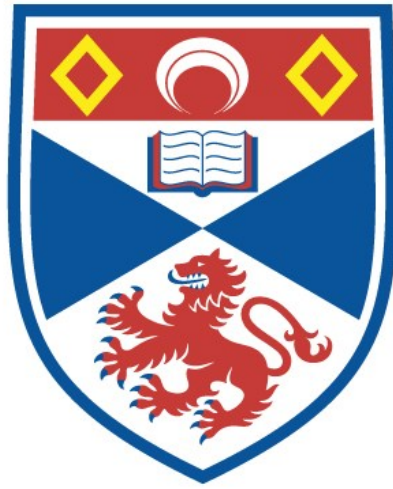


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The Emergence of the Cult of and the Literature on St. Magnús of
Orkney:
The Scandinavian and European Context

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. by Haki Þór Antonsson
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1999.



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Abstract

The thesis examines the cult of and hagiography on St. Magnús, earl of Orkney (d. 1117), and seeks to place both within their proper cultic and literary contexts.

The literature on Magnús is primarily preserved in Icelandic works of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The distinguishing features of the Magnús corpus are highlighted as well as its correspondence to other hagiographic works on princely martyrs. Particular attention is paid to the influence of the Becket biographies on the Magnús literature and the hypothesis that a fragmentarily preserved Life of the Orkney saint was written by Robert of Cricklade, prior of St. Frideswide's in Oxford (d. ca. 1180), is examined.

The official recognition of the Orkney saint serves a starting point for a re-interpretation of the emergence of the princely cults in the Nordic lands. Although the dynastic aspect of the cults should not be underestimated, the cults of St. Magnús, St. Ólafr of Norway, St. Knud of Odense and St. Erik of Sweden were created by ecclesiastics in order to enhance the position of the Church in a recently converted society.

Martyrdom, the predominant form of sanctity in the twelfth-century Nordic lands, was also manifested through minor cults of secular leaders who came to a violent end. These cults are examined and it is pointed out that in the absence of an effective ecclesiastical authority the laity was able to appropriate and interpret sanctity for its own purposes.

Acknowledgements

I thank my supervisor, Dr. Barbara E. Crawford, for her guidance and support throughout the period of research; especially for allowing and encouraging me to explore avenues that were not always obvious at the time and pulling me down to earth when my ideas were in danger of racing ahead of reality.

To Dr. Michael Staunton, Dr. Björn Weiler, Ásdís Egilssdóttir and Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson I am grateful for numerous suggestions and advice on various aspects of the thesis. Warm thanks to Angela Montford for proof-reading the work on a very short notice and Angus Donal Stewart for advising me on all matters relating to word processing.

To the following institutions and I owe thanks for financial help: The Royal Historical Society, The Bank of Scotland, Björn Þorsteinsson's Memorial Fund and the Overseas Students Award Scheme.

Thanks to Jack and Ann Finn for their invaluable friendship and encouragement throughout and, above all, to my parents who not only provided me with a safe-haven in Iceland during the summer months but also gave me support which I will not be able to repay.

...where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

T. S. Elliot, The Waste Land.

Introduction

One is hard pressed to think of a topic which touches on more diverse aspects of medieval Nordic history than the cult of the princely martyrs. For one thing, the literature and liturgy composed in the saints' honour represents some of the oldest known writings from this part of Europe.¹ In Denmark the slaying of King Knud IV in the year 1086, "the strangest event in the history of the Danish church since the introduction of Christianity", in the words of one commentator, inspired the first attempts to write on the history of that country.² Moreover, the papally approved recognition of Knud's sanctity in 1100/1101 was the incentive for the earliest noting down of musical composition in Denmark.³ In the Northern Isles the fragmentarily preserved Life of St. Magnús, composed in the latter half of the twelfth century,⁴ is the first known prose work to deal exclusively with any aspect of Orcadian history. Curiously, the earliest and the most successful Nordic royal cult, that of St. Ólafr of Norway (d. 1030), did not as far as one can tell, generate much hagiographic writing in the first century of its existence. Still Passio et miracula beati Olavi

¹ For a brief assessment of the significance of hagiography in the earliest stages of writing in Scandinavia see the contributions of Kværndrup, S., (Denmark), Kratz, H., (Iceland and Norway) and Morris, B., (Sweden) sub. "Saints' Lives", Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia. Ed. by Philip Pulsiano et al. (New York & London 1993), 562-563. See also Cormack, M., The Saints in Iceland. Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400. Subsidia Hagiographica 78 (Bruxelles 1994), 32-41.

² Gertz, M. Cl., Knud den helliges Martyrhistorie særlig efter de tre ældste Kilder. Festskrift udgivet af Københavns Universitet i anledning af Hans Majestæt Kongens Fødselsdag den 3. Juni 1907 (København 1907), 1.

³ Berzagal, J., "Songs for St. Knud the King", Musik og Forskning 6 (1980), 153.

⁴ On the dating of this work see ch. 1.5.

(1180s) and the laudatory poem Geisli (ca. 1152) are among the earliest works known to have been written in Norway.

The hagiography relating to the Nordic princely martyrs was heavily indebted to foreign literary models and, indeed, foreign men of letters. Thus Englishmen were to a considerable part responsible for the hagiography on St. Knud of Odense, St. Knud Lavard (d. 1131) and St. Magnús of Orkney. From this perspective the cults of the royal/princely martyrs reflected the growing cultural and ecclesiastical ties in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries between Scandinavia and the more established Christian countries.

It is difficult to separate the emergence of the cults from the strengthening of princely power in the same period. In every case we see a secular ruler applying his authority and resources to enhance the cult of a murdered or a killed relative. Knud IV was canonised on the insistence of his son, King Erik *ejegod*, and Earl Rögnvaldr of Orkney (1137-1158/59) began the building of St. Magnús Cathedral in honour of his executed uncle. In its initial phase the most important promoters of the cult of King Ólafr were the saint's half-brother, King Haraldr *harðráði* (1046-66), and his son King Magnús *góði* (1035-46). Likewise, it appears that King Knut of Sweden (1167- ca. 1195/96) was behind the establishment of the cult of his father Erik Jedvardson (d. 1160). By personally associating their authority with a saintly relative, these rulers strengthened their own claim to power. The cults were thus princely in every sense of the word.

From approximately the second half of the eleventh century onwards there was a noticeable shift towards a more centralised form of rulership in the Nordic dominions. The town-based court became increasingly important as a centre of power, a development which heralded the beginning of the end for the itinerant king. It is not without relevance in this context that in some cases these new centres of authority – Kirkwall in

Orkney, Nidaros in Norway and Uppsala in Sweden – became associated with the corporal relics of the princely saints. By the end of the twelfth century each Nordic realm had acquired a native heavenly patron who was neither a bishop nor an abbot but a saintly ruler. Indeed it is indicative of the dominant position of the princely martyr-model of sanctity in the Northern countries that it was first in Iceland, with the emergence of the cult of Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson of Skálholt at the end of the twelfth century, that a cult of a native confessor achieved any notable popularity in the Northern lands.

It would be misguided, however, to examine the cults of the princely saints solely in terms of secular politics. As I will show, the role of ecclesiastics was crucial in both their establishment and maintenance. In the eleventh and the twelfth century the Nordic Church was in the process of transforming itself from a missionary body to a more organised institution, albeit one which still worked in close co-operation with the secular authority. The cults of the princely saints played an important part in this development for they provided a platform and a focal point for closer co-operation between Crown and Church. Indeed the shrines of the martyred rulers became the most treasured possessions of both bishoprics (in Orkney) and archbishoprics (in Sweden and Norway) alike.

It is not the aim of the thesis to make an exhaustive examination of the cults of the Nordic princely saints in this period and the relevant hagiographic corpus. Rather my aim is to place the literature and the early stages of the Orcadian cult of St. Magnús - born ca. 1075 and executed in 1116/1117 on the orders of his cousin and co-ruler Hákon Pálsson – within their Scandinavian, and to a certain extent, European context. This discussion will include the Norwegian cults of St. Ólafr and (to a lesser extent) St. Hallvard, the Danish cults of St. Knud of Odense and St. Knud Lavard and the Swedish cult of St. Erik.

It is difficult to separate the early history of the princely cults from the hagiographic literature associated with them. Moreover a study of cults of this nature must take into account not only their institutional framework but also its underlying emotive aspect: the phenomenon of martyrdom. In the twelfth century martyrdom of secular figures was not exclusively confined to the high-profile princely cults already mentioned. In the Scandinavian sources, and in the Old-Norse corpus in particular, we find a number of (albeit fragmentary) references to figures of political importance who came to a violent end and were subsequently considered holy. Not only do these minor cults hold an important key to people's perception of sanctity in this period, but they also reveal what ingredients were essential for the establishment of successful princely cults

My line of research can be summed as follows: to investigate the earliest stage of St. Magnús' cult and the literary corpus on the saint and to place both within their proper historical and literary contexts. In the process I hope not only to throw a light on the Orcadian cult and the relevant sources but also aspects relating to the sanctity of secular figures in the Nordic lands that have hitherto been, if not neglected, then at least not sufficiently highlighted.

Part 1

The Magnús Corpus and the Hagiographic Tradition

1.1. The Icelandic Background

The medieval narrative sources pertaining to the life and martyrdom of St. Magnús earl of Orkney and the emergence of his cult are the following: Orkneyinga saga (The Saga of the Earls of Orkney),⁵ Magnús saga skemmri (Magnús saga the shorter) preserved in a manuscript dating from the second half of the fourteenth century **ÁM 235 fol.**;⁶ Magnús saga lengri (Magnús saga the longer) preserved in three paper manuscripts from ca. 1700, **ÁM 350 4to**, **ÁM 351 4to** and **ÁM 352 4to**,⁷ and a Latin Legenda de sancto Magno of uncertain date, found (in two slightly different versions) in an Icelandic manuscript from the beginning of the eighteenth century, **ÁM 670 f 4to**,⁸ and in the Scottish Breviarium Aberdonense printed in 1509/10.⁹ The Legenda is an abbreviated version

⁵ Orkneyinga saga. Ed. by Sigurður Nordal (København 1913-16). Hereafter referred to as O.s.

⁶ Orkneyinga saga. Legenda de Sancto Magno. Magnúss saga skemmri. Magnúss saga lengri. Helga þáttir ok Úlfs. Finnogi Guðmundsson gaf út. Íslensk Fornrit XXXIV (Reykjavík 1965), 311-332. Hereafter referred to as M.s.s.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 335-383. Hereafter referred to as M.s.l. The main manuscript is **ÁM 350 4to**, copied from Bæjarbók, a vellum MS from ca. 1400 which was almost completely destroyed in a fire in Copenhagen in 1795. This is the manuscript followed in the edition of the saga used in this study.

⁸ The Orkneyingers' saga. Transl. by G. W. Dasent. Icelandic Sagas vol. iii. Rolls Series. (London 1894), 301-304. Hereafter referred to as Leg.

⁹ Breviarium Aberdonense (Edinburgh 1510) Reprinted Spalding and Maitland Club (London 1854). Pars Hyemalis, fo. lxxxvii - fo. lxxxix. Printed in The Orkneyingers' saga, 305-322. For the liturgical material on St. Magnús see De Geer, I., Earl, Saint, Bishop, Skald – and Music. The Orkney Earldom of the Twelfth Century. A Musicological Study (Uppsala 1985), 118-143.

of a twelfth-century Latin Life of St. Magnús which a certain *magister* Robert composed, in my estimation, in the 1170s (see ch.1.5.). Although Robert's work has not survived in its entirety, a substantial part of it was incorporated into M.s.l. Attached to M.s.l., M.s.s. and the Magnús section of O.s. are miracle collections of the saint.

To date, the main studies of the Magnús corpus are Einar Ól. Sveinsson's chapter on O.s. and the Magnús sagas in his Sagnaritun Oddaverja,¹⁰ Finnbogi Guðmundsson's preface to his Íslensk fornrit edition of O.s. and the Magnús sagas¹¹ and Magnús Már Lárusson's study of the cult of the saint in Iceland.¹² None of these studies has as its main aim to place the Magnús corpus within a proper hagiographic and literary context. This will be the primary object in this part of the thesis.

Orkneyinga saga. The earliest of the three Icelandic works is Orkneyinga saga, dating from the first half of the thirteenth century. As a whole the saga is only preserved in the fourteenth-century codex Flateyjarbók where it is interpolated into accounts relating to the two missionary kings of Norway, Ólafr Tryggvason and Ólafr Haraldsson.¹³ The textual history of the work is complicated by the fact that the preserved O.s. is a revised version of a lost earlier saga. In its present state O.s. ends with the death of Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson of Orkney in 1206 whereas the original redaction of the work is believed to have terminated in 1171. Moreover, it is at the latter date that a sixteenth-century (yet unpublished) translation of O.s. into Danish comes to an end which suggests that the translator had

¹⁰ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Sagnaritun Oddaverja. Nokkrar athuganir. Studia Islandica I (1937), 17-39.

¹¹ Orkneyinga saga, xliii-lxi ; cxxviii-cxli.

¹² Magnús Már Lárusson, "Sct. Magnus Orcadensis Comes", Saga 3 (1963), 470-503.

