, 40, 43–45, 124
founding father 19, 23, 32–35, 39–40, 49, 59, 97, 133, 236, 372
Freyr
  Freys afspringr. (Freyr's offspring) 194
  Freys leik. See also Yule 36–37
  Freys ǫttungr 194
  relationship to rulership 35
friendship 6, 43, 56, 75, 77, 79 n. 35, 86, 126, 138, 149, 151 n. 131, 200, 383
Friggr 28, 55
frost-giants 115
Frosti 49, 115
Fröslunda 193
Fröstuna 182
Fundinn Noregr 48, 113 n. 11
fylgðarsveinn. See also follower 75
Fyrkat 8
Færeyinga saga 52–56, 60, 372–373, 378

Gamal norsk homiliebok 80
Gangleri 277
Gautreks saga 286 n. 44
Geirrǫðr 54–55
genealogy
  divine 38, 62
  legendary 118, 121, 170, 212–213, 284
  mythological 53
  non-human 116, 372 n. 6
generosity 70, 77–78, 99, 100 n. 98, 101, 200
gengi. See retinue
Gent 346
gentle rule. *See* rule
Gerðr Gymisdóttir 22, 44
Gesta Danorum 277, 279
Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificium 205, 294, 326
giants 17, 20, 23–24, 28–29, 31, 35, 40, 43–47, 49, 52, 57–61, 115–118, 273–274, 311, 383
gift 7, 77–78, 86, 100, 121, 135, 137–138, 185–186, 200–201, 248, 259, 288, 314
Gimlé. *See also post mortem* place, Hel, Ran's realm, death realm, otherworld, Valhǫll, paradise 301
gipta. See also gæfa, hamingja, luck 17, 81
Gísli saga 298
giver 7, 272

Gizurr Þorvaldsson 73 n. 14, 74, 98
Glanshammar 175, 183, 186
Glen Bolcáin 243
Glúmr Geirason 307
Glymdrápa 36
Glælognskviða 42, 336, 348, 352, 375
god 17, 23, 25–30, 32, 36–37, 39–40, 45, 49, 54, 57–58, 62, 81, 83, 121 n. 34, 126, 133, 136, 171, 194, 271–274, 277, 284–285, 287, 291, 294, 299–300, 313, 316, 318–321, 322 n. 101, 325, 370–371, 381, 383
god of rulers 37
god of the first function 271
god of the second function 271
God's *eikon*. *See also* God's representative, *vicarius dei* 62, 376, 383
God's representative. *See also* God's *eikon, vicarius dei* 9, 11, 69, 85, 101–102, 330
goðahús 167
god-given 8
Goðheimr 285
goði. *See* chieftain
goðorðsmaðr. *See* chieftain
Gokstad 5
gold foil figures 167, 173, 175, 182–183, 186, 191, 193–195
Gǫndul 305, 321
good harvests. *See also ár ok fríðr* 40–41, 195
Górr 49, 118, 121–122
Gotland 168, 199, 323
Gotlandic picture stones 323–324
governance 154 n. 143, 212
Gráfeldrdrápa 302
Granhammar 180 n. 71
Granmarr, king of Södermanland 198, 289
grave-goods 6
grave-mounds 225
Greenland 146, 369
Gregorian 169, 177 n. 58, 335
Gregorian reform. *See also* Church reform, *libertas ecclesiae.* 177 n. 58
Grimkell, bishop 348–349
Grímnismál 54, 297, 300, 306, 307 n. 35, 319, 320 n. 97
Grímr Þorgilsson 345
Gruffydd ap Cynan 141 n. 95
gúbreth 213 n. 9
Gudme 168, 188
Guðmundar saga dýra 80 n. 39
Guðmundr Arason, bishop of Hólar 93
Guðrǫðr Haraldsson ljómi 51
Guðrǫðr Rǫgnvaldsson, king of the Isles 125
guldgubbar. *See also* gold foil figures 167, 173, 175, 182–183, 186, 191, 193–195
Gullinkambi 319
Gunnhildr, wife of Eiríkr Haraldsson blóðǫks, king of Norway (and poss. York) 46 n. 73, 302, 303 n. 23, 308 n. 41, 309–310
Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu 77 n. 29, 97
Gutalagen 199 n. 164
Gutasagan 199 n. 162
Gwynedd 141 n. 95
Gylfaginning 24, 115 n. 16, 277, 298 n. 5, 307, 319
gæfa. *See also hamingja*, luck, *gipta* 17, 81
Götaland 164, 175, 191, 196, 203, 287
Götar (*Gauta*) 164, 184

Hadeland 40
háfœta 134, 136
Hagebyhöga 191
hagiography 216, 233, 237 n. 68, 245, 338
hair and nails. *See also* relics, martyr, saint, body 351–353
  clipping of 351, 353
  growing posthumously 352
Hákon Eiríksson, earl of Hlaðir 339
Hákon góði Aðalsteinsfostri, king of Norway 33
Hákon Hákonarson, king of Norway 10, 44 n. 70, 69, 71, 125, 151, 376, 379
Hákon Pálsson, earl of Orkney 122 n. 8, 140, 144
Hákon the Powerful, earl of Hlaðir 27, 31
Hákonardrápa 31, 307
Hákonarmál 32–33, 37, 297, 302, 305 n. 32, 306, 315, 316 n. 79, 317–318, 319 n. 85, 320–322, 324–325
Háleygjatal 16 n. 2, 22, 26, 27 n. 26, 29–33, 34 n. 49, 35, 41, 51, 57, 60–61, 82
Hálfdan Haraldsson háleggr 51, 133–134
Hálfdan inn gamli 114
Hálfdan svarti 40–42, 44 n. 70, 45, 59, 353 n. 93
Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar 116 n. 21
Hálfdanar saga svarta 40–41, 43, 77 n. 29, 368

Hálfdanar þáttr svarta 41
hall (*bruiden*) 218, 224–225, 228, 229 n. 49, 230–231, 233, 236, 242 n. 73, 244–245, 247, 251–263
  as place for pagan cult 255, 258
  as representation of paganism 258
  bruighen (as battle-scene) 254
  tech n-óil 199, 256, 262–263
hall (*hǫll*) 33 n. 43
  Iron Age 167–168, 175, 183, 194
  multi-functional building 163 n. 2, 167, 201
  special building 371
  topographical position 187
  Viking Age 4, 190
Hallaðr Rǫgnvaldsson, earl of Orkney 131
Hallfreðr Óttarsson 31
Hamburg/Bremen, archbishopric 89, 92
hamingja. See also luck, *gæfa, gipta* 17, 69, 81
Hammarby 180
Hámundr Sigmundsson 289
Haraldr gráfeldr, king of Norway 33, 307
Haraldr hárfagri, king of Norway 2–3, 21–22, 24, 29 n. 34, 33, 36–37, 40, 42, 44 n. 70, 45–52, 59, 61, 69, 71, 73, 81–82, 86, 119, 126, 133, 135 n. 76, 136–137, 140, 335, 351–353, 370, 372, 380
Haraldr hilditǫnn 277
Haraldr Maddaðarson, earl of Orkney 87, 109–111, 137, 148, 154
Haraldr Sigurðarson, king of Norway 333, 344, 351–353, 359
Haralds saga gráfeldar 77 n. 29
Haralds saga hárfagra 46, 52, 119, 122, 123 n. 42
Haralds þáttr hárfagra 43
Haraldskvæði 36, 45, 280
Hárbarðsljóð 279
Hárfagri-dynasty 15, 21, 26, 33, 35, 37, 39, 45, 116, 123
hásæti. See also high seat 19, 25, 190–191, 194–195, 198–200, 203, 371
Háttalykill 150
Hauks þáttr hábrókar 171
Hauksbók 8, 131 n. 60
Hávamál 27, 286 n. 43
Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings 77 n. 29
head church. *See* church
Hebrides 119 n. 29, 140, 141 n. 95, 146, 378
Hedeby 5
hefna. See also take revenge 80
hegna. See also punish 80
heiðin 317–318, 325
heimamenn. See also home men 75
Heimdallr 81
Heimskringla 18, 21, 25, 34, 40–43, 44 n. 70, 46–48, 52, 59, 61, 69, 72, 74 n. 17, 77 n. 29–30, 79, 84, 86 n. 64, 96–98, 116, 119 n. 28, 120 n. 31, 128–129, 132 n. 64, 139 n. 86, 142, 190 n. 123, 272 n. 7, 305, 307–308, 310 n. 48, 311–312, 314, 325 n. 117, 335–336, 342–343, 345, 349, 351–354, 359–360, 362, 371, 378
heiti 78, 113, 122
Hel. *See also post mortem* place, Valhǫll, Ran's realm, Gimlé, death realm, otherworld, paradise 23, 277–278, 298–299
Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar 26 n. 24, 30 n. 39, 300 n. 16
Helgakviða Hundingsbana 319
Helgi (Holgi/Hølgi/Hǫlgi), founding father of the earls of Hlaðir 33–34, 51, 99 n. 95, 145, 289, 319
Helgi Sigmundsson 289
Helgö 173, 175–176, 182, 185–186, 190, 194, 199
helper 272
Henry II, king of England 255, 357
Henry III, king of England 357
Hergeir, prefect of Birka 176, 178
hero. *See also* Óðinn-hero 40, 291
herra 80
hersir 124 n. 42
Hervarar saga 198, 307
Hibernica Minora 219 n. 29
hieros gamos 9, 17, 25–26, 30, 35, 39 n. 61, 46, 56–57, 59, 133, 259
high seat 19, 25, 190–191, 194–195, 198–200, 203, 371
Hildr (Ragnhildr), wife of Rǫgnvaldr Eysteinsson, earl of Møre and Orkney 135
hirð 86, 89, 109, 171, 180, 185, 325
Hirðskrá 75
hirðstjóri 85
Historia Norwegie 48 n. 78, 49 n. 81, 119 n. 30, 120 n. 33, 124 n. 44, 170, 171 n. 27, 194 n. 144, 308 n. 46, 310–311, 314
Historia ortus, vitae et passionis Sti Canutis 336–337
Historia rerum Norvagicarum 27 n. 26
Historical cycle 211

historical writing. *See also* historiography 335
historiography 10–12, 16, 18–19, 21, 40, 42, 45–46, 50, 58, 60, 62, 100, 297, 308–310, 313, 370, 377, 380
historiography
  European 19, 62
  medieval 11, 18, 58, 60, 100, 297, 308–310, 370
  Nordic 21, 62
Hjalti 282
Hjörvarðr, king of Denmark 198
Hlaðir 2, 15, 20, 22, 26–39, 41, 43, 51, 53–58, 60–61, 71, 81–83, 116–117, 121, 370–372, 380
Hlér 49, 115, 127 n. 53
hof 167, 181
hǫfðingi. *See* chieftain
Hofstaðir 167
Hǫfuðlausn 305 n. 31
Hólar 93–94
Hǫlga ættar 34 n. 45
hǫll. *See* hall
homage 202–203
home men 75
Hordaland 314 n. 71
hǫrgr 167
Hǫttr 282–283
housecarl 74–75
Hovgården 175, 182, 187
Hrafn lǫgmaðr 154 n. 141
Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson 154 n. 141
Hrani 284
Hrǫlfr kraki 281
Hrólfr Rǫgnvaldsson 50, 129, 131, 135, 281, 283
Hrólfs saga kraka 281, 283, 287
Hrollaugr Rǫgnvaldsson 129, 131
husaby 180, 191, 202
Husby 175, 180, 183, 186, 192
Husby kyrka 180
Husby-Lyhundra 192
húskarl. *See also* housecarl 74
Hvamm-Sturla, Icelandic chieftain 76–77
Hversu Noregr byggðist 48
Hvítserkr 282
Hyndluljóð 16 n. 2, 26, 57
Höfuðsmaðr 85
Hålogaland 27, 34, 60–61, 380
Håtuna bay 187