¹³ Flateyjarbók: En samling af norske konge-sagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler. Ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon & C. R. Unger. 3 vols. (Oslo 1860-68), vol. I 219-229, 558-560 ; vol. II 176-182, 404-519, 529-530.

before him the original (or at least an older) version of the work.¹⁴ Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla, thought to have been completed in the fourth decade of the thirteenth century, was the major influence on the revised version of O.s. To what extent the Magnús section of the saga was affected in the process is unknown and probably impossible to reconstruct.¹⁵

Naturally the parts in O.s. that deal with St. Magnús and his adversary, Earl Hákon, are closely interwoven. Indeed in chapters 34-46 (in the modern editions) the saga focuses as much on Hákon as it does on the saintly Magnús. It is only with the description of Magnús' martyrdom on Egilsay, his subsequent miracles and episcopal recognition of his sanctity, that he assumes centre stage. The author's occupation with Hákon may reflect the fact that he had before him a Hákonardrápa,¹⁶ i.e. a poem on the earl, and possibly a separate saga dedicated to him.¹⁷

Einar Ól. Sveinsson argued that the author of O.s. had been influenced by a hagiographic work on St. Magnús. He drew attention to the

¹⁴ The translation, which has not been edited, is preserved in a paper manuscript from ca. 1600.

¹⁵ Various hypothesis have been put forward regarding the authorship of the saga. Jón Stefánsson argued that Bjarni Kolbeinsson, bishop of Orkney (1188-1223), had composed the saga. Jón Stefánsson, "Biarne Kolbeinsson, The Skald, Bishop of Orkney, 1188-1223", Orkney and Shetland Old-lore Series 1 (1907), 43-47. Idem., "The Authorship of Orkneyinga saga (Jarla sögur)", Orkney and Shetland Old-lore Series 2 (1907), 65-71. In an article from 1937 Anne Holtsmark acknowledged that Bjarni may have been the source for much of the material but considered it more plausible that the actual author was Icelandic. Holtsmark, A., "Bjarni Kolbeinsson og hans forfatterskap", Edda (1937), 1-17. A similar role for Bishop Bjarni was suggested by P. A. Munch with Snorri Sturluson as the final author, Det norske folks historie. Tredie del (Christiania 1857), 1049-1053. Einar Ól. Sveinsson suggested that the work had been composed by a member of the culturally prominent family of Oddaverjar. It is also known that Oddaverjar had notable ties with the Orkney earls in the second half of the twelfth century. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Sagnaritun Oddaverja, 17-39. Of individual members of this family Bishop Páll Jónsson of Skálholt (d. 1211) has been identified as a likely author of the saga, Hermann Pálsson, Tólfta Öldin (Reykjavík 1970), 27-30. On the other hand one scholar has argued that it is unwise to dismiss out of hand a statement that appears at the beginning of the aforementioned Danish translation that the saga was composed by a Norwegian priest. Böðvar Guðmundsson, "En norsk klerk fast for de 400 aar forleden", Yfir Íslandsála. Afmælisrit til heiðurs Magnúsi Stefánssyni sextugum 25. desember 1991. Ed by Gunnar Karlsson & Helgi Þorláksson (Reykjavík 1991), 39-53.

¹⁶ O.s., 108. M.s.l., 352.

¹⁷ The Orkneyinga Saga. A new translation with introduction and notes by A. B. Taylor (London 1938), 72-74.

stark contrast between the hagiographic flavour of some of the passages dealing with the life and martyrdom of the earl and the classical saga-style prose which otherwise distinguishes the saga. As already noted Master Robert's Latin Life is the sole hagiographic work on St. Magnús which is known to pre-date O.s. To account for the hagiographic nature of the Magnús section in O.s., Einar Ól. Sveinsson suggested that the saga-writer had made use of this particular work, perhaps in an abbreviated form.¹⁸

The case can be made that the hagiographic style of the passages in question reflects the nature of the subject matter rather than outside influence. In other words, the telling of the life and death of a canonised martyr required a different stylistic approach than, for instance, the killing of the warlike Rögnvaldr Brúsason recounted earlier in the saga.¹⁹ A shift in style within one and the same work is not uncommon in Old-Norse prose. In the Icelandic Family Sagas, for instance, the narrative tone frequently changes when the scene of action moves from Iceland to foreign lands. A mention can also be made of the colourful account in O.s. of Earl Rögnvaldr Kali's pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the early 1150s.²⁰ Away from the political strife of the Orkney earldom the narrative takes on a fantastic tinge which in many ways recalls the Icelandic adventure stories of the Middle Ages, the so-called Legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*). In

¹⁸ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sagnaritun Oddaverja*, 27-35.

¹⁹ O.s., 76-79. A note can be made of the description of the killing of Duke Knud Lavard in the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Knýtlinga saga*. Although the author of the saga does not (as far as one can tell) follow any hagiographic work on the death of the Danish martyr, his account of the betrayal of Knud and his subsequent murder conforms to the hagiographic pattern associated with martyrs of his type (see ch. 1.3.). *Danakonuga sögur. Skjöldunga saga – Knýtlinga saga – Agrip af sögu Danakonunga*. Bjarni Guðnason gaf út. *Íslensk fornrit XXXV* (Reykjavík 1982), 251-255. See Bjarni Guðnason's comments, *ibid.*, cxliv-cxlviii. This however applies only to the plot and not the language or the style of the saga account.

²⁰ O.s., 230-262.

short, authors were often inclined to adopt the style which best fitted the scenario they were dealing with.²¹

On the other hand it is worth noting that the killing of the same Rögnvaldr, whose sanctity is recognised by the author, is described in a non-hagiographic, "saga-style" manner.²² Similarly the death-scene of Haraldr ungi, whose saintly reputation is also noted, is devoid of any noticable hagiographic gloss.²³ Separate works of hagiography on these two martyred earls have not survived and it is unlikely any were composed in their honour.

The hypothesis that the author of O.s. was influenced by a Life of St. Magnús is further strengthened by apparent textual parallels between the Leg. (which, as mentioned, is based on Robert's Life) and O.s. Most notably, O.s. tells that Magnús went to his martyrdom "*sem honum væri til veizlu bodit...*",²⁴ which echoes the words of the Leg.: "*Eductus ergo hilari mente et intrebido animo quasi ad epulas invitatus...*"²⁵

At one point O.s. refers to an oral source for its account of Magnús' martyrdom: "*Svo segir Holdbode, rettordr bonde i Sudreyium, fra vidrædu þeirra; hann var þa met Magnusi annarr hans manna, er þeir gerdu hann handtekinn.*"²⁶ A comparable reference to an eye-witness at the scene of

²¹ Not much has been written about the style of O.s. However, for an analysis of narrative shifts in the latter stages of the saga see Jesch, J., "Negotiating Traditions: Recent History in *Orkneyinga Saga*", *Samtíðarsögur. The Contemporary Sagas. The Ninth International Saga Conference. Akureyri 31.7. - 6.8. 1994. Preprints: vol. I*, 365-379. Idem., "Narrating *Orkneyinga Saga*", *Scandinavian Studies* 64 (1992), 19-28.

²² O.s., 309-315.

²³ Ibid., 321-324.

²⁴ Ibid., 117. "as though he was bidden to a feast... ." The *Orkneyinga Saga*, 210.

²⁵ Leg., 307-308.

²⁶ O.s. 117. "So says Holdbodi, a trustworthy bondi from the Hebrides, concerning their conversation. He was one of the two men with Earl Magnús when they made him captive." The *Orkneyinga Saga*, 210. It is interesting to note that in another context O.s. mentions a man from the Hebrides by the name of Holdboði. Early in the year 1136 Vilhjálmr, the Orkney bishop, sent the unruly Sveinn Ásleifarson to a certain Holdbodi Hundason so that he might escape the wrath of Earl Páll. O.s., 171-172. Thus Holdbodi Hundason had links with Bishop Vilhjálmr who was responsible for the canonisation of Earl Magnús (see ch. 2). The possibility can not be ruled out that the two are one and the same person. If that is the case the reference to the eyewitness in O.s. may derive

martyrdom can be found in Abbo of Fleury's *Life of King Edmund of East Anglia* composed in 987/8. Abbo states that he received information (indirectly) from the king's armour-bearer who claimed to have been present when Edmund was killed by the Viking war-band.²⁷ Although references of this sort are not un-common in hagiographic works²⁸ it is probably hypercritical to dismiss the testimony of O.s. in this respect.

The possibility that the author of O.s. had before him an hagiographic work on St. Magnús in Norn, the Orcadian vernacular, was suggested by the eminent philologist D. A. Seip. He asked whether "the Vita Sancti Magni [was] not only composed but also translated into Norn in the Orkneys?"²⁹ Seip isolated unfamiliar spellings of Icelandic and argued that they derived from a vernacular translation of an early *Life* which, he furthermore suggested, was very likely produced at the court of Rögnvaldr Kali (d. 1158/59), the first Orkney earl to take an interest in Magnús' cult.

Of the eight cases of Norn spellings which Seip found in O.s., six appear in the Magnús section of the saga. Seip did not, however, draw attention to the fact that the examples derive from the miracle section of the work rather than the main narrative.³⁰ It is not at all certain whether the early *Life* included the miracle accounts of St Magnús. The more likely scenario is that they were first written in the vernacular and only at a later

from an early hagiographic work on St. Magnús composed on the initiative of the Orkney bishop.

²⁷ Corolla Sancti Eadmundi. The Garland of Saint Edmund King and Martyr. Ed. by Francis Hervey (London 1907), 8. For a discussion of this detail see Whitelock, D., "Fact and Fiction in the Legend on St. Edmund", Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology xxxi (1969), 217-233.

²⁸ See for example Colgrave, B., "Bede's Miracle Stories", Bede. His Life, Times, and Writings. Essays in Commemoration of the Twelfth Centenary of his Death. Ed. by A. H. Thompson (Oxford 1935), 224-226.

²⁹ Seip, D. A., "Some Remarks on the Language of the Magnus Legend in the Orkneyinga Saga", Nordica et Anglica. Studies in Honour of Stefán Einarsson (The Hague 1968), 93-96.

³⁰ O.s., 131, 18 ; 132, 19 ; 135, 21 ; 136, 4 ; 137, 5 ; 138, 7. The second numeral refers to the line-numbers in Nordal's edition.

stage attached to the Magnús sagas. In short, it is vital to distinguish between the *vita* of the saint on one hand and the posthumous miracles attributed to him on the other hand. Seip's hypothesis that a Life of St. Magnús in the Norn vernacular influenced O.s. must be qualified by this observation.

Seip is not the only scholar to have concluded that an Orcadian work underlies the Magnús material in O.s. Thus Macrae-Gibson claimed "that the whole lively episode leading up to his [i.e. Magnús'] death can fairly be seen as a literary artefact of Scottish Norse, incorporated in Orkneyinga Saga."³¹ Macrae-Gibson was concerned with proving the indigenous origin of O.s. as a whole and his ideas relating to the Magnús section of the saga thus constituted only a part of his argument. In this section of the work he nevertheless found two expressions which he considered "not characteristic of Icelandic": "*þa eindagade Hakon iall med false ok fagrmælum* ["with false heart and fair words"] *stefnudag hinum sæla Magnusi ialli...*" "*Petta likade Magnusi ialli sem fullkomnum hæilhuga, an allra grunsemda svika ok agirndar...* ["without any suspicions, deceit or greed of gain"]."³² Macrae-Gibson also found the contrast between the overbearing behaviour of Hákon and the passive stance of Magnús not "a characteristic Icelandic saga feature."³³ The citation of two "un-Icelandic" expressions hardly supports the conclusion that a Norn Life of St Magnús was used in the composition of O.s. In fact these expressions appear to echo the Latin life of *magister* Robert.³⁴

³¹ Macrae-Gibson, O. D., "The Other Scottish Language — Orkneyinga Saga", Bryght Lanterns. Essays on the Language and Literature of Medieval and Renaissance Scotland. Ed. by J. D. McClure et al. (Aberdeen 1989), 421.

³² O.s., 112. The "peculiar" expressions mentioned by Macrae-Gibson are here in bold characters.

³³ Ibid., 423.

³⁴ E.g.: "Placuit hoc beato utpote homini serenatae conscientiae, qui vivere Christus et mori lucrum. Ad praedictam igitur insulam, in qua mansio sua sita erat, cum duabus longis navibus, nullam mali habens suspicionem, pervenit." Leg., 306. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sagnaritun Oddaverja*, 28.

The argument that an hagiographic work in the Norn vernacular influenced the Magnús section of O.s. must be supported by a thorough investigation of its language. Such a study has yet to be undertaken.

Magnús saga skemmri (M.s.s.), a work of thirty-five chapters, is thought to have been composed in the second half of the thirteenth century and its author seems to have followed the revised version of O.s.,³⁵ although he may have had access to an older textual type than the one preserved in Flateyjarbók.³⁶ Before the saga focuses on the life and death of Earl Magnús, a brief synopsis is given of the content of O.s. from the reign of Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson (ca. 1014-ca. 1065) until the time of Magnús and Hákon. After this introduction the saga closely follows O.s., often verbatim. Although the saga-form of M.s.s. makes it less than ideal for liturgical purposes, it is tempting to place its composition within the context of the earliest stage in the development of St. Magnús' cult in Iceland.³⁷ As M.s.s. does not include much material not found in O.s. (apart from two miracles and a reference to a *translatio* of St. Magnús' relics into Kirkwall Cathedral), the work is of marginal importance to this study.

Legenda de sancto Magno. There is, however, no doubt that the Leg. was used for liturgical purposes as the shorter version of it appears in the Scottish Breviarium Aberdonense which contains liturgical material for feast days of saints, many of them of Scottish pedigree.³⁸

³⁵ For the dating see Orkneyinga saga, cxxi.

³⁶ Magnús Már Lárusson, "Sct. Magnus Orcadensis", 489-490.

³⁷ Ibid., 487-488.