Ibn Fadlan 287 n. 22
Iceland 1–2, 10–11, 38, 48, 69–72, 74–76, 78, 80, 82–85, 87, 89–95, 98, 101, 111, 131, 141 n. 94, 145–146, 147 n. 115, 154, 167, 170, 335, 367 n. 1, 371, 374, 378, 380
Icelandic family sagas 69–70, 72, 79, 84, 90, 96, 97 n. 89, 98, 100, 307
Icelandic Homily Book. *See also Íslensk Hómilíubók* 317 n. 83, 320
idealised viking society 52, 151
ideology
  aristocratic 5, 16 n. 2, 71, 152 n. 137, 153, 167, 173, 199, 271, 300, 311 n. 56, 376, 378
  changes of 2, 16, 80, 382
  Christian ideology 1, 3, 9–10, 18, 42, 186, 213, 216, 375, 378, 381–383
  Christian language of 8, 381–382
  congruence between ideology and the structure of society 383
  continuity in the 369
  definition of 70
  monarchic 152 n. 135, 378
  of kingship 133 n. 65, 151, 213, 255
  of power 3, 15, 55, 195, 329
  of rulership 1, 3, 9, 11–12, 16 n. 3, 17–18, 23–24, 26, 28, 38, 40, 42, 48, 50–51, 53, 54 n. 86, 55–56, 70–71, 95–96, 135 n. 77, 141 n. 94, 152 n. 135, 166, 203, 213, 367–372, 374–383
  pagan ideology 38, 369, 374–376, 383
  pagan language of 380, 382
  pre-Christian ideology 18
  production of ideological texts 370, 377–379
  religious ideology 4, 9, 163, 369–370
  Viking Age ideology 368, 370, 383
  warrior ideology 6–7, 11, 24, 31, 33, 37–38, 40, 51, 216, 325, 369, 372
idol 170 n. 26, 171, 193, 199 n. 161, 271 n. 4, 310
immaculate appearance 214
immigration 116–121, 124, 126, 153
inauguration 9, 25, 26 n. 23, 232, 245, 262 n. 119
Ingi (the Elder) Steinkelsson, king of Svear 198, 200
Ingi Bárðarson, king of Norway 87, 125
Ingibjörg Þorgeirsdóttir, Icelandic chieftain's daughter 76
Ingunar (Freyr), founding father of the earls of Hlaðir 34
Inishowen. *See* Ailech Neit
initiation 6, 9, 15, 26 n. 22, 53–56, 60, 270, 275, 280, 282–287, 289–294, 372, 378

interpretatio Christiana 230
interpretatio norroena 333 n. 13
interpretatio romana 171, 197
Ireland 1–3, 10, 127 n. 51, 140, 141 n. 95, 211, 218, 220, 222–223, 231–234, 237, 243, 252, 255–256, 260–261, 374
Irish Sea 141
Islandske Annaler 80 n. 39, 138 n. 85
Íslendingabók 20, 22 n. 15, 44 n. 70, 83, 194 n. 144
Íslensk Hómilíubók. See also Icelandic Homily Book 80
Israel Erlendsson, canon at Uppsala 338
Ívarr, earl of the Uplands 120 n. 31, 122–123, 129
Ívarr Rǫgnvaldsson 120 n. 31, 122–123, 129

jafræði 133 n. 65
jarl. see earl
Jarla sǫgur Orkneyja. See Orkneyinga saga
Járnsíða 339, 344
Jaroslav, grand duke of Novgorod 339, 344
Jerusalem 148–150, 359
John, king of England 110–111
joint kingship. *See* kingship
joint rule. *See* rule
Jómsvíkinga saga 34
Jón Haraldsson, earl of Orkney 125
Jón Loptsson, Icelandic chieftain 83, 92
Jónsbók 85
Jotunheim 25, 29
judgement 18, 77, 138, 191, 213–214, 227, 229, 231 n. 53, 310–311, 374
just king. *See* king
just war. *See* war
justice 9, 42, 102, 149, 211 n. 1, 213 n. 9, 214–215, 273, 330
Järrestad 168, 176

Kalendarium Vallentunense 195
Kálfr Árnason 342, 344
Kalmarsund 184
kappar 281–282, 284
Kári 49, 67, 82, 115
karl 81, 124 n. 42
Karl Jónsson, abbot of Þingeyrar 154 n. 141
Karl Sverkersson 359
Karlungskirkia 179
Karmøy 6
Kent 336
Ketill flatnefr 120 n. 33
kin
  agnatic 16, 333, 346
  cognatic 16
king 2, 69, 78, 84, 113, 118, 121–124, 126, 138, 140–141, 145, 170, 316, 349, 351 n. 85, 354
  adventus 201
  and fertility. *See* fertility
  and generosity. *See* generosity
  and good governance. *See* governance
  and good judgement. *See* judgement
  and ignoble death. *See* death
  and immaculate appearance. *See* immaculate appearance
  and legitimacy. *See* legitimacy
  and peace. *See* peace, *ár ok fríðr*
  and perfect truth. *See* perfect truth
  and ritual role 198
  and severed head. *See* severed head
  and war. *See* war, warfare
  as God's representative. *See* God's representative, God's *eikon, vicarius dei*
  blemished king 235
  by God's grace. *See* God's grace
  champion king 216, 229, 249, 260–261, 274 n. 119
  cleansing of 222
  criticism of the king. *See also* admonitory texts 379
  critique of the king. *See also* admonitory texts 216–217
  dead king. *See also* king's death 11, 41–42, 261, 354–356, 360, 368
  description of the king 315 n. 77
  downfall of a king 214
  high-king 141 n. 95, 164, 220, 222, 263
  historic king 22, 214, 218, 235, 305
  just king. *See also* justice, *rex iustus*, righteous king 215
  king and priest. *See also rex et sacerdos* 186
  king's appearance 79
  king's body 32, 41, 225, 240, 338, 346–347, 349, 352, 368
  king's death. *See also* dead king 29 n. 31, 41, 262 n. 119, 337, 339, 347
  king's fate. *See* fate

king's inauguration. *See* inauguration
king's inviolability 196
king's luck. *See* luck, *hamingja, gæfa, gipta*
king's madness 219
king's personal qualities 84
king's power 69, 202, 237
king's time. *See* time, regnal period
king's two bodies 343
laudes regiae 201–202
legendary king 261
missionary king 53, 332
pre-historic king 214, 218, 235
purgation of 229
rex iustus. See also just king, righteous king 9–11, 18, 42, 62, 69, 80, 84, 112 n. 8, 152, 155, 186, 215–216, 376–377
righteous king. *See also rex iustus,* just king 9, 354
sacral king 62
saintly king 346
sea-king 49, 122
sækonungr 121–122
wise king. *See* wisdom, *vitr, storvitr*
See also royal 77
kingship
centralised 3, 197, 204, 374
Christian 2–3, 166, 196
concept of 44 n. 70, 70
ideology of 70, 133 n. 65, 151, 213, 255
of Tara 214 n. 12, 222, 231, 233
pagan 2–3, 7–9, 11–12, 15, 16 n. 3, 17–20, 22, 25, 32–33, 35 n. 50, 36, 38, 40, 42–43, 49–53, 56–60, 62–63, 91, 140 n. 88, 143, 164, 166, 169–170, 176 n. 49, 183, 186, 193, 195, 199, 203, 216, 218, 220–223, 226, 229, 231, 234–236, 244, 247, 249, 251–252, 255, 258, 260, 280, 282–283, 292–293, 308–312, 314–318, 330, 369, 373–377, 379, 381–383
righteous king. *See rex iustus*
sacral 5, 7, 11, 16, 62, 163, 222, 231, 330 n. 3, 355, 357, 368, 374
unjust 215, 227 n. 47, 333, 342–343
king tales 211–218, 245, 252
kin-groups 46, 339, 342
Kings' sagas 5, 10, 58, 169, 307, 376
kinship 6, 16, 43 n. 68, 99, 113, 274
kin-slaying 233, 239
Kirkwall 135 n. 76, 145 n. 103, 150, 380
Kjalnesinga saga 181 n. 78
Knútlinga saga 341 n. 42
Knútr Eiríksson, king of Sweden 350, 359, 362
Knútr IV Svensson, king of Denmark, saint 329
Kolbeinn Arnórsson 98
Kolbeinn Tumason, Icelandic chieftain 93
Kolbeinn ungi 78, 98
konungr. See king
konungs ambátt 132
Konungs skuggsjá 10, 62, 151
Korvey 202
Krákumál 307
Kurland 353
Kvenland 49, 82, 113, 380

Lake Mälaren 164, 187, 189
Land as feminine 32, 118
as masculine 32
Landnámabók 74 n. 21, 83, 84 n. 55, 90, 123 n. 41, 131 n. 60
Langfeðgatal 20, 22 n. 15
laudes regiae. See king
Law of Succession. See Magnús Erlingsson's *Law of Succession*
Law of the Gulathing 318
Laxdæla saga 77 n. 29, 98
learned orders 214, 217
Lebor Bretnach 236 n. 64
Legend of St Erik 196
Legendary Saga of St Óláfr 336
legitimacy 40, 45, 62, 93–94, 129, 131, 166, 184, 194, 196, 198, 201, 333, 335, 340, 362, 370, 376, 374
leiðangr 74
Lejre 168
len. *See also* fief 137
lesser seat 190
libation. *See* drinking-ceremonies
libertas ecclesiae. See also Church reform, Gregorian reform 177 n. 58, 379
Liðskjalf 25
Life of St Brendan of Clonfert 234
Lillön 173
liminal phase 26
liminal place 194
lineage. *See also* descent 16, 21, 24, 232
literacy 10, 213, 216, 377, 384

liturgical texts 335
Livland 353
Livonia 353
Ljósvetninga saga 77 n. 29
Logi 49, 115
Lokasenna 319
Loki 272
London 145 n. 107, 326
Longseachán, son or foster-brother of Suibhne mac Colmáin Chuair 212, 218, 241, 248
Lord's anointed 330, 362
Lorsch 202
loyalty 7, 56, 75, 80, 87, 333, 344
luck. *See also hamingja, gæfa, gipta* 17, 69, 131 n. 60, 132, 284 n. 35, 288, 306, 312
Lund 89, 92, 367 n. 1
Lunda 175, 188, 193, 195
Lytir 171
lögmenn 85

Mac Cécht, chief champion of Comaire Mór 261, 262 n. 119
madness 219, 244, 246, 250, 262–263
Máel Brigte 127, 129
Mael Chaba 215 n. 17
Maelmór, foster-brother of Diarmait mac Cerbaill 219 n. 29
Maelodor, son of Diarmait mac Cerbaill 219 n. 29
magic 25, 30, 124 n. 42, 221 n. 33, 238, 249, 271, 282, 291, 352
Magnús Birgersson, king of Sweden 338
Magnús Erlendsson, earl of Orkney, saint 136, 140, 144
Magnús Erlingsson, king of Norway 92, 109 n. 3, 335, 376
Magnús Erlingsson's *Law of Succession* 377
Magnús Erlingsson's *Privilege to the Norwegian Church* 377
Magnús Henriksson, king of Denmark 340–341, 359
Magnús Óláfsson berfœttr, king of Norway 349, 351, 354, 358 n. 110
Magnús saga góða 342, 351, 353
Magnúss saga lengri 141 n. 94, 146
Magnúss saga skemmri 141, 145–146
Magnússona saga 84 n. 58
maledictory psalm 225, 236 n. 66
Mammen 6
Man 11 n. 17, 125, 147, 374, 378
Man and the Isles 147 n. 116
Manannán mac Lir 115 n. 17, 127 n. 53, 248
manipulation 275, 368
Margareta I, queen of Denmark, Norway, Sweden 112, 125
Máríuvísur 320 n. 92
martyr. *See also* saint, body, hair and nails, relics
  Christian martyr 330, 332, 374
  concept of 330, 375, 377
  royal martyr 219, 229, 246, 329–330, 332–334, 336, 338, 341 n. 42, 343–346, 356, 358–359, 361, 374–377, 379, 382
martyrdom. *See also* martyr 330–331, 336, 339–341, 346, 360 n. 115, 375
Masán, cleric of Bishop Cairnech 238
Medb 26 n. 23
mediator 198, 249, 370
mentality 4, 308, 332
Mesca Ulad 251, 254–255
Miðgarðr 27 n. 28
miracle 11, 145–146, 237–239, 242, 336–337, 347–348, 351, 356, 357 n. 107
Miracle book (of Orkneyinga saga) 48
misogyny 30–31
mobility 117
Moling 244–246, 248, 262–263
Mongán mac Fiachnae 248
Mongán, husband of Moling's female cook 244
morals 31, 112 n. 8
Muirchertach mac Erca, Irish king 212, 218, 230, 256
multi–functional arena 166, 382
Munsö 184
Myklebostad 5
Mýrar 78
myth
  Christian myth 367 n. 1
  foundation myth 10, 41, 61
  historicising of myth 46 n. 72, 58
  origin myth 15–19, 22–30, 31 n. 41, 32–35, 38 n. 59, 39–41, 43, 46–53, 56–62, 82–83, 115–117, 126, 135–136, 372 n. 6, 373, 378
  pagan myth 33, 38 n. 59, 42, 53, 56, 60, 62–63, 377, 383
  pre–Christian myth 26, 39, 42, 53–54
mythical beings 170, 195
mythography 18, 62, 298, 368, 373

Mývatnssveit 167
Mälar Region 2, 164, 166, 173, 175, 177 n. 55, 178–185, 188, 190–191, 194, 196, 200, 203–204, 300
Männerbünde 276, 285, 318
Møre (Norway) 49–51, 119 n. 30, 120, 122, 123 n. 42, 131, 133 n. 68, 135
Möre (Sweden) 184