³⁸ A detailed study of the Magnús material in the *breviarium* has not been made to my best knowledge. See, however, De Geer, Earl, Saint, Bishop Skald, 120-123. It is evident that the inclusion of the Orcadian saint is in line with the general editorial philosophy which underlies the collection. As one scholar has pointed out there appears "to have been a conscious attempt to spread the net over the whole of Scotland, to

The longer version (of ca. 800 words), preserved in **ÁM 670 f 4to**, begins by stressing the nobility of Magnús' family and the exemplary youth of the future martyr. However, when Magnús becomes tainted by the semi-pagan culture and violence of Orcadian society he strays off the right path and begins to participate in less than pious activities: "*se illorum moribus per dies aliquot cæpit conformare, marinus prædo existere, rapinis et spoliis vivere, cædibus indulgere*." When his father dies a certain Hákon, "*filius patru sui...*", occupies Magnús' dominion by violent means. While Magnús is in exile in England – where he visits king Henry I as well as notable holy places – Hákon extends his authority to Caithness. When Magnús returns to the earldom he is betrayed and murdered by Hákon at a peace meeting on Egilsay.

The content of the short Leg. does not give much scope for independent treatment. The significance of the work lies in the fact that its main, and probably only, source was Master Robert's Vita Sancti Magni. Accordingly it represents the sole preserved medieval prose work on St. Magnús independent of the Old-Norse corpus.³⁹ At what date the Leg. was adapted from Robert's Life is on the other hand impossible to assess.

include saints from every diocese and to have a sprinkling of obscure and little-known local saints as well as national heroes... ." MacQuarrie, A., The Saints of Scotland. Essays in Scottish Church History AD 450-1093 (Edinburgh 1997), 7. For an introduction to the Breviarium Aberdonense see Macfarlane, J. L., William Elphinstone and the Kingdom of Scotland, 1431-1514. The Struggle for Order. (Edinburgh 1985), 231-246. Macfarlane points out that the editors worked mainly from Scottish liturgical books in use but rarely from Lives, chronicles or more substantial sources of that nature. Ibid., 239-240.

³⁹ Curiously, no scholar has considered the possibility that the Leg. was put together from M.s.l. However there is one detail in the work which appears to exclude this option. The Leg. tells that when King Magnús *berfætr* of Norway effectively forced Magnús Erlendsson to join him in his military expedition to the British Isles, the future saint was in Shetland with his father and brother. Leg. 304. This detail neither appears in M.s.l. nor O.s. and M.s.s. Another source, in all probability Robert's Life of St. Magnús, must have been used by the composer of the Leg.

Magnús saga lengri (M.s.l.), the most important work within the context of this study, has been dated on stylistic grounds to the fourteenth century. Parts of it are written in the so-called *florissante* style or *skrúðstíll* which became fashionable at the end of the thirteenth century and was adopted by prominent hagiographers of the following century, such as Bergr Sökkason, Arngrímr Brandsson and Árni Lárentíusson.⁴⁰ One scholar, Helgi Guðmundsson, has argued for an earlier date on account of a passage in Sturla Þórðarson's Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar (composed 1264/65) where St. Magnús, in tandem with St. Ólafr and St. Columba, appears in a dream to King Alexander II of Scotland. The physical appearance of the Orcadian saint is described in the following fashion: "*annar maðr syndiz honum hár ok grannvaxinn ok ungligr, manna fríðastr ok tiguliga búinn*."⁴¹ Helgi sees a similarity between this passage and the depiction of the saint in M.s.l.:

Magnús, son Erlends jarls, var hár maðr á vöxt, skörligr ok skjótligr ok styrkr at afli, fríðr sýnum, ljóslitaðr ok limaðr vel, tiguligr í yfirbragði ok inn kurteisasti í öllu athæfi.⁴²

Magnus, the son of earl Erlend was a tall man of growth, quick and gallant, and strong of body, fair to look on, lighthued, and well-limbed, noble in aspect, and the most courteous in all his behaviour.⁴³

Helgi argues that when Sturla Þórðarson described the appearance of St. Magnús in Hákonar saga, he was influenced by this passage in M.s.l.

⁴⁰ The term *skrúðstíll* was coined by O. Widding, "Jærtegn og Maríu saga. Eventyr", Norrøn Fortællekunst, Kapitler af den norsk islandske middelalderlitteraturs historie. Ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al. (København 1965), 127-136. See also idem., "Den florissante stil i norrøn prosa (isl. skrúðstíllinn) specielt i forhold til den lærde stil", Selskab for Nordisk Filologi. Årsberetning (København 1979), 7-10. The distinguishing features of this style are the appliance of elaborate imagery and complicated diction.

⁴¹ Flateyjarbók vol. III, 178. "The second man seemed to him tall, and slender, and youthful; the fairest of men, and nobly dressed." Hákonar Saga and a Fragment of Magnus Saga. Ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon. Rolls Series (London 1882), 242.

⁴² M.s.l., 346. Helgi Guðmundsson, Um haf innan. Vestrænir menn og íslensk menning á miðöldum (Reykjavík 1997), 284-5.

⁴³ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 249.

To conclude from this single parallel that M.s.l. was written prior to 1264/65 is a somewhat dubious exercise. True, three of the five adjectives which appear in the Hákonar saga passage also figure in M.s.l. (*hár*, *fríðr* *tiguligr*). However two of them, *hár* and *fríðr*, are hardly rare in descriptions of physical appearance in Old-Norse literature. Moreover the word, *tiguligr* appears in a different context in M.s.l. than it does in Hákonar saga. In the latter work *tiguligr* is used to describe Magnús' attire whereas the word in M.s.l. indicates the saint's physical bearing. That the three words appear in the same order is an unconvincing argument for a textual connection. Although the tripartite formula – height/weight etc ; beauty/ugliness ; description of garments or general bearing – is by no means the rule in Old-Norse in descriptions of this nature it is hardly a rare one. Thus in the very same scene in Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar, St. Columba is depicted according to an identical formula: “*hinn þriðji var miklu mestr vexti ok allra manna ófrýnilegastr hann var mjök framsnoðinn.*” In short, Helgi's attempt to re-date M.s.l. fails to convince.⁴⁴

That the Icelandic author of M.s.l. made use of Robert's Latin Life is borne out by the following references:

Meistari Roðbert, er sögu ins heilaga Magnúss jarls hefir samt ok diktat í látínu, byrjar svá Prologum sem hér má heyra.⁴⁵

Master Robert, who hath collected and composed the Saga of the holy earl Magnus in Latin, so begins his Prologue as may here be heard.⁴⁶

Meistari Roðbert dictaði þessa sögu á látínu til virðingar ok sæmdar inum heilaga Magnúsi Eyjajarli at liðnum tuttugu vetrum frá hans písl.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ In any case, although I find even that unlikely, Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar may well have influenced the author of M.s.l.

⁴⁵ M.s.l., 336.

⁴⁶ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 239.

⁴⁷ M.s.l., 372.

Master Robert wrote this story in Latin to the worship and honour of saint Magnus the isle-earl, when twenty winters were passed from his martyrdom.⁴⁸

Judging from these words, Robert wrote his Life of Magnús in 1136/1137, that is around or shortly after his sanctity was officially recognised by the bishop of Orkney and the building of St. Magnús Cathedral was commencing. One feature, hitherto ignored by commentators, is that no mention is made in O.s. and M.s.l. of the *translatio* of the saints' relics into the new cathedral in Kirkwall. The author of M.s.s. found the silence on this matter unsatisfactory, for having recounted the miracles of St. Magnús, he adds the following passage:

Þá er Rognvaldr Kali jarl, systursonr ins helga Magnúss jarls, var kominn til ríkis í Orkneyjum ok settisk um kyrrt, þá lét hann marka grundvöll til Magnúskirkju í Kirkjuvági ok fekk smíð til; ok gekk sú smíð bæði vel ok skjótt, ok er þar ágæt smíð ok vel vandat. Síðan var þangat fluttr heilagr dómr Magnúss jarls, ok verða þar margar jarteinir at hans helgum dómi. Þar er nú ok byskupsstóll, sá er fyrr var at Kristskirkju í Byrgisheraði.⁴⁹

After Earl Rognvald Kali, nephew of the Holy Earl Magnus, had come to power in Orkney and settled down, he had the ground-plan drawn up for St Magnus' Cathedral in Kirkwall and hired builders for the work. The structure progressed rapidly and well : it is a remarkable building, on which great pains were bestowed, and later the holy relics of Earl Magnus were transferred to it. Many miracles continue to take place there. Nowadays it is the episcopal seat, the same that used to be at Christ Church, Birsay.⁵⁰

This is the single reference to the *translatio* of Earl Magnús into the cathedral dedicated to his memory and it clearly represents an interpolation by the Icelandic author of M.s.s. If a Life of the saint had been written in 1136/1137 it is not surprising that it did not mention the translation of the relics into St. Magnús Cathedral; by a conservative estimate it was not

⁴⁸ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 270.

⁴⁹ M.s.s., 330.

⁵⁰ *Magnus' Saga. The Life of St Magnus Earl of Orkney 1075-1116*. Translation with an introduction by Hermann Pálsson & Paul Edwards (Oxford 1987), 41.

until the 1140s that the building of the cathedral had reached the stage where the relics could be enshrined within its choir.⁵¹

As I hope will become clear in the course of this study, the hagiographic work which underlies M.s.l. was composed about four decades later than implied by the Icelandic author. We are left, however, to explain why this dating appears in M.s.l. A scribal error has been suggested⁵² and considering the preservation of the saga in paper manuscripts from ca. 1700, this option can not be dismissed out of hand. However the working hypothesis can be put forward that *magister* Robert's Life was essentially an elaborated version of an hagiographic work written in 1136/1137. The dating of this first Life of St. Magnús may have appeared in the second Life by *magister* Robert and from there found its way into M.s.l. Hereafter this hypothetical early work will be referred to as **Vita*.

The Icelandic composer of M.s.l. drew heavily on Robert's digressive passages on the life and martyrdom of St. Magnús. On the other hand he appears to have more or less followed O.s., even taken up parts of it verbatim, in the narrative sections.⁵³ The most straightforward way of identifying the passages stemming from Robert's Life is to isolate those sections where the reader is directly addressed. It should be noted, however, that the Icelandic author also addresses the reader directly in his own prologue which he places before that of Master Robert's. The device

⁵¹ Cruden, S., "The Founding and Building of the Twelfth-Century Cathedral of St Magnus", *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*. Ed. by B. E. Crawford (Aberdeen 1988), 82.

⁵² E.g. Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnordiske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*. Vol. II (København 1922), 651-652. Finnur suggests that the scribe read the numeral xx for the original Mxx. Certainly the transcriber got the numerals wrong when he wrote that Magnús had been killed in 1091 which suggests a misreading (Mxcj) from Mcxj (1111). See Magnús Már Lárusson, "Sct Orcadensis Comes", 493-494.

⁵³ Finnbogi Guðmundsson has concluded that the author of M.s.l. had before him a version of O.s. which closely resembled the one in *Flateyjarbók*. O.s., cxxxiv. It should, however, be noted that the versions were not identical. For instance M.s.l., unlike O.s., gives the names of the three men who followed Earl Magnús to his martyrdom. M.s.l., 363.

of putting a new introduction in front of an older one is adopted from Latin rhetoric and appears in Tveggja postula saga Jóns og Jakobs, Nikolaus saga erkibyskups by the fourteenth-century hagiographer Bergr Sökkason and in Strengleikar, a twelfth-century Norwegian translation of the *lais* of Marie de France.⁵⁴

Both Finnbogi Guðmundsson and Peter Hallberg have identified Bergr Sökkason, who became a monk at Þingeyrar monastery in 1316/17 and later abbot (in 1325) at the Benedictine monastery of Munka-Þverá in northern Iceland, as a likely composer of M.s.l. Finnbogi does not present any tangible evidence in support of Berg's authorship apart from citing Laurentius saga where he is said to have "put together" ("*saman sett*") with great skill many saints' Lives in the vernacular.⁵⁵ Peter Hallberg on the other hand based his conclusion on a comparison between the appearance of selected words in M.s.l. and compositions known to have been written by Bergr.⁵⁶ Hallberg's methodology, which he applied to other fourteenth-century works beside M.s.l., has been questioned on the ground that it fails to take into the equation that Icelandic works of hagiography of this period share notable common characteristics.⁵⁷ Thus, although it is hazardous to identify the author of M.s.l. by name, we have a reasonably clear knowledge of the literary environment within which he worked.

As to the incentive to compose M.s.l., the most recognisable landmark on the horizon is the inclusion of the St. Magnús feast into the Icelandic liturgical calendar in 1326 at *alþingi*, the national assembly. The earliest

⁵⁴ Sverrir Tómasson, Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum. Rannsókn bókmenntahefðar. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi rit 33 (Reykjavík 1988), 234.

⁵⁵ O.s., cxxxviii.

⁵⁶ Hallberg, P, "Om Magnúss saga helga", Einarsbók. Afmæliskeðja til Einars Ól. Sveinssonar 12. desember 1969. Ed. by Bjarni Guðnuason et al. (Reykjavík 1969), 59-70.