Nás 235, 257
Nástrǫnd 301
necropolis 357, 360
New Uppsala 339, 350, 355, 359
Níall Noigillach 239
níð 35 n. 50, 128, 134 n. 73
Nidaros 27, 42
Níkulás Sveinsson, king of Denmark 360
Njǫrðr 22, 29, 285
Nordland 33
norðvegr 44
Noregs konungatal 41, 83, 310 n. 50
Norges gamle Love 80 n. 39
Norgesveldet 146
Nórr 49–50, 118, 121–122
Northumbria 308–309
Norway 2–3, 5–6, 8, 10, 21, 26, 32, 39, 47–50, 53–54, 59–61, 69–72, 74–89, 92, 94, 98, 101–102, 112, 113 n. 11, 117, 119 nn. 29–30, 120–122, 123 n. 42, 125–126, 128, 134–135, 137–140, 141 n. 93, 142–143, 145–147, 151, 153, 168, 190, 204 n. 179, 302, 309, 312 n. 60, 314–315, 318, 326, 335, 339, 344, 349 n. 76, 351–353, 368, 370–372, 374, 376, 378, 380–381
numinous knowledge 9, 290
Närke 164, 175, 180 n. 71

oðal. See also allodial property 21
Oddaverjar 76, 83, 93, 154 n. 141
Oddi 73, 76, 115 n. 17, 154 n. 141
Oddi Þorgilsson, Icelandic chieftain 73
Oddr Munk's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* 308 n. 41
Odensala 203
Odense 147, 336–337, 339–341, 344, 346, 355, 359
Odenslund(a) 193
Óðin
  and mental strength 275
  as god of death 36, 39
  as god of rulers 33, 37
  association with Óðinn 135–136
  descent from Óðinn 370, 378
  initiation to Óðinn 60
  Óðinn–hero 291
  Óðinn–warrior 36, 135, 271, 272 n. 7
  óskamegir 319
  óskasynir 319–320
  received by Óðinn 383
  relationship to rulership *See also* *úlfheðinn* (sg.), *úlfheðnar* (pl.), *einheri* (sg.), *einherjar* (pl.), *berserkr* (sg.), *berserkir* (pl.) 35
Oillill Cedach, Irish king 243
Óláfr Hákonarson, king of Norway 111, 125
Óláfr Haraldsson, king of Norway, saint 21, 71, 78–79, 137, 140, 142, 144, 147, 332–335, 339, 343, 345, 348–349, 351–353, 359
Óláfr Haraldsson kyrri, king of Norway 190, 359
Óláfr Sveinsson 336, 340, 353
Óláfr Tryggvason, king of Norway 21, 53–54, 56, 71, 143–144, 335
Óláfs saga helga 42, 74 n. 17, 77 n. 30, 78, 79 n. 35, 110 n. 7, 170, 197, 334, 335 n. 18
Óláfs saga kyrra 190 n. 123, 358
Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar. See also Oddr Munk's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* 171 n. 30, 194 n. 145, 308 n. 41
Öland 184
Old Norwegian Homily Book 317 n. 83
Old Uppsala 134 n. 8, 177, 180, 187, 189, 191–192, 195, 355
ollam 212 n. 6, 213 n. 6, 253 n. 103
ǫndvegi. See also high seat 190
óœðra ǫndvegi. See also lesser seat 190
Oppland 40, 42, 44, 61
Oratio contra clerum Norvegiae (En tale mot biskopene) 103, 151, 152 n. 135, 379
Örberga 191, 202
Orgain Denna Ríg 215 n. 16, 254
Orkney 1–2, 10–11, 15, 28 n. 30, 48–52, 59, 70–77, 80–84, 86–87, 92, 94–96, 101, 109–111, 113, 115 n. 17, 116–127, 129, 131–148, 150, 152–154, 370–371, 373–374, 376, 378, 380
Orkneyinga saga 48–52, 59, 70, 72, 73 n. 16, 74 n. 17, 77 n. 30, 79, 82, 84, 86 n. 64, 87, 96, 109–113, 115–129, 133–144, 148–155, 198 n. 160, 372–373, 378
Oseberg 5–6, 300

óskamegir. See Óðinn
óskasynir. See Óðinn
Oslo 48 n. 78, 89, 128 n. 56, 380
Östergötland 168, 182, 184
Östra Äros 339, 341, 350
otherworld. *See also post mortem* place, Valhǫll, Hel, Ran's realm, Gimlé, death realm, paradise, *síd* (Irish) 251–252
Otto III, emperor 351
overlordship 2, 39, 48, 52, 56, 86–87, 109, 138–139, 144

pagani 169, 317
paganism 3, 11, 29 n. 31, 32, 36, 45, 48, 53, 56, 221, 233, 258, 260, 282
Páll Jónsson, bishop of Skálholt 93
Páll Þorfinnsson, earl of Orkney 136, 141
papar 124 n. 44, 144
Paphos 359
paradise. *See also post mortem* place, Valhǫll, Hel, Ran's realm, Gimlé, death realm, otherworld, *síd* (Irish) 37, 279, 299, 301, 307, 320, 324
Passio et miracula beati Olavi 336
Passio Sancti Canuti Regis et Martiris 336–337
patron goddess 34, 54–55
peace 28, 31, 40, 50, 54–55, 59, 71, 81, 84 n. 58, 110, 118 n. 26, 140–141, 144, 149, 170 n. 23, 215, 224 n. 40, 225, 242, 251, 275, 282 n. 29, 306, 310 n. 52, 312, 319
perfect truth 214
periphery. *See* centre and periphery
personal belief. *See* religion
personal qualities 69–70, 72–73, 84–86, 88, 95–97, 101
phallic figure 175
pilgrimage 355, 357, 359
pillar 193, 253 n. 103, 259–260
Pony Rider stone 143
power
  clerical power 216
  concept of 61
  exercise of 1 n. 1, 367
  ideology of. *See* ideology
  legitimisation of 57, 166, 203, 367
  royal power. *See also* king's power 81–82, 85, 88, 164, 178 n. 62, 225, 264, 330, 347, 357, 360
  Viking Age 3, 6, 369
post mortem existence 299–300, 320
post mortem place. *See also* Valhǫll, Hel, Ran's realm, Gimlé, death realm, otherworld, paradise, *síd* (Irish) 301
pre-Christian culture. *See* culture
priest 90–93, 118 n. 24, 177, 180, 184, 186, 197, 201, 312, 335–336, 346, 354, 359
primeval couple 23, 33–34
primeval mother 26 n. 23, 28, 32, 34, 46–47, 60
primogeniture 122 n. 38, 333
primus inter pares 52, 151, 275
Privilege to the Norwegian Church. See Magnús Erlingsson's *Privilege to the Norwegian Church*
property. *See also eign* 21, 31, 78, 92–93, 137, 177, 184, 223
proprietary church. *See* church
protection 7, 88, 226–227, 231, 236, 242, 257, 269, 274, 371
proto–miracle 347, 350, 354 n. 96
punish 80, 86

Ragnarǫk 24, 135
Ragnars saga loðbrókar 307
Ráith Bec 228, 231, 252
Ran 37, 278
Ran's realm. *See also post mortem* place, Valhǫll, Hel, Gimlé, death realm, otherworld, paradise 300
rebirth 290–292
redistribution 7, 185
refsa. See also punish 80
regnal period 83–84
regnum and sacerdotium 355, 360, 379
relics 11, 32, 196, 203, 225, 228, 246, 332–333, 337, 341 n. 41, 343, 346–347, 350, 352–353, 356–357, 359, 361
religion
  change of religion 2, 4, 8, 12
  ethnic religion 3
  personal religion 308
  universal religion 3
retainer 74–76, 109, 346 n. 64
rex et sacerdos. See also king 186
rex iustus. See king
rex perpetuum Norwegie 139
Rígr 81
Rígsþula 8, 81–82, 124 n. 42
Rimbert 176, 320
Ringerike 40–41
rite of transition 9, 26
ritual
  Christian ritual 204

funeral ritual 325
initiation ritual 26 n. 22, 270, 275, 285, 291–293
pagan ritual 169–170, 234, 311, 315
pre-Christian ritual 200
ritual object 166, 196, 203–204
ritual space 166, 191
River Boyne 240, 256
River Dodder 256
Rogaland 315, 380
Rǫgnvaldr Brúsason, earl of Orkney 137
Rǫgnvaldr Eysteinsson, earl of Møre and Orkney 116 n. 21
Rǫgnvaldr Guðrǫðarson, king of the Isles 125
Rǫgnvaldr heithumhæri 22
Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson, earl of Orkney 51, 148 n. 120
Romanesque church. *See* church
Rome 150 n. 130, 197, 204, 359
Romsdal 120, 122, 123 n. 42
Ronán Fionn 242
Roslagen 179
royal attributes 250
royal law (*récht rígda*) 226
royal legislator 42
royal martyr. *See* martyr
royal praise 23, 201
royal saint. *See* saint
royal sites 235, 245, 256–257
royal touch 357 n. 107
royal transgression against the Church's rights 227
Ruadán of Lorrha, monastic founder 224
rule 8, 16 n. 3, 28, 31, 41, 43–44, 50, 52–53, 57, 60, 62, 79, 87, 94, 97, 100, 120 n. 31, 125–126, 132–133, 137–138, 140 n. 88, 141–142, 148, 150–151, 166, 215, 223, 242, 250, 261, 330, 305 n. 31, 332–333, 344, 353, 361–362
ruler
and fertility. *See* fertility
and generosity. *See* generosity
and legitimacy. *See* legitimacy
and ritual role 166, 198
as God's representative. *See* God's representative, God's *eikon*, *vicarius dei*
dead ruler. *See also* ruler's death 9, 320
death of a ruler 9, 352
de-sacralisation of 372
good ruler 7, 96, 149
historical ruler 114
just ruler 253 n. 105, 335
ruler's accession. *See* accession
ruler's bride 31–32, 372
ruler's death. *See also* dead ruler 41
ruler's fate. *See* fate
ruler's inauguration. *See* inauguration
ruler's luck. *See* luck, *hamingja, gæfa, gipta*
secular 73, 77, 84, 87–92, 95, 124 n. 42, 214 n. 11, 221–222, 226–227, 233, 235–236, 240, 245, 253, 257, 330, 334–335, 355–356, 370, 379, 382
strong ruler 150
wise ruler. *See* wisdom, *vitr, storvitr*
ruler-god 37
rulership
ideology of xi, 1, 3, 8–9, 11–12, 16–18, 23–26, 28, 30, 40, 42, 48, 50–56, 70–71, 95–96, 135, 141, 152, 166, 192, 203, 213, 215, 367–383
Christian rulership 1, 2, 9, 17–18, 42, 213, 375–376, 378
concept of rulership 3, 376
European rulership 11, 152
Nordic rulership 7, 12, 26, 28, 50, 56, 380–381
pagan rulership 2, 38, 382
pre-Christian rulership 11, 18
Viking Age rulership 28 n. 31, 369
viking style of rulership 152–153, 155
runes 149 n. 126
runic inscription 6, 164 n. 6, 182, 200, 325
runic knowledge 82
Rällinge 193
Rök stone 182

sacral kingship. *See* kingship
sacrality 330
sacrifice 34, 51, 115, 166, 170–176, 186, 196–199, 284, 286, 287 n. 45, 310, 313 nn. 64, 66
sagas
native elite…subject of sagas 87
as sources 96
See also Kings' sagas, Icelandic family sagas 10, 18, 21, 38–39, 44, 46, 53 n. 85, 56 n. 90, 28, 69–70, 72, 76–77, 79, 84, 87–88, 90 n. 69, 91, 95–102, 110, 112–113, 142 n. 96,