⁵⁷ Sverrir Tómasson, "Norðlenski Benediktínaskólinn", The Sixth International Saga Conference. Workshop Papers II (1985), 1012-1013.

reference to this event is found in Annale Regii, or Konungsannáll, compiled in the first half of the fourteenth century: “*logtekit at alþingi de corpore Christi. ok Magnus messa iarlls.*”⁵⁸ The official recognition of the feast is also mentioned in two other fourteenth-century annals, Skálholtsannáll⁵⁹ and Flateyjarannáll.⁶⁰ Interestingly, the one annal from the period which does not refer to this event is Lögmannsannáll, although under the same year it notes the adoption of the *Corpus Christi* feast into the liturgical calendar.⁶¹ Lögmannsannáll originates from northern Iceland and was almost certainly compiled by Einar Hafliðason (1307-1393), a priest close to Bishop Lárentíus of Hólar (1324-1331). Einar also composed a biography of Lárentíus where the following passage telling of the introduction of the Eucharist feast appears:

aa odru are byskups doms Laur(encij) baud hann med rade allra lærðra manna j Hóla byskups dæme. ad festum corporis Christi skyldi syngia hatidliga. sem summum festum. þuiat at það var nylega flutt vt af herra Joni byskupe. var su hatid log tekinn a Alþingi. vm sumarit.⁶²

In the second year of Laurentius' time as bishop he stipulated, with the advice of all the learned men in the bishopric of Hólar, that Corpus Christi should be celebrated summum festum because the feast had been recently brought to the country by sir Bishop Jón. In the summer the feast was taken into law at *alþingi*.⁶³

Bishop Jón Halldórsson of Skálholt (1322-1339), a Norwegian Dominican educated in Paris and Bologna, is here identified as the

⁵⁸ “Adopted into law *Corpus Christi* and the feast of Earl Magnús.” My translation. Íslandske annaler indtil 1578. Ed. by Gustav Storm (Christiania 1888, reprinted Oslo 1977), 153. On the textual complications relating to the annals of medieval Iceland see Jakob Benediktsson, “Annals: Iceland (and Norway)”, Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia. Ed. by Philip Pulsiano et al. (New York & London 1993), 15-16; Árna saga byskups. Þorleifur Hauksson bjó til prentunar (Reykjavík 1972), lxii-lxxx.

⁵⁹ Íslandske annaler, 205.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 396.

⁶¹ Ibid., 268.

⁶² Laurentius saga biskups. Árni Björnsson bjó til prentunar (Reykjavík 1969), 103.

⁶³ My translation.

instigator of the *Corpus Christi* feast in Iceland.⁶⁴ From the testimony of fourteenth-century annals and Laurentíus saga it is known that *Corpus Christi* was declared an official feast on his initiative. Could Bishop Jón have been behind the recognition of the feast of St. Magnús on the same occasion?

Einar Hafliðason does not state that this was the case in his Laurentíus saga. Judging by Einar's silence regarding St. Magnús in Lögmannsannáll it appears he did not consider the adoption of this feast worthy of much attention. As noted this is in contrast to the other annals which mention the event in conjunction with the Eucharist feast. Einar's reticence regarding St. Magnús in two of his compositions could of course reflect the different nature of the two liturgical innovations; whereas the Eucharist feast was a novel addition of some considerable theological interest and observed throughout Christendom, the Orkney martyr was just another saint deemed worthy of official veneration.

Still, it is scarcely a coincidence that Lögmannsannáll is also the single annal from the period which fails to mention the translation of a Magnús relic to Skálholt *anno* 1298. Under that year Flateyjarannáll says: "*kom af helgum dómi Magnús jarls til Skálholts...*"⁶⁵ Similar statements appear in Skálholtsannáll⁶⁶ and Konungsannáll.⁶⁷ The three annals also mention another translation to Skálholt, that of St. Þorlák's relics in 1292,

⁶⁴ On Jón Halldórsson's contribution to the politics and literature of fourteenth-century Iceland see Gering, H., Islendzk Æventyri. Islandische Legenden Novellen und Märchen band 2, (Halle an der Saale 1882-1884), v-xxii. Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson, Bishop Jón Halldórsson of Skálholt. A Profile of a Preacher in Fourteenth-Century Iceland (Unpublished M. Phil. thesis University of St. Andrews 1994). Jakobsen, A., Studier i Clarus saga: Til spørsmålet om sagaens norske proveniens (Bergen 1963). As with the *Corpus Christi* there is no evidence that the feast of the Orcadian martyr was officially adopted by the archbishopric of Nidaros. Indeed in 1464 the bishop of Skálholt complained that his diocese had been celebrating feasts of saints which did not figure in the liturgical calendar of the archbishopric. Magnús Már Lárusson, "Sct. Magnus Orcadensis", 481. De Geer, Earl, Saint, Bishop, Skald, 128.

⁶⁵ Islandske annaler, 386. "Relic of St. Magnús came to Skálholt". My translation.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 198.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 145.

and again Lögmannsannáll is silent.⁶⁸ Einar Hafliðason's enthusiasm for the veneration of saints in the diocese of Skálholt appears to have been limited.

In light of the above it appears that the bishopric of Skálholt had a special interest in the cult of St. Magnús in the first half of the fourteenth century, an interest not shared to the same degree in the diocese of Hólar. Moreover, it is tempting to see Bishop Jón Halldórsson as the driving force behind the official sanction of the cult of St. Magnús in 1326. If Einar's biographical subject, Bishop Lárentíus of Hólar, had been intimately involved in this decision, one would expect him to have made a note of that fact in his account.

This accords well with Margaret Cormack's analysis of the spread of church dedications and images relating to St. Magnús which shows that his cult in Iceland first took roots in the diocese of Skálholt in the late thirteenth century.⁶⁹ Four of the five churches dedicated to the Orkney saint are located in this diocese and, moreover, a decade after a relic of St. Magnús was translated into Skálholt Cathedral, Bishop Árni Helgason (1304-1320) seems to have dedicated a hospital to the saint at Gaulverjabær.⁷⁰ At first sight Cormack's conclusion appears to contradict Magnús Már Lárusson's argument that the Magnús cult was particularly prominent in the northern and western quarters of the country.⁷¹ However, it must be taken into account that whereas Magnús Már included cultic evidence from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in his study, Cormack concentrated on the early stages of the cult in Iceland, that is the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth century.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 143 ; 197 ; 384.

⁶⁹ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, 119-121.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 121. It is known that the hospital was dedicated to Magnús although this is not mentioned in the annals. *Íslandske annaler*, 149 ; 201 ; 341 ; 391.

⁷¹ Magnús Már Lárusson, "Sct. Magnus Orcadensis", 498-503.

In view of the above it is not far fetched to suggest that the bishops of Skálholt made an effort to promote the cult of St. Magnús in the first decades of the fourteenth century which culminated in its formal adoption at *alþingi* in 1326, probably at the instigation of Bishop Jón Halldórsson. Moreover I would argue that in the wake of the translation of 1298 an effort was made to formalise an already existing practise in relation to the cult. In two of the earliest manuscripts of the law-code Grágás (Konungsbók and Staðarhólsbók), dating from ca. 1250-1270, we read that Magnús' feast day was locally observed;⁷² which diocese this refers to is on the other hand impossible to judge. The bishop of Skálholt had acquired a relic of St. Magnús of some importance and, as suggested, then took the significant step of having the feast of the martyr celebrated throughout the whole country. Against this cultic background the composition of M.s.l. was undertaken.

In addition shifts in literary style and religious sentiments should also be considered. The distinguishing features of early Icelandic hagiography, that is from the twelfth and the early thirteenth century, were simplicity of style and an emphasis on unadorned narrative.⁷³ In the fourteenth century, as the Christian religion and the cult of the saints had taken deeper roots, works of hagiography became more elaborate in style and reflective in content. The saga-like simplicity of the earlier Lives was superseded by a more sermon-like, exegetical, style of writing that drew attention to the religious lessons to be drawn from the conduct of the saints. Accordingly, older works were updated in this period. For instance, Bergr Sökkason

⁷² Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, 20 ; Magnús Már, "Sct. Magnus Orcadensis", 480. Grágás (Konungsbók). Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid, udgivet efter det Kongelige Bibliotheks haandskrift. Ed. by V. Finsen (Copenhagen 1852, reprinted Odense 1974), 34. Grágás (Staðarhólsbók). Efter det Arnamagnæanske haandskrift Nr. 334 fol. Ed. by V. Finsen (Copenhagen 1879, reprinted Odense 1974), 40. On the debate regarding this reference to St. Magnús' feast in relation to the dating of Konungsbók, see Grágrás. Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins. Ed. by Gunnar Karlsson et al. (1992), xii-xvi.

⁷³ Íslensk Stílfraði. Þorleifur Hauksson (ritstjóri), Þórir Óskarsson (Reykjavík 1994), 183-196.

composed a new Life of St. Nicholas although at least one Old-Norse version of his *vita* existed at the time.⁷⁴ More impressively, Lives of native saints, such as bishops Guðmundr Arason (1161-1203) and Jón Ögmundarson of Hólar (1106-1123), were updated in the first half of the fourteenth century.

The composition of M.s.l. fits well into the trend in this period of re-writing or re-editing older works of established saints. In M.s.s. and O.s. the emphasis is on the narrative, the story itself, and less on the deeper religious meaning of his life and martyrdom. A note, for instance, can be made of the different manner in which Magnús' celibacy in marriage is portrayed in the two works.⁷⁵ M.s.s., following O.s., simply states that...

Í öllum hlutum helt hann ríkt guðs boðorð ok var meinlætasamr við sjálfan sik. Svá er sagt, at hann byggði svá með konu tíu vetr, at þau heldu hreinlíf, en er hann fann freistni á sér, þá fór hann í kalt vatn ok bað sér fulltings af guði.⁷⁶

[in] all things he strictly held God's commandments, and was unmerciful against his own self. So it is said that he abode with his wife for ten years, so that they kept their purity of life; but when he felt temptation coming over him he went into cold water and begged for support of God.⁷⁷

In M.s.l. Magnús' celibacy gives rise to a lengthy digression, liberally sprinkled with biblical references, where the saint is compared to a knight of God who battles daily against carnal temptations. God is presented as

⁷⁴ Sverrir Tómasson, "Íslenskar Nikulás sögur", *Helgastaðabók* (Reykjavík 1982), 25-41.

⁷⁵ Peter Foote has observed that the emphasis on the earl's chastity in marriage may reflect an influence from Osbert of Clare's (composed in the 1130s) and Ailred of Rievaulx's (finished in 1163) Lives of King Edward the Confessor. Foote, P., "Master Robert's Prologue in Magnúss saga lengri", *Festskrift til Finn Hødnebo*. Ed. by B. Eithun (Oslo 1989), 72. See further John, E., "Edward the Confessor and the Celibate Life", *Analecta Bollandiana* 97 (1979), 170-178. On virgin kings in general see Elliot, D., *Spiritual Marriage. Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton 1993), 113-131. Elliot sees Magnús' celibacy as something of an anomaly in medieval hagiography for it was "contingent on his role as a public penitent." Ibid., 268. As far as I can see no connection is made in the Magnús corpus between his celibacy and his rowdy youth.

⁷⁶ M.s.s., 317.

⁷⁷ M.s.s. (Rolls Series), 288.

his feudal lord who rewards his vassal for his heroic self-control by bestowing upon him the status of sainthood:⁷⁸

En með því at svá mælir Páll postuli, at engi kórónast nema sá, er lögliga stríðir ok karlmannliga til þjónar, þá valdi þessi hallarhöfðingi ok stríðandi riddari höll þína, at þola dagligt stríð ok nálægan bardaga brennanda holds.⁷⁹

But for that the apostle Paul so says that no one is crowned save he lawfully strives and manfully works for it, so this courtly chief and warlike knight chose thy courts, to suffer daily strife, and the constant battle of the burning flesh.⁸⁰

Like other Icelandic hagiographers of the fourteenth century the author of M.s.l. was in a sense neither an original composer nor a straightforward translator. His task was rather to mould existing sources into a hagiographic work in the vernacular. Bergr Sökkason, for instance, saw himself as a compiler or editor of older *vitae*. In his *Michaels saga* and *Nikolaus saga erkibyskups* he uses phrases such as “*skrifaðr ok saman settr*”, (“written and put together”), and “*saman lesit*” (“twined together”).⁸¹ Árni Lárentíusson in his preface to *Dunstanus saga* (St. Dunstan) also applies similar phrases: “*Þui hefui ek saman lesid j fylgiandi frásögn þau æuenntyr sem miog hafua stadit sundr-dreipt j imissum bokvm af ... Dunnstano*.”⁸² Although Bergr and Árni drew their material from various sources, they clearly made an effort to shape their composition into reasonably well integrated pieces of hagiography.

In contrast, the compiler of M.s.l. made little attempt to treat the Old-Norse and the Latin corpus relating to St. Magnús in a similar fashion. As

⁷⁸ On marital imagery in Icelandic hagiography see Hallberg, P., “Imagery in Religious Old Norse Prose Literature. An Outline”, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 102 (1987), 170-171.

⁷⁹ M.s.l., 354.

⁸⁰ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 255.

⁸¹ Fell, C. E., “Bergr Sökkason’s *Michaels Saga* and its Sources”, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 16 (1962-65), 357-358.

⁸² “That is why I have put together in following narrative the happenings that have been written in various books ... on St. Dunstan.” My translation. *Dunstanus Saga*. Ed. by C. E. Fell. *Editiones Arnarnæmæ* series b, vol. 5 (Copenhagen 1963), 1.

noted the distinctive quality of the saga is the weight given to Master Robert's exegesis and excursions as the story of Magnús' life and martyrdom unfolds. To the modern reader the integration of these two strands – Robert's exegesis on one hand and the narrative of O.s. on the other hand – leaves much to be desired.⁸³ Indeed it is hard to escape the impression that M.s.l. was written in haste and/or by an inexperienced scribe. The author seems to have had limited interest in improving or elaborating on the material he was working with, partly, perhaps, because *magister* Robert's exegetical and learned style was already congenial to the taste of the Icelandic scribe.⁸⁴ However we can be certain that both cultic and stylistic reasons lay behind the decision to write a new vernacular Life of the Orcadian martyr.⁸⁵

⁸³ With this in mind it is difficult to imagine the work being composed by luminaries of the northern "Benedictine school" of hagiographic writing such as Bergr Sökkason and Arngrímur Brandsson.