167, 169, 181, 252, 258 n. 116, 280, 307, 315 n. 77, 335–336, 342, 359, 372, 376
sagas about the distant past 96–101
saint. *See also* body, hair and nails, relics, martyr
national 10
royal 10–11, 28 n. 31, 42, 153, 195, 329, 330, 334, 339, 344, 347–348, 361, 374–376
saint and *natio* 375
saint-bishop 147 n. 115
saint-king 32, 140, 147, 334, 376
saintly earl / saint-earl 10–11
sainthood 151 n. 133, 152 n. 136, 196, 246, 329, 331, 360, 370, 374, 375
Salgofnir 319
Sami 2, 29, 44, 46–51, 58–61, 368, 372, 383
samtíðarsögur. See also Contemporary sagas 96
sanctity 311, 330, 356
sanctuary. *See also vé, véstallr* 143, 179, 181–182, 219–220, 223–225, 231, 260, 343
Sanda 175, 186
satirical poetry 24
Saurhlið 345–346
Scania. *See* Skåne
Scéla Éogain in so 7 Cormaic 214
Scéla Muicce Mac Da Thó 254
sea-king. *See* king
seiðr-woman 288
severed head 127 n. 51, 129
sex and coercion 30 n. 39
sexual metaphor 31
sexuality 30–32, 118 n. 26, 372
Shannon 220, 221 n. 33
Shetland 71–72, 86–87, 94–95, 109, 111, 119 n. 29, 120–121, 145, 146 n. 112
ship burial 5, 300, 323
Sibbi *vīaværi* 182
síd. See also post mortem place, death realm, otherworld, paradise 215 n. 20, 225, 251–252
Siggeir, king in Götaland 287–289
Sighridakirkia 179
Sighvatr Sturluson 98
Sigmundr Brestisson 52, 60
Sigmundr son of Vǫlsungr, king 287
Signý, sister of Sigmundr 287–289
Sigtuna 164, 166, 169, 176–177, 180, 183, 189, 193, 201
Sigurðardrápa 182 n. 85
Sigurðr Eysteinsson inn ríki, earl of Orkney 111, 154
Sigurðr Hlǫðvirsson inn digri, earl of Orkney 143
Sigurðr Magnússon Jórsalfari, king of Norway 71
Sigurðr risi (hrísi) 47
Sigurðr syr 47, 61
Sín, mistress of Muirchertach mac Erca 234–241, 247, 256
Sinfjǫtli 275 n. 14, 279, 282, 287–292
single kingship. *See* kingship
single rule. *See* rule
Skaði 27, 29–30, 31 n. 41, 32, 34 n. 45, 43, 51, 57, 60–61, 372
skald 6, 27, 29 n. 34, 33, 36, 61
skaldic poetry 5, 11, 18, 21, 26–27, 29, 31–32, 34, 36–37, 40, 45, 52 n. 84, 61, 100 n. 98, 101, 128, 182, 319, 336, 352
Skálholt 92–94, 145 n. 107
Skara 164
Skírnir 25
Skírnismál 22–23, 25–26, 30, 33, 40–41, 46–47, 55, 57, 59
Skjǫldunga saga 19, 25, 58, 116
Skǫgul 305–306, 324
Skúli Bárðarson 69, 71
Skåne 13, 64
slave. *See also þræll* 50, 53, 80, 131–133, 143–144, 179, 254, 278 n. 22, 299, 372
Slöinge 168
Småland 184
Snorra Edda 67
Snorri Sturluson 79, 128, 170, 335, 368, 378
Snæfríðr 29 n. 34, 44, 46–47, 50–51, 59, 61, 372
Snær 49, 115
social order 8, 131
Sogn 6, 44 n. 70
Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum 307
Sollentuna 184, 203
Solna 184
Sonatorrek 300 n. 16
sovereignty 189, 192, 203, 217, 231–232, 234, 239, 242 n. 73, 262 n. 119, 373
speculum (-a) principum 10, 102
speculum (-a) regis 10
Spånga 184, 193
St Brendan 225, 234
St Ciarán 220–221, 224, 260
St Columba 234 n. 58
St Denis 202

St Edmund. *See* Edmund, king of England
St Gertrud's, Sigtuna 176, 180, 201
St Lars', Uppsala 177, 350
St Olof's, Sigtuna 201
St Per's, Sigtuna 176–177, 180, 189, 192, 201–202
Starkaðr 270, 272, 275
stave 193
stave church. *See* church
Stefan, archbishop of Uppsala 179
stone crosses 315
storvitr 77
Sturlu saga 73, 76, 77 nn. 28–29
Sturlubók 131
Sturlunga saga 70, 72–73, 74 n. 20, 76 nn. 26–27, 77 nn. 28–29, 78 nn. 33–34, 80 n. 39, 84, 96, 100
style of rulership 113, 152–153, 155
submission 125, 137–139, 227, 378
succession 112, 151, 237, 261, 264, 333, 335, 359, 377
Sueno's Stone 127 n. 51
Suibhne mac Colmáin Chuair, Irish king 212, 218, 241, 248
Suibhne mac Colmáin Móir 233
Sutton Hoo 5
Svaði 50
Sváfnir 36
Svealand 34, 39, 175
Svear 170, 184, 185 n. 100, 164, 192, 198–199, 204, 313 n. 66, 320, 382
Svefneyjar 78
Svein Estridsson, king of Denmark 169
Sveinn Ásleifarson, Orcadian chieftain 52, 136, 148, 150, 154 n. 141
Sverker dynasty 196
Sverker I the Elder, king of Sweden 196, 338
Sverrir Sigurðarson, king of Norway 52, 71–72, 87, 103, 109, 111, 125, 151–152, 154, 378–379
Sverris saga 72, 79, 96, 109, 151–152, 195, 350
Svetjud 164, 166, 168, 170 n. 23, 182–183, 186, 190, 192 n. 135, 193, 196–198. 204
Svintuna 175, 183, 186
Svipdagr 281–282
Svíþjóð. *See* Svetjud
Sweden 2, 5–6, 10, 97, 140, 147, 164, 168–169, 178, 182–184, 191, 195, 197, 202, 206, 300, 339, 341. 344, 350, 374, 377
symbols
  of power 189, 192, 356
  religious 166, 189
syncretism 332
synod of Braga 177
sýslumaðr (sg.), *sýslumenn* (pl.) 85
Säby 180
Sæheim 314 n. 71
Sæhrímnir 319
sækonungr. *See* king
Sæmundr Sigfússon fróði 19 n. 6
Södermanland 164, 175, 179, 193, 198

Tabula Othiniensis 337
Tailltiu 226
take revenge 80, 133 n. 68, 288–289
Tara 214, n. 12, 219, 222, 225–226, 230–231, 233–237, 240, 242, 245 n. 80, 248, 257, 259–260
Tecosca Cormaic 214
temple 167–169, 170 n. 26, 171, 181, 185–186, 188, 193, 197, 320, 358 n. 110
templum. *See also* temple 169, 171, 188
territory 6, 30, 32, 41–42, 57, 146, 164, 242, 249, 333, 353, 368
Theodoricus Monachus' *Historia* 308 n. 40, 309 n. 46, 310 n. 48, 310 n. 50
theology 343, 374, 382
time
  Christian time 90, 215, 233
  Norwegian time 84
  time zones 83
Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, saint 357
þing 355
thing. *See* þing
Þingvellir 72
Þjálfi 272
Þjóðólfr of Hvinir 22, 24, 36
Þóra, mother of Hákon góði Aðalsteinsfostri, king of Norway 132
Þórarinn loftunga 336, 248, 375
Þórbjǫrn hornklofi 36, 280
Þórðar saga kakala 78 n. 33, 78 n. 34
Þórðr kakali Sighvatsson 78
Þorfinnr Sigurðarson inn ríki, earl of Orkney 111, 154
Þorgeirr Hallason, Icelandic chieftain 76
Þorgeirr Sveinsson, Icelandic farmer 76
Þorgerðr Egilsdóttir 98
Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr 34, 53–55, 60