⁸⁴ The rhetorical learned style of *magister* Robert can perhaps be classified as *Scholastico stilo* which some English twelfth-century men of letters such as Gerald of Wales applied to their hagiographic output. See Bartlett, R., "Rewriting Saints' Lives: The Case of Gerald of Wales", *Speculum* 58 (1983), 607.

⁸⁵ It is on the other hand impossible to establish how a work in the form of M.s.l. was used to bolster the cult itself. A similar observation has been made by Julia Smith regarding *vitae* in general, "Review Article: Early Medieval Hagiography in the Late Twentieth Century", *Early Medieval Europe* 1 (1992), 71. A study of this aspect in the context of Icelandic hagiography has yet to be made.

1.2. The Nature of Master Robert's Life of St. Magnús

I have emphasised that M.s.l. is constructed from two main building blocks: the Icelandic O.s. and Robert's Latin Life of St. Magnús. It should be noted, however, that M.s.l. includes passages which neither appear in O.s. nor owe affinity to Master Robert's erudite reflections on St. Magnús' life and martyrdom. For instance, particular to M.s.l. is a description of how Magnús came into possession of his share of the earldom. O.s. and M.s.s. tell that Hákon received the title of earl from the three co-rulers of Norway (Sigurðr, Eysteinn and Ólafr) following the death of King Magnús *berfættr* in 1103. Hákon had only enjoyed sole rulership for a brief period when Magnús appeared on the scene and demanded his rightful inheritance. The matter was referred to Eysteinn and when Magnús came to see him the Norwegian king "gave him a very cordial welcome, and gave up to him his inheritance – the half of the Orkneys, and the title of Earl."⁸⁶ This is also recorded in M.s.l. but in addition the saga describes how Magnús received the title of earl from the king of the Scots prior to his visit to King Eysteinn.

Pá er inn heilagi Magnús var á Skotlandi, frétti hann andlát Erlends jarls, föður síns, ok þau önnur tíðendi sem fyrr var ritat. Ok sem hann hafði verit slíka stund í hirð Skotakonungs sem honum líkaði, sæmðr af konunginum gjöfum ok göfgu föruneysi, fór hann á Katanes ok var þar af öllum virðuliga tekinn, hirt ok haldinn ok þegar kosinn ok tignaðr jarls nafni, vinsæll ok virðuligr öllum guðs vinum.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The Orkneyinga saga, 204. "[Eysteinn] tok vit honum forkunnar vel, ok gaf honum upp fodurlæifd sína, halfar Orkneyiar, ok iallsnafnn." O.s. 109 ; M.s.s., 316.

⁸⁷ M.s.l., 349. There is an echo of this passage in one of the three Magnús *lectiones* in the *Breviarium Nidrosiense* printed in 1519: "Unde contigit eum de manu violenti regis et predatoris evadere et Cathaniam adire, vbi honorifice susceptus est." *Breviaria ad usum ritumqve sacrosanctem Nidrosiensis ecclesie* (Paris 1519). Fascimile edition by H. Buvarp & B. M. Børsum (Oslo 1964), kk. vj.

When the holy Magnus was in Scotland he learnt of the death of earl Erlend his father, and those other tidings which before were written. And when he had been such time at the court of the Scot-king as liked him, honoured of the king with gifts and noble company he fared to Caithness, and was there worthily received of all, kept and cared for, and at once chosen and honoured with the title "earl", beloved and worshipful to all the friends of God.⁸⁸

Also noteworthy is the account in M.s.l. of Hákon's take-over of the earldom:

Fór hann þá vestr um haf ok tók undir sik allt ríki í Orkneyjum með svá mikilli ágirni ok vitjanligri, at hann drap saklausan sýslumann Nóregskonungs, er þann helming eyjanna helt ok geymdi, er inn heilagi Magnúss átti, ok lagði þann veg undir sik allar Orkneyjar með ofríki, því at hálfar eyjarnar horfðu til ins heilaga Magnúss af föðurligri erfð.⁸⁹

Then he fared west over the sea, and took under him all the realm in the Orkneys with so much greed and aggression that he slew the guiltless steward of the king of Norway, who held and looked after that half of the isles which Saint Magnus owned, and in that way laid under him all the Orkneys with violence; for half the isles fell to Saint Magnus by inheritance from his father.⁹⁰

No reference is made in O.s. to Hákon killing a steward of the Norwegian king and it is difficult to envisage the compiler/author of M.s.l. inventing this detail. The Leg. mentions Hákon's brutal method of subduing the earldom and accordingly it seems fairly certain that the episode derives from Master Robert's Life. It was noted earlier (see footnote 39) that the Leg. tells that Earl Magnús was in Shetland when King Magnús *berfættr* forced him to participate in his expedition to the British Isles. As no other source mentions this detail one must assume that it figured in the Latin *vita*.

Also noteworthy is that M.s.l. mentions a visit which Magnús made to King Henry I of England. Having become aware of his rival's desire to eliminate him from the political scene, Magnús decides "to yield for a

⁸⁸ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 251.

⁸⁹ M.s.l., 350.

⁹⁰ Ms.l. (Rolls Series), 252.

while to the envy and wrath of Hacon.” He then sets sails for England and arrives at the court of King Henry I where he is well received and for a whole year is treated “as it beseemed a king to treat a noble duke.” He then visits holy shrines before returning home.⁹¹ No mention is made of this journey in O.s. The saga, like M.s.l., only tells that when Magnús had deserted King Magnús’ retinue during the harrying of Anglesey in Wales, he stayed at the court of King Malcolm of Scotland and then “sometimes in Wales with a certain bishop; sometimes he was in England, or in various other places with his friends. [But] he did not visit the Orkneys during the life of King Magnus.”⁹² Magnús’ visit to England is noted in the Leg.⁹³ and in the *Responses* in the Aberdeen *breviarium*.⁹⁴

Two works have certainly been lost from the equation: the original version of O.s. and Robert’s Life. We know that the author of M.s.l. followed a text of O.s. which closely corresponds to the one found in *Flateyjarbók*, that is he does not appear to have had before him the original version of O.s.⁹⁵ The obvious solution is that the material in question derives from Master Robert’s work on Magnús. This in turn implies that Robert incorporated Orcadian tradition into his work which the O.s. author chose to ignore or, alternatively, did not have access to. Accordingly it appears that Robert’s Life of St. Magnús was more than an assemblage of pious exegetical utterances; the work was firmly placed within the context of Orcadian history in the first decades of the twelfth century. Although the point can not be proven, it is likely that his source for these events was the lost early **Vita* of St. Magnús.

⁹¹ Ibid., 257-258. M.s.l., 356-357.

⁹² The Orkneyinga saga, 201. O.s., 104.

⁹³ Leg., 305.

⁹⁴ The Orkneyingers’ saga, 312.

⁹⁵ Magnús Már Lárusson, “Sct. Magnus Orcadensis”, 486.

1.3. The Narrative Pattern of Princely Martyrdom

Erich Hoffmann has drawn attention to the influence which English hagiography exerted on the literature of the Scandinavian princely martyrs.⁹⁶ To a degree Hoffmann followed here in the footsteps of N. Lukmann who had noted parallels between some English Lives of the eleventh century and the main hagiographic work on St. Knud of Odense, Aelnoth's Gesta Swenomagni written ca. 1120.⁹⁷ However, whereas Lukmann argued that Aelnoth had been influenced by various English historical and hagiographic works, Hoffmann confined his analysis to the hagiography of the princely martyrs.

Hoffmann found similar *topoi* in the Scandinavian and English hagiography of the martyred rulers. Both contain motifs and themes such as the saint as a righteous ruler, the Judas-like figure who betrays him and the column of light which appears over his grave as proof of his sanctity. That English hagiography influenced the corpus on the two Danish princely martyrs of the twelfth century, St. Knud of Odense and St. Knud Lavard, is hardly a matter of surprise in light of the fact that their four hagiographers were perhaps all of English origin.⁹⁸ Questionable, however,

⁹⁶ Hoffmann, E., Die heiligen Könige bei den Angelsachsen und den scandinavischen Völkern. Königsheiliger und Königshaus. Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins Band 69 (Neumünster 1975).

⁹⁷ Lukman, N., "Ælnod. Et bindeled mellem engelsk og dansk historieskrivning i det 12. aarhundrede", Historisk tidsskrift (dansk) 11 (1947-1949), 493-505. In a Finnish doctoral thesis from early in this century it is argued that the Life of St. Erik of Sweden was influenced by English hagiography on royal martyrs. Jaakkola, J., Pyhän Eerujub pyhismystraditsionin, kultin ja legendan synty. Historiallisia tutkimuksia 4 (Helsinki 1921). For linguistic reasons I have been unable to consult this study.

⁹⁸ The two hagiographers of King Knud IV: the anonymous author of King Knud's first *passio* (ca. 1095) (Vitae Sanctorum Danorum. Ed. M. CL. Gertz (København 1908-1912), 62-71); Aelnoth of Canterbury (ca. 1120) (*ibid.*, 77-136); the two hagiographers on Knud Lavard: Robert of Ely (ca. 1135), (*ibid.*, 234-242), and the anonymous author of his second Life (ca. 1170), *ibid.*, 189-204.

is Hoffmann's argument that the hagiography on St. Ólafr of Norway served as a proto-type or model for the works on the Danish martyrs.⁹⁹ The fact that the oldest known hagiographic prose work on St. Ólafr, Passio et miracula beati Olai, usually attributed to Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson of Nidaros, was composed nearly half a century later than Aelnoth's work makes this hypothesis highly suspect.¹⁰⁰ Hoffmann appears to equate the early historical date of St. Ólaf's martyrdom (1030) with the sources that describe the same event. Unless we envisage the unlikely scenario of English ecclesiastics being influenced by motifs derived from Icelandic skaldic poetry or, alternatively, a now lost hagiographic work on the Norwegian saint, Hoffmann's diffusionary model can not be upheld.

Although Hoffmann, for reasons that he does not explain, did not even mention the Magnús corpus in his study, it is evident that Master Robert's Vita Sancti Magni (and indeed the whole Magnús corpus) is indebted to the English hagiographic tradition concerning princely martyrs. More specifically, the Life can be placed within a sub-genre of that tradition: the pious and just ruler who is betrayed and murdered for political purposes by a member of his own family. From the Nordic sphere the clearest parallel on a *narrative level* is the martyrdom of St. Knud Lavard, as portrayed in the so-called In passione sancti Kanuti composed on the occasion of the duke's canonisation in 1170.

Knud, the son of King Erik *ejegod* (1095-1103), is brought up with his cousin, Magnus, the son of King Niels (1104-1134). When Knud comes of age Niels entrusts him with the frontier duchy of Schleswig. Like Magnús of Orkney, Knud turns out to be an exemplary ruler who defends his lands from pirates and treats everyone with fairness irrespective of

⁹⁹ Hoffmann, *Die heiligen Könige*, 101-127. Idem., "Das Bild Knud Lavards in den erzählenden Quellen des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts", Hagiography and Medieval Literature. A Symposium. Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium for the Study of Vernacular Literature in the Middle Ages, held at Odense University on 17-18 November 1980. Ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al. (Odense 1981), 118-119.

¹⁰⁰ On this see Gad, T., Legenden i dansk middelalder (København 1961), 152-153.

social status.¹⁰¹ His vigorous support of the Christian religion and the Church is also noted.¹⁰² Then, as the popularity of Magnús arouses the envy of Earl Hákon, Knud's success evokes jealousy and fear in the mind of Magnus Nielsson.¹⁰³

Magnus, along with three associates, now plots the downfall of Knud Lavard. However, one initial conspirator by the name of Hakon pulls out of this pact when it dawns on him that the plan is to betray and kill Knud.¹⁰⁴ This episode, incidentally, bears a curious resemblance to a scene in the Magnús corpus where a certain Hávarðr deserts on moral grounds the retinue of Hákon Pálsson prior to the meeting on Egilsay.¹⁰⁵ The tension between Knud and Magnus increases until the latter suggest that they should meet in the woods, without escort, to work out their differences. Just as Knud Lavard takes no heed of a warning directed at him from a boy who sings a ballad in his presence about a murder and betrayal within a family, so Magnús receives and ignores a sign (a wave that arises from the calm waters and crashes on his boat) that his betrayal is imminent.¹⁰⁶ Finally, just as Hákon his counterpart in the Magnús corpus, Magnus ignores the terms and has Knud executed.

There are also noteworthy similarities between the Life of St. Magnús and the Swedish Life of King Erik Jedvardson, *Vita S. Eriki regis et martyris*, composed in the second half of the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰¹ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 191-192.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 193-194.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 195-196.

¹⁰⁵ O.s., 114. M.s.l., 364. It is, however, uncertain whether this incident appeared in Robert's Life. The following passage from Ailred of Rievaulx's *De Spirituali Amicitia*, completed around 1167, may throw light on how the desertion of Hakon and Hávarðr could have been elaborated on in sermons: "And far better did the servants of King Saul preserve their loyalty to their master by withdrawing their hands from blood in violation of his command, than Doeg, the Edomite, who as minister of the royal cruelty killed with sacrilegious hands the priests of the Lord." Ailred of Rielvaux, *Spiritual Friendship*. Transl. by Mary Eugenia Laker, Introd. by Douglass Roby. *Cistercian Fathers Series* nr. 5 (Kalamazoo 1977), II, xl, 79. It is a curious co-incidence that Master Robert likens the killers of Earl Magnús to Doeg (see below ch. 1.5.).

¹⁰⁶ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum* 197.

¹⁰⁷ *Scriptores rerum Suecicarum medii aevi*, vol. I. Ed. by E. G. Geijer & J. H. Schröder (Uppsala 1828), 272-276. For a general introduction to the hagiography on St.

brevity of the work is conspicuous and it has led to speculations that it is based on an earlier, more expansive, hagiographic work on St. Erik.¹⁰⁸ If this, in my estimation highly plausible, hypothesis is correct the work can be compared with the Magnús Leg., that is *lectiones* which in turn are based on a *vita*.

When the Swedish throne becomes vacant Erik, whose royal pedigree is duly noted, is chosen to kingship by the "lords of that country and by all the people" because of his gentleness and pious life. Erik's generosity towards the Church and his zealous efforts to uphold the worship of Christianity are emphasised. Like Earl Magnús, Erik marries a woman of noble birth and abstains from sexual intercourse by bathing in cold water. Mirroring Magnús' campaign against piracy, the Swedish king undertakes a crusade against the pagan Finns. However

[c]urrente igitur anno decimo regni Illustris Regis nostri, ut virum justum probaret tribulatio, et granum oppressum fructificaret uberius, antiquus hostis quendam Magnus nomine, Danorum Regis filium, eidem adversarium suscitavit, qui ex hereditate materna jus regnandi contra consuetudinem terræ, quæ alienigenas regnare prohibet, sibi perperam vendicabat. Unde et quendam Principem regni aliosque iniquitatis Satellites sibi associans, qui muneribus corrupti et promissionibus allecti in necem Regis Illustrissimi conspirarunt.¹⁰⁹

...in the course of the tenth year of the reign of our illustrious king, in order that tribulation might test the just man and the crushed seed might bear fruit more richly, the ancient foe incited as his adversary a certain man, named Magnus, the son of the king of the Danes, who falsely claimed the right to rule by inheritance through his mother, contrary to the custom of the land which prohibits foreigners from ruling. Wherefore he allied himself with a certain prince of the realm and other wicked accomplices who, corrupted by gifts and enticed by promises, unanimously conspired for the murder of the illustrious king.¹¹⁰

Erik and a translation of the *Vita* see Cross, J. E., "St. Eric of Sweden", *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 15 (1961), 295-325. There is also a shorter version of the Life, consisting of three *lectiones*, but it contains no additional material.

¹⁰⁸ E.g., Carlsson, E., *Translatio archiepiscoporum: Eirikslegendens historicitet i belysning av ärkebiskopssätets förflytning från Upsala til Östra Aros. Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift* (Uppsala 1944), esp. 60-80. Idem., "Eirikslegendens historicitet", *Historisk tidskrift* (svensk) 14 (1952), 217-250.

¹⁰⁹ *Scriptores rerum Suecicarum* I, 275-276.

¹¹⁰ Cross, "St. Eric of Sweden", 324-325.

As a result of this unholy alliance St. Erik is killed, not as Magnús Erlendsson and Knud Lavard, in a resigned frame of mind, but fighting valiantly alongside his men.

A similar hagiographic pattern appears in the Lives of those Anglo-Saxon royal martyrs who were killed in inter-dynastic power-struggles such as Edward the Martyr (d. 979)¹¹¹ and Ethelbert of East Anglia (d. 794).¹¹² As Christine Fell has pointed out the distinctive feature of this hagiographic sub-genre is the betrayal of the innocent prince and the sacrificial nature of his murder:

The emphasis is on the guilelessness of the victim, killed while engaged in some harmless or benevolent activity. Kenelm was out hunting, Æthelbert on a good-will visit to Offa. Edward was *both* out hunting *and* on a good-will visit to his brother Æthelred. The murder itself is presented in sacrificial terms stressing the "lamb" qualities of the victim, the Judas qualities of the killer.¹¹³

In one sense *magister* Robert, Aelnoth of Canterbury and the unknown author of the second *passio* of Knud Lavard were among the last English writers, if not the last, to work within a tradition which stretched back to the second half of the tenth century. Although evidence for the cults of the betrayed Anglo-Saxon princes (such as Kenelm and Ethelbert) can be found in the ninth century, accounts of their life and martyrdom were first recorded in the tenth century,¹¹⁴ a development which reflects the more widespread interest in saints' cults from this period onwards.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Edward, King and Martyr. Ed. by Christine E. Fell. Leeds Texts and Monographs (Leeds 1971).

¹¹² Edited by James, M. R., "Two Lives of St. Ethelbert, King and Martyr", English Historical Review 32 (1917), 214-244.

¹¹³ Fell, C. E., "Edward King and Martyr and the Anglo-Saxon Hagiographical Tradition", Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference. Ed. by David Hill. British Archaeological Report (British Series) 59 (1978), 10-11.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 1-14. See also Campbell, J., "Some Twelfth Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past", Essays in Anglo-Saxon History (London & Ronceverte 1986), 216-18 [Originally published in Peritia 3 (1984), 131-150].

¹¹⁵ Rollason, D., Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England (Oxford 1989), 165-195.

Still, it would be misguided to assume that this hagiographic pattern was exclusively confined to England and the Scandinavian sphere for it can also be found in works on princely martyrs from Eastern Europe. A note can be made of the tenth- and eleventh-century Lives of the martyred duke of Bohemia, St. Wenceslas (d. 927), and the princes of Kievan Rus', the brothers Boris and Gleb (d. 1015).¹¹⁶ Indeed one scholar has pointed out that of the Western European passions of princes it is that of St. Magnús which most closely resembles the Russian and the Bohemian works.¹¹⁷

N. W. Ingham has divided the early Lives of the three Eastern European saints mentioned into thematic sections.¹¹⁸ Here below I have bracketed the similarities in the Magnús corpus alongside them:

i) A brother of the saint conspires with evil men, holding stealthy meetings with them, and plans to kill the saint. ["And when the army was mustered, the Earl makes it known to them that he means so to settle up with Earl Magnus at their meeting, that they would not both of them [be rulers] over Orkneys [thereafter]. Many of his men showed themselves well-pleased at his plan, adding to it many wicked suggestions. Among the worst of those to acclaim his plan were Sigurd and Sighvat Socks." The Orkneyinga saga, 208].

ii) The murderer uses deceit and cunning, pretending to love his brother but enticing him to a place where he can be betrayed. ["And after some time had passed, Earl Hakon with false heart and fair words, called a meeting on a day appointed between himself and the blessed Earl Magnus, to settle it that nothing should disturb or nullify their fellowship and the established peace just made between them." The Orkneyinga saga, 205-207].

¹¹⁶ For a translation of the Kievan Lives, The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'. Ed. and transl. by Paul Hollingworth (Harvard 1992) and for St. Wenceslas, Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes. Ed. and transl. by Marvin Kantor. Michigan Slavic Translations 5 (Ann Arbor 1983). The Origins of Christianity in Bohemia. Sources and Commentary. Ed. and transl. by Marvin Kantor (Evanston 1990).

¹¹⁷ Ingham, N. W., "The Martyred Princes and the the Question of Slavic Cultural Continuity", Medieval Russian Culture. Ed. by H. Birnbaum and M.S. Flier. California Slavic Studies 12 (Berkeley & Los Angeles 1984), 31-54. See also idem., "The Sovereign as Martyr, East and West", Slavic and Eastern European Journal 17 (1973), 7-8. Ingham has M.s.l. primarily in mind here.

¹¹⁸ "We can identify an impressive sequence of story elements that are common to most or all of... [the following texts]" : The First and Second Slavonic Lives, Crescente fide christiana and Christian's Legend of Wenceslas; the chronicle, Skazanie, and Ctenie about Boris and Gleb. Ingham, "The Martyred Princes", 37-38.

iii) The saint is warned about the fratricide but rejects the warning (either from disbelief or out of principle). [On the way to the rendezvous a wave rises from the calm sea and crashes on the place where Magnús is sitting. This incident is interpreted by himself as an evil omen and a sign of Hákon's intent. His followers urge him to return; Magnús replies "Our voyage shall still go on, and may God's will be done therein." The Orkneyinga saga, 207.]

iv) The site of the murder is away from the prince's own territory, and he is virtually undefended. [Egilsay is on neutral territory and Magnús arrives with only a small contingent compared to Hákon's].

v) The killing takes place in the morning, after the saint's activities of the night before have been described. [Magnús has mass sung and next morning he is killed].

vi) He usually has time to pray (and attend Matins). [Just before he is executed Magnús prays; in M.s.l. he attends morning mass].

vii) The murder is done as though from an ambush; the victim is suddenly surrounded by several men, who close in on him by stages. [This holds true for M.s.l. which tells that Magnús was caught inside a church].

viii) The saint does not resist his attackers. [Magnús is compliant throughout].

ix) He is stabbed to death, the actual killing being done by henchmen, not by the brother himself. [Hákon orders his cook to perform the deed].

x) The body is mistreated and/or neglected. [Magnús' mother asks Hákon to be allowed to bury him properly].

xi) The slaughter and robbery of the saint's followers take place immediately.

xii) The remains of the saint are retrieved and entombed with appropriate honors. [Magnús' mother has his body buried on Birsay from where they are translated at a later date to Kirkwall].

xiii) Divine vengeance is visited upon the murders, who suffer "evilly" for their crime. ["It is also said of the men who had been most deep in treachery against Saint Magnus the Earl that most of them died wretched and miserable deaths." The Orkneyinga saga 212-213].

One Old-Rus scholar has noted that the martyrdom of St. Magnús has some intriguing parallels with that of St. Gleb. For instance, both martyrs attempt to persuade their adversaries to spare their lives and, strangely, both are executed by cooks.¹¹⁹ Moreover, a link can be found between the

¹¹⁹ Price, R. M., "Boris and Gleb: Princely Martyrs and Martyrology in Kievan Russia", *Martyrs and Martyrologies*. Ed. by Diana Wood. *Studies in Church History* 30

Orkney saint and the Eastern European princely saints. In a Russian litany dating from the late twelfth century we find the Kievan martyrs in tandem with St. Ólafr, St. Knud of Odense and St. Magnús.¹²⁰ Here, however, we must step back and take account, for unless we put forward the implausible hypothesis that Master Robert had been familiar with the Slavic languages the possibility of a direct influence between the East European *vitae* and the Magnús corpus can hardly be entertained. Rather, what we are confronted with is a hagiographic pattern – almost iconographic in nature and clearly bearing a close correspondence to the passion of Christ – adopted by hagiographers working in the more peripheral, relatively newly converted parts of Europe, in order to describe political killings of princely figures in terms of martyrdom.

(Oxford 1993), 108-109. In English hagiography we also have examples of the actual killing being carried out by an henchman of the saint's adversary, see for instance St. Edward, King and Martyr, 5.9-11. M. R., James, "Two Lives of St. Ethelbert", 240.

¹²⁰ Lind, J. H., "The Martyria of Odense and a Twelfth-Century Russian Prayer: The Question of Bohemian Influence on Russian Religious Literature", The Slavonic and East European Review 68 (1990), 1-21. Lind's article is in part a challenge to accepted notions relating to this litany. Lind demonstrates that Dvornik, in particular, is wrong in his identification of Western saints such as St. Ólafr (who he thought was King Ólafr Tryggvason) and St. Magnús (who he assumed was the German St. Magnus of Fuss). Dvornik, F., "The Kiev State and its Relations with Western Europe", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 29 (1947), 38-39. The appearance of these Western European saints in this litany has been interpreted as sign of Bohemian influence. Lind on the other hand points out that the Kievan principality had considerable ties (especially through dynastic marriages) with Scandinavia well into the twelfth century (see ch. 3.1). Strangely Lind does not refer to N. W. Ingham's highly relevant study, "The Litany of Saints in "Molitva sv. Trioce"", Studies Presented to Professor Roman Jakobson by his Students. Ed. by C. E. Gribble (Cambridge Mass. 1968), 121-136. There was a tendency in the Middle Ages to confuse St. Magnús of Orkney with his saintly namesakes. Most notably in a Swedish Legendary from the thirteenth century he takes the place of St. Magnus of Kölbígg and the famous dance associated with that town is transferred to Orkney. Et fornsvenskt legendarium. Vol. II (Stockholm 1858), 875-880. For the literary context of this work see Chesnutt, M., "The Colbeck Legend in English Tradition of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries", Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century. Proceedings of the Centenary Conference of the Folklore Society. Ed. by Venetia Newall (London 1980), 158-163.

1.4. The Periphery and the Literature on Princely Martyrs

Around the time of Magnús' death William of Malmesbury – putting words into the mouth of Pope Urban II on the eve of the First Crusade – wrote in his De gestis regum Anglorum: “for who will give the name of Christians to those barbarians living on the icy ocean as if they were beasts.”¹²¹ Although it is uncertain whether Urban II uttered these words, or others to the same effect, on this occasion they are nevertheless indicative of the image which ecclesiastics and men of letters had of the outlying regions of Christian Europe such as Eastern Europe, the Nordic lands and the Celtic fringe. Although Christian in name they were often seen as pagan or semi-pagan in reality.¹²²

Even within the Nordic sphere itself a “learned” prejudice of this nature can be detected. Sweden, for instance, is often portrayed in the Old-Norse sources as a barbarous and almost heathen country. Thus O.s. and M.s.l. tell how Hákon Pálsson visited a pagan soothsayer in order to learn about his future during a stay in that country.¹²³ The thirteenth-century Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus emphasises the religious backwardness and political disunity of the Swedes with the clear purpose of bringing into starker relief the more advanced condition of the Danes.¹²⁴

¹²¹ “nam omnem illam barbariem quae in remotis insulis glaciale frequenter oceanum, quia more belluino victitat, christianam quis dixerit?” Willelmi Malmebiriensis, De gestis regum Anglorum. Vol. I-II, ed. by W. Stubbs. Rolls Series (London 1889), vol. II, 395. My translation.

¹²² E.g., Bartlett, R., Gerald of Wales 1146-1223 (Oxford 1982), 268-270.

¹²³ O.s., 94-97 ; M.s.l., 341-343. On this episode see footnote nr. 230 See also in this context Lindow, J., “Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others: A Millennium of World Views”, Scandinavian Studies 67 (1995), 8-31.

¹²⁴ Sawyer, B., “Valdemar, Absalon and Saxo: Historiography and Politics in Medieval Denmark”, Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire 63 (1985), 696-697.

It is precisely this attitude which the Icelandic compiler/author counters in his prologue to M.s.l. The opening sentence of the saga sets the tone:

Lof, dýrð ok heiðr ok æra sé almáttigum guði, lausnara várum ok skapara, fyrir sína margföldu mildi ok miskunnsemi, er hann veitir oss, er byggjum á utanverðum jaðri heimsins, ok eptir meistaranna orðtæki, er svá setja í sínar bækr, at þeim sýnist sem vér sém komnir út ór heiminum.¹²⁵

Praise glory and splendour and honour be to Almighty God, our redeemer and maker, for his manifold mercy and grace, which he bestows on us who dwell on the uttermost edge of the world; so that after the saying of the masters who so set it in their books, it seems to them as though we were come out of this world.¹²⁶

By the grace of God – who has granted Norway, Orkney and Iceland, five illustrious saints – these remote lands have been blessed:

Þessir eru: inn heilagi Ólafr konungr ok inn háleiti Hallvarðr, frændi hans, er prýða Nóreg með sínum helgum dómum; inn mæti Magnús Eyjajarl, er birtir Orkneyjar með sínum heilagleik, hverjum til sæmdar eptirfarandi saga er saman sett. Hér með eru blessaðir biskupar, Johannes ok Thorlacus, hverir Ísland hafa geislat með háleitu skini sinna bjartra verðleika. Því má sjá, at vér erum eigi fjarlægir guðs miskunn, þó at vér sém fjarlægir öðrum þjóðum at heims vistum; ok þar fyrir eigum vér honum þakkir at gera, sæmd ok æru alla tíma várs lífs.¹²⁷

These are, the saint king Olaf, and the exalted Hallvard his kinsman, who adorn Norway with their halidoms; the worshipful Magnus, the Isle-earl, who brightens the Orkneys with his holiness, to whose honour the aftercoming Saga is put together. Herewith are the blessed bishops John and Thorlak, who have enlightened Iceland with the exalted shining of their bright worthiness. By this it may be seen that we are not far off from God's mercy though we be far off from other peoples in our abode in the world; and therefore we are bound to pay Him thanks, honour and reverence all the time of our life.¹²⁸

In one sense Master Robert can be seen as one of the pioneers in writing the history of a relatively newly converted Northern land. In light of the fact that we are dealing with works of hagiography an objection could be made to the use of the word "history" in this context. However,

¹²⁵ M.s.l., 335.

¹²⁶ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 239.

¹²⁷ M.s.l., 335.

¹²⁸ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 239.

the subject matter which Robert and the other hagiographers of the Scandinavian princely saints were confronted with – the killing of a secular ruler by a political rival within a Christian setting – opened up channels of interpretation that were, by and large, closed to biographers of figures whose main criteria for sanctity were pious conduct and posthumous miracles. In contrast, *magister* Robert was faced with the task of demonstrating the holiness of a secular prince whose claim to holiness depended upon the significance of a single event: his violent death. Unlike the self-sacrifice of the saints of the early Church, the murder of a ruler (St. Knud Lavard, St. Knud of Odense and St. Magnús) or his death in battle (St. Ólafr and St. Erik) was, by itself, devoid of any inherent religious significance. Accordingly the hagiographer had to construct a framework within which he could present the death of the prince as martyrdom. An effective way to achieve this aim was to place this event within a historical context. More precisely, to present it as the defining point in the history of the people over whom they had ruled during their life-time.

In Robert's prologue the biblical tabernacle denotes Christianity which Magnús, with his conduct during his life and the manner in which he died, both completes and protects:

Þvílíkt færir hverr sem hann hefir föng á í landtjald guðs sér til hjálpar ok miskunnar: einn gull, aðrir silfr, sumir gimsteina, sumir hafrahár ok rauð bukkaskinn; ok er slík fórn eigi svívirðiliga virðandi, því at af slíku er gör yfirhöfn yfir landtjald guðs, at hlífa því ok verja þat fyrir vætu ok sólarhita. Þessi orð má svá glósa með fáum orðum: Hverr kristinn maðr offri guði at gjöfum ok láni, sem hann hefir honum veitt, þat er hann hefir bezt til: at guðs kristni, er landtjald þat, er Moyses gerði guði til þjónostu, merkir, verði til hlífðar ok styrkingar móti árásum sinna óvina. Gull merkir speki ok vizku, silfr hreinlífi, gimsteinar kraptaverk heilagra manna, hafrahár iðran synda, rauð bukkaskinn píslarvætti. Nú má lesandi maðr svá til hugsa, at þessar allar fórnir hafi heilagr Magnús offrat sínum drottni, sem hans lífssaga váttar.¹²⁹

Each one bringeth such things as he hath means to bring into the tabernacle of God, as a help to mercy for himself. One gold, others silver, some gem-stones, some goats hair and red buckskin ; and such

¹²⁹ M.s.l., 336.

offerings are not to be contemptuously esteemed, for of such is made the covering over the tabernacle of God, to shield it and keep it from wet and sun-heat. These words may be so glossed with few words. Let every christian man offer to God of the gifts and grants which He hath bestowed on him, what he hath best. That God's christianity is the tabernacle that Moses made for God's service, denotes its worth as a shelter and support against the onslaughts of his foes. Gold denotes wit and wisdom ; silver chastity ; gem-stones the miracles of holy men ; goatshair the repentance of sins ; red buckskinn martyrdom. Now the man who reads may so make up his mind, that all these offerings hath the holy Magnus offered to his Lord, as the story of his life witnesseth.¹³⁰

The tabernacle metaphor frames Robert's Life of St. Magnús. Immediately after the description of the martyrdom he places an epilogue which echoes and further elaborates on the prologue:

...fyrir hans háleit eptirdæmi ok heilagan lifnað blómguðust fyrst í álfum Orkneyjaríkis inar fegrstu skipanir skærrar góðfýsi ok af inu helgustu lögmáli þessa dýrðarfulla píslarváttis tóku margfalda aukning ins sæmiligista siðferðis. Hann rak brott herrasætisstól fjándans ór norðrætt heimsins ok setti í staðinn landtjald almáttigs guðs. Hann eyddi öllu illgresi ok upprætti með sinni predikan, en lét upp vaxa inu fegrstu blóma ok inn sætasta kornskurð ins hjálpsamligasta ávaxtar. Hann um sneri öllum beiskleika Orkneyja í sæmd ok sætleik heilagra siða.¹³¹

For that because of his sublime example and holy life, first bloomed in the region of the realm of the Orkneys the fairest dispensations of pure good-will, and from the holiest decrees of this gloryful martyr sprung manifold increase of the most seemly virtue. He drove away the throne of the lordship of the Devil out of the north part of the world, and established in its stead the tabernacle of Almighty God. He withered and up-rooted all ill-weeds with his preaching, but let grow up the fairest flowers and the sweetest corn crop of the most helpsome growth. Help turned all the bitterness of the Orkneys into the seemliness and sweetness of holy habits.¹³²

¹³⁰ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 240.

¹³¹ M.s.l., 370.

¹³² O.s. (Rolls Series), 269. Compare this to the following passage from an early *passio* of Boris and Gleb: "... you [i.e. Boris and Gleb] are the defence and support of the land of Rus', the double-edged sword with which we lay low the insolence of the pagans and trample into the earth the arrogance of the Devil. Verily, can I say without doubt, that you are heavenly men and earthly angels, the pillars and the support of our land!" The Hagiography of Kievan Rus', 201.

The tabernacle signifies the final victory of Christianity in the region. In a re-enactment of Christ's crucifixion and his triumph over the devil, Magnús' willingness to suffer martyrdom heralds the completion of one step in God's plan: the spread of the religion even to a remote land like the Northern Isles. True, Magnús does not convert his people to Christianity; they are already Christians in name. However, his martyrdom represents a baptism of the earldom into the family of Christian nations. His innocent blood has washed away the violent Viking past and introduced a new era in Orkney.¹³³

Below I will attempt to show that Robert's Life of Magnús was composed in the 1170s, or at least not long after the early saintly biographies of the most famous martyr of twelfth-century Christendom, St. Thomas of Canterbury, were written. Earlier I suggested that Robert's work may have been a re-writing of a *vita* composed in 1136/1137. If this was the case Robert relied on this early Life for the immediate historical context for the Magnús' martyrdom which he then placed within a wider and more intellectually subtle framework.

For such a re-working we have a parallel in the corpus on King Knud IV. Shortly after his *elevatio* in 1095 an unknown clergyman of Odense

¹³³ The reference to a papal canonisation of Magnús in M.s.l. is, I believe, another attempt to make the cult of St. Magnús appear less parochial. M.s.l. tells that a bone of St. Magnús miraculously transformed itself into a cross in the presence of the pope in the same manner it had done when it underwent trial by fire in Orkney. In response to this event the pontiff took "the purple martyr into the catalogue of saints ; but that has been granted to few others in the North lands that he himself has done this." M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 273. For a similar false reference to a papal canonisation of a local cult see footnote. It is near certain that the description in M.s.l. of the shape-shifting bones at the episcopal canonisation figured in Robert's Life for it is alluded to in the Magnús liturg: Orkneyinger's Saga (Rolls Series), 317. It is more than likely that English influence lay behind the trial by fire of saints' relics in Scandinavia. There are two recorded cases of this procedure from Denmark, in relation to St. Theodgarus, *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 16, and St. Knud of Odense, *ibid.*, 129, and of course St. Ólafr. *Heimskringla* II, 404-405. In light of the fact that monks from Evesham were recruited to Odense it is worth noting that the abbot of that foundation, Walter (1077-1104), subjected relics he considered doubtful to an ordeal by fire. See *Chronicon abbatiae de Evesham*. Ed. by William D. Macray. *Rolls Series* (London 1863), 320-325. Ridyard, S., "Condigna Veneratio: Post-Conquest Attitudes to the Saints of the Anglo-Saxons", *Anglo-Norman Studies* 9 (1987), 204-205.

composed Passio sancti Kanuti regis et martiris.¹³⁴ This short and simple *passio* contains many of the elements that one would expect to find in works of this nature. The emphasis is on King Knud the just ruler, the protector and patron of the Church. Indeed he suffers martyrdom at the hands of his own people who resent his introduction of tithes.¹³⁵ A more straightforward reason for dying in the cause of Church in a recently converted society is difficult to imagine. In short, the scope of the work is confined to the interests of the clerical community in Odense which conducted the *elevatio* of the slain king (see ch. 3.2.).

About two decades later an English monk, Aelnoth of Canterbury, composed his Gesta Swenomagni regis et filiorum eius et passio gloriosissimi Canuti regis et martyris. As the title implies the work is both a history of Denmark and a Life of St. Knud IV. In contrast to the author of the first Life of St. Knud, Aelnoth places the martyrdom of the king within a wide historical framework. The work begins with the reign of King Sven Estridsson (1047-1074) and concludes in the reign of his son Niels (1104-1134). It is on this broad historical canvas that Knud's martyrdom stands out as the central event in the history of the Danish people.¹³⁶ In the opening chapters of the work the reader is reminded that the kingdom has only recently been converted to Christianity.¹³⁷ Geographically it is located at the edge of the known world and only through God's grace has it been brought into the folds of the true religion. Until that came about the North is the playing field of the devil and, paraphrasing Jeremias 1. 14., the region from where all evil originates.¹³⁸ In Abbo of Fleury's Life of King

¹³⁴ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 62-71.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹³⁶ Sørensen, P. M., "To gamle historier om Knud den Hellige - og de moderne", Knuds-bogen 1986. Studier over Knud den Hellige. Red. av Tore Nyberg et al. Fynske Studier XV (Odense 1986), 53-55.

¹³⁷ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 78-85.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

Edmund of East Anglia the same biblical passage is evoked at a point in the narrative when the slayers of the saint, the Danish Vikings Inguar and Hubba, are introduced. The Danes have been "hardened with the stiff frost of their wickedness from that roof of the world where he fixed his abode who in his mad ambition sought to make himself equal to the Most High."¹³⁹ A link is made between the geographical remoteness of their native country and its abysmal spiritual state:

*Talesque nationes abundant plurimæ infra Scythiam, prope Hyperboreos montes, quæ antichristum, ut legimus, secuturæ sunt ante omnes gentes, ut absque ulla miseratione pascantur hominum cruciatibus, qui characterem bestię noluerint circumferre in frontibus. Unde jam inquietando chisticolas pacem cum eis habere nequeunt, maxime Dani, occidentis regionibus nimium vicini, qui circa eas piraticam exercent frequentibus latrociniiis.*¹⁴⁰

Nations of this abound in great numbers in Scythia, near the Hyberborean Mountains, and are destined, as we read, more than all other races, to follow Anti-Christ, and to batten without compunction on the agonies of men who refuse to bear on their foreheads the mark of the beast. Hence it results that they can observe no truce in harrying the worshippers of Christ, and this is true especially of the Danes, who, dwelling fatally near to the western regions, indulge continually in piratical raids upon them.¹⁴¹

In a sense Aelnoth is answering Abbo when he refers to the same biblical passage. He does not reject the premise that the North had been a place of evil and pagan abominations. However, because of King Knud's martyrdom the reign of the devil has come to an end and the Danish people can make a belated entry into the Christian world. The north-wind must give way to the south-wind, heralding the real, as opposed to the nominal, adoption of Christianity.¹⁴² The canonisation of King Knud by Pope

¹³⁹ *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi*, 19. "[Nec mirum] cum venerint indurati frigore suæ malitiæ ab illo terræ vertice, quo sedem suam posuit qui per elationem Altissimo similis esse conpupivit." *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴² *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 84.

Paschal II in 1100/1101 represents a tangible vindication of this development.¹⁴³

Within the context expounded above the reference in M.s.l. to “*fjándans herrastól*”, “the throne of the devil”, becomes more comprehensible. The martyrdom of St. Magnús is interpreted in terms of a battle between God and the devil. The latter inspires Magnús’ enemies to turn against him:

Nú með því at engi má vera Abel nema sá, er þolir ok reynir nízku Kains ok öfund, ok inn helgi Ezechíel bjó með eitrfullum mönnum ok inn réttláti Loth var þröngdr af ranglátum mönnum, þá vakti upp óvin alls mannkyns freistni ok bruna meingörða alla vega í mót þeim guðs riddara, sándi sundrþykki ok hatri milli bræðra ok frænda ok kærna vina, allt til þess at fyrirkoma honum ok ónýta hans kraptaverk, er þá tóku at vaxa með honum.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ In passing it is interesting to note that at the start of St. Ólaf’s life, *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*, usually attributed to Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson of Nidaros (1161-1188), the same passage from the Book of Jeremias is elaborated on: “Sicut enim loca aquiloni proxima inhabitabant, ita familiarius eas possederat, et tenaciori glacie infidelitatis astrinxerat aquillo ille, a quo panditur omne malum super uniuersam faciem terre...”. *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*. Ed. by F. Metcalfe (Oxford 1881), 67. There is a shorter redaction of this work published under the title *Acta Sancti Olavi regis et martyris* in *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae*. Ed. by Gustav Storm. *Latinske kildeskrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen* (Kristiania 1880, reprinted 1973), 126-144. An extended version of the shorter redaction exists in the Old-Norse vernacular, published in *Gamalt norsk homilieboek*. Cod. AM 619 4o. Ed. by Gustav Indrebø (Oslo 1966, reprinted from 1933). See Holtsmark, A., “Sankt Olavs liv og mirakler”, *Studier i norrøn diktning* (Oslo 1956), 121-133. Unlike Aelnoth, however, Eysteinn does not assume that an intangible, almost mystical, transformation of religious sentiments followed in the wake St. Ólaf’s martyrdom. The emphasis is firmly on Ólafr as *rex iustus* and particularly his role in the conversion of Norway. If, as is generally believed, Archbishop Eysteinn composed *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* during his exile in England between 1181 and 1183 the contemporary relevance of the work cannot be ignored. As Ólafr was forced into exile to Rus’ in 1028 by his ungrateful subjects so Eysteinn had to leave his see as a result of King Sverri’s hostility towards Church independence. Ólaf’s enemies are not explicitly portrayed as pagans (although some are), rather they are Christians who should know better: “Erat quedam pars illius terre, in qua modo sacratissimum corpus eius requiescit [i.e. St. Ólaf’s], cuius incole indurati et pertinaces in malicia sua, ueritatis, et ideo regis, hostes erant inexorabiles.” Ibid., 72. Ólaf’s stand at Stiklastaðir is for “*justicia*”, just kingship and the Christian faith. With the English Church still reeling from the martyrdom of another returning exile, St. Thomas of Canterbury, it is not difficult to imagine how the fate of St. Ólafr assumed a pertinent meaning for Archbishop Eysteinn as he waited out his time in England.

¹⁴⁴ M.s.l., 354. The enemies of the Kievan martyrs Boris and Gleb (Svjatopolk), and the Bohemian martyr Wenceslas (Boleslav), are also temporarily possessed by the devil when they plot and commit their foul deeds against the saints. “And then the devils summoned Boleslav and plotted fiendishly against Wenceslas.” *Medieval Slavic Lives*, 146-147. “But it was at this moment that Satan entered his heart and began to spur him

Now, for that no man can be Abel, save he who tholes and proves the spite and envy of Cain ; and as the holy Ezekiel dwelt with the venomous men, and the righteous Lot was hard pressed of wrongful men ; so the foe of the whole human race waked up temptation, and the heat of persecution on all sides against this knight of God, sowing discord and hatred between brothers and kinsfolk and dear friends, all that he might hinder him, and make those wonders of none effect, which then began to grow with him.¹⁴⁵

Hákon and his henchmen are inspired by the devil in their treacherous and murderous dealings with Earl Magnús. For a brief moment in time the immemorial battle between God and his adversary is fought between two historical figures, Hákon and Magnús, in an obscure location near the edge of the known world. With Magnús' death the devil is defeated and the Orcadian people are baptised with his innocent blood. Similarly in Aelnoth's work the killing of King Knud heralds Satan's demise and the true conversion of the Danish people to the Christian religion. As in Robert's Life (see ch. 1.5.), historical figures are compared with biblical characters. Knud's father, Sven Estridsson is compared to David who in medieval tradition was seen as the allegorical forerunner of Christ (i.e. St. Knud).¹⁴⁶ As in the Magnús corpus the enemies of the martyr are portrayed as henchmen of the devil; the people of Jylland who rebelled against the king are accused of being his accomplices.¹⁴⁷

Early this century Curt Weibull pointed out that Aelnoth views Danish history through an Augustinian perspective: the realm is presented as a battle-field between *civitas dei* and *civitas diaboli*. This schematic approach, adopted from well known religious works such as the seventh-century De duodecim abusivis saeculi by the so-called Pseudo-Cyprianus,

to commit greater, crueller, and more numerous murders." The Hagiography of Kievan Rus', 183.

¹⁴⁵ M.s.l. (Roll Series), 256.

¹⁴⁶ Vitae Sanctorum Danorum, 88.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 109.

makes the Gesta Swenomagni a source next to useless for the historian.¹⁴⁸ More recently Weibull's interpretation has come under criticism from those who argue that irrespective of the work's factual accuracy, it should be studied within the context of the ecclesiastical and political situation in Denmark in this period.¹⁴⁹ Still it has not been sufficiently emphasised that Aelnoth's presentation of Danish history in the terms highlighted by Curt Weibull has to be understood with the status of the English monk as outsider in a recently converted land in mind. In a similar way as the crucifixion of Christ heralded the triumph of God over the devil, thus Knud's martyrdom, signifies the emergence of the Danish people from a barbarous, semi-pagan, past to a new place alongside the Christian nations of Europe. In short, although Aelnoth of Canterbury and *magister* Robert were influenced by English hagiographic tradition on princely saints they were also innovative in their approach. Both present the martyrdom of their respective subjects within the context of the inevitable triumph of Christianity over paganism and as a turning point in the history of the lands over which the saints had ruled.

The tendency to place what was effectively the death of a secular ruler in a local political struggle within the context of a cosmic struggle between God and devil was not confined to the Lives of the Nordic princely martyrs. This is precisely the interpretation adopted by the early

¹⁴⁸ Weibull, C, Saxo, kritiska undersökningar i Danmarks historia från Sven Estridsens död til Knud VI (Lund 1915), 75-90.

¹⁴⁹ In particular Breengaard, C., Muren omkring Israels hus. Regnum og Sacerdotium i Danmark 1050-1170 (København 1982), 122-149. Idem., "Det var os, der slog kong Knud ihjel!", Knuds-bogen 1986. Studier over Knud den Hellige. Red. av Tore Nyberg et al. Fynske Studier XV (Odense 1986), 9-21. Sørensen, P. M., "To gamle historier om Knud den Hellige – og de moderne", Knuds-bogen 1986. Studier over Knud den Hellige. Red. av Tore Nyberg et al. Fynske Studier XV (Odense 1986), 53-55. See Curt Weibull's reply to this criticism, "Ny och äldre historieskrivning om Danmark under tidig medeltid", Historisk tidskrift (dansk) 86 (1986), 1-25.

hagiographers of the Rus' saints Boris and Gleb (d. 1015).¹⁵⁰ In particular by the use of biblical imagery their hagiographers projected

...the notion of the Russian land as the newest participating member of Christendom, fully benefiting from Grace, and... [interpreted] ...the politically motivated assassinations of the princes Boris and Gleb as acts having spiritual ramifications for the newly Christianized nation.¹⁵¹

Similar sentiments also appear in the early hagiography on St. Wenceslas. The earliest Life of the Bohemian saint, the so-called First Church Slavonic Life of Saint Wenceslas composed ca. 930, is written in an unadorned style and no attempt is made to place the killing of Duke Wenceslas by his brother Boleslav within a wider historical and salvific context.¹⁵² However in the Second Slavonic Church Life of St. Wenceslas, written in the late tenth or early eleventh century, the saints' life and martyrdom is presented as a sort of confirmation of the triumph of God and Christianity over the devil and paganism. In the prologue we are told that while

...some nations, after long and circuitous wanderings, were brought to the rightness of the true way by holy illumination, nevertheless not all the nations of the world, even those predestined, partook of and received this gift of grace at the same time.¹⁵³

The Bohemians are converted to Christianity but through Boleslav and his evil accomplices the devil attempts to deal the new religion a blow by murdering Wenceslas; Boleslav's assumption of power heralds "a reign

¹⁵⁰ Sciacca, F. A., "In Imitation of Christ: Boris and Gleb and the Ritual Consecration of the Russian Land", Slavic Review 49 (1990), 252-260. Cherniavsky, M, Tsar and People: Studies in Russian Myths (New York 1969), 7-10. Maczko, S., "Boris and Gleb: Saintly Princes or Princely Saints?", Russian History II, 1 (1975), 68-80. In general this feature of Russian medieval hagiography is succinctly summed up by Paul Hollingworth: "... the mimetic aspect of Rus' Christian culture, revealed so powerfully in its hagiography, was an expression of the desire of Rus' Christians to see themselves as part of God's unfolding salvific plan." *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, xxiv.

¹⁵¹ Sciacca, "In Imitation of Christ", 260.

¹⁵² *The Origins of Christianity in Bohemia*, 56-57. For the dating of the Bohemian Lives see *ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 71.

of great injustice... .”¹⁵⁴ In the larger context, however, the supernatural authority of the saint confirms the new religion in the hearts of the Bohemians and even converts those who still adhere to pagan idolatry.¹⁵⁵

Master Robert and Aelnoth of Canterbury both present the martyrdom of the ruler as an integral part of the history of the earldom of Orkney and the kingdom of Denmark respectively. The different approach adopted by the unknown author of St. Knud Lavard's Life, *In passione sancti Kanuti* (ca. 1170), is therefore noteworthy. When compared with Aelnoth's work one is struck by the drastic narrowing of focus. Unlike Aelnoth the author does not portray Knud's martyrdom as a climactic event in the struggle between Christianity and paganism, God and the devil. The emphasis is on Knud Lavard the ideal ruler and less on the manner in which he died.¹⁵⁶ The murder of Knud Lavard is not the turning point in the history of the Danish people; indeed it is hard to avoid the thought that its composer deliberately shied away from placing his saint on a similar grand cosmic stage as erected by Aelnoth of Canterbury for the first Danish royal martyr. Stripped of this larger historical dimension it follows that the importance of the martyrdom itself diminishes: the focus is firmly on the saint as the exemplary ruler and the treacherous (albeit not satanically inspired) nature of his betrayal. This inward looking quality of the work undoubtedly reflects the nature of the occasion for which it was composed: Knud Lavard's canonisation in 1170, an event which coincided with the coronation of King Valdemar's son and namesake. At that particular point in time there was less need to dwell on the emergence of the Danish people

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 84.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 88.

¹⁵⁶ “Den officielle passionslegende om Knud Hertug er altså ikke nogen helgenlegende i almindelig forstand, men snarere en krønike eller biografi af en *rex iustus*.” Gad, *Legenden*, 165. “The official passion-legend of Duke Knud is not a saint's life in the usual sense of the word, but rather a chronicle or a biography of a *rex iustus*.” My translation.

into the Christian world and it was more appropriate to concentrate on Knud Lavard's role as *rex iustus*.

Thus Master Robert's Life of St. Magnús, a work which underlies the whole literary corpus on the saint, can be firmly placed within the context of the hagiographic corpus dedicated to the Scandinavian princely martyrs. His general approach to the subject is best compared to Aelnoth of Canterbury's Gesta Swenomagni; for both Englishmen the martyrdoms of their subjects represented the entry of relatively newly converted lands into the family of Christian nations.

1.5. Robert's Life of St. Magnús and the Thomas Becket Corpus

It is told in Benedict of Peterborough's *miracula* of St. Thomas of Canterbury (completed 1171/72) that around the year 1160 Robert of Cricklade, prior of the canons of St. Frideswide's in Oxford, was travelling on foot between the Sicilian towns of Catania and Syracuse.¹⁵⁷ At one stage in his journey, as he was walking along a beach, a ferocious wave suddenly arose and hit his legs, with the result that "the flesh swelled immediately, and the skin was smitten with malignant redness." In the following years Robert was constantly plagued by an unidentified ailment resulting from this incident. The doctors he consulted were unable to offer any relief for they claimed that the illness was not to be healed by human hands. However, hearing of the manifold miracles performed by St. Thomas Becket, Robert travelled to Canterbury where he visited the saint's tomb and bathed his infected limbs in the healing water of his well. From that moment onward his suffering grew more bearable until he fully recovered.

Within a decade of Becket's death an extensive corpus had been composed on his life and martyrdom.¹⁵⁸ Among the earliest biographers was Robert of Cricklade who said in the aforementioned testimony that his cure