Þorgils Hálmuson 345
Þorgils saga skarða 80 n. 39
Þórir hundr 342, 347–349, 354
Þórir þegjandi Rǫgnvaldsson, earl of Møre 129
Þorkell fóstri 139 n. 86
Þorkell rostungr 154 n. 141
Þorlákr Þórhallsson, bishop of Skálholt 92
Þórleifr jarlsskáld 307
Þórr
and cosmic sphere 371
Þórr-hero 272
Þorri 49, 115
Þorsteinn knarrarsmiðr 342
Þorsteinn rauðr 120, 123 n. 41
Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar 77
Þrandr from Gata 52
þræll. *See also* slave 81, 124 n. 42
þulur 115 n. 14
Þuríðr Úlfsdóttir 55–56
þættir 84
Tillinge 192
Tissø 168, 176
title 82, 86, 90, 97, 110 n. 7, 121–124, 133 n. 68, 219, 251, 293 n. 56, 303
Tjängvide stone 323 n. 108
Tochmarc Becfhola 215 n. 17
Togail Bruidne Da Derga 213, 218, 245 n. 80, 251, 254, 261
top down 6, 383
Torslunda 193
Torstuna 182
Toten 40
treaty of Hvitingsøy 125
Trelleborg 8
triangular stone-setting 175
tribute 125, 164, 166, 184–186, 203, 235
triclinium 171, 192, 199
Trójumanna saga 20
Troy 20
truth of the prince 213–214
Trädgårdsmästaren 200
Trøndelag 30–32, 61, 71, 312–313, 315, 380
túath 213–214, 221
Túathal Máelgarb 219, 222, 239, 247–248
Tuilén 235, 240, 257
Tuna 182, 300
Tune 5
Týs ǫttungr. *See also* Freyr 194
Uí Néill 219, 236–237
Uisnech 223, 226
úlfheðinn (sg.), *úlfheðnar* (pl.) 36, 54, 135–136, 272, 276, 280, 285
Ulfhildakirkia 179
Úlfr 54–55, 321
Ulster cycle 251, 214 n. 11, 254
Ultuna 183
universal religion. *See* religion
un-king 373
Uppland 6, 39, 164, 166, 171 n. 28, 173, 177–180, 184, 193
Upplandslagen 171 n. 28, 197
Uppsala 5, 164, 166, 169–171, 173, 175, 176 n. 49, 177, 180–183, 185, 187–189, 191–199, 338–339, 350, 355, 359, 364, 371
Uppsala auðr 164 n. 8, 180, 193
Uppåkra 168
Uraicecht Bec 256
Utgarðr 17, 20, 25, 27, 28, 31–32, 44, 54–56, 274 n. 11
Utgarðr-son 51
Utgarðr-woman 23–24, 34, 46–47, 53, 60

Vafþrúðnismál 297, 319
Valhǫll. *See also* death realm, Gimlé, Hel, otherworld, paradise, *post mortem* place, Ran's realm 301
Valkyrie 278 n. 22, 291, 304–306, 319, 321, 323–324
valkyrjur. *See also* Valkyrie 303, 304 n. 28
Vallentuna 184, 350
Vallentuna calendar 350
Vallhagar 168, 199
Valsgärde 5, 175, 182
Vanir 23, 25, 29, 34, 38, 41, 45, 194, 272
Varnhem 359
vassal 87, 109, 137–139, 142, 308, 339
Vatnsdæla saga 77 n. 29, 120 n. 31
vé 181
vebǫnd 173
Vellekla 32, 43, 61, 302
Vendel 5, 175, 182–183
véstallr 181
Vestfold 6
Viby 179
vicarius dei. *See also* God's *eikon*, God's representative 62
Víkarr, king 286

Viken 39, 41–42, 71
viking style of rulership. *See* rulership
viking way of life 148–149, 154
vinsælir. See also friends 77
Vīseti 182
Vita Anskarii 164 n. 6, 176, 320
Vita Columbae 230, 232, 234, 251 n. 94
Vita Findani 143
Vita Sanctae Columbae 233 n. 56, 234 n. 60
Vita sancti Botvidi 180 n. 70
vitr 73, 77, 140
Vǫlsunga saga 280 n. 24
Vǫlsungr 287–288
vǫrðr 181
vǫrðr véstalls 181
vox populi 202
Västeråker 180 n. 71
Västmanland 164, 180 n. 71

Wales 141 n. 95
war
  collective 272–275
  defensive 273
  individualistic 272–273
  just war 122
  Óðinn's and Þórr's relationship to 272, 275
  offensive 273–274
  war-god 38, 270
warrior
  banféndi. See also female warrior 221 n. 33
  chief warrior 253 n. 105, 258
  concept of 269
  cú. See also hound 225 n. 42, 249
  dead warrior. *See also* fallen warrior 276, 287 n. 46
  divine warrior 270
  earthly warrior 272, 276 n. 15
  fallen warrior. *See also* dead warrior 36, 317
  female warrior. *See also banféndi* 221 n. 33, 249 n. 91
  function in society 270
  hound. *See also cú* 225, 249, 251
  ideology 6–7, 11, 24, 37
  Óðinn-warrior. *See* Óðinn 36, 271, 272 n. 7
  sea-warrior. *See also sækonungr* 37–38
  warrior-culture. *See* culture
  warrior-god 271
  wolf-warrior. *See úlfheðinn, úlfheðnar*
Westminster Abbey 357
William, king of Scotland 110
wisdom 52, 77, 102, 135, 223, 246
wolf-warrior. *See úlfheðinn* (sg.), *úlfheðnar* (pl.)
woman from beyond 324

Yellow Book of Lecan 218, 220 n. 31
Ymir 41 n. 64, 115, 118
Ynglinga saga 18–19, 21–23, 35, 40–41, 43, 57, 170, 193, 196, 198, 271, 272 n. 7, 275, 279, 281 n. 27, 283, 285
Ynglingar 19, 21, 22, 23–25, 35, 38–43, 44 n. 70, 45, 49–51, 57, 59, 128, 371
Ynglingar-dynasty 2, 15, 18, 20, 21–22, 24, 35, 39–42, 46, 48, 58
Ynglingatal 16 n. 2, 21–24, 27 n. 26, 30, 35, 40, 44 n. 70, 82, 116, 128–129, 170, 181, 193 n. 140, 194
Yngvi, king of Turkey 116, 181
Younger Passio (of St Knútr) 337
Yule. *See also Freyr* 36 n. 36, 37, 43–44, 197, 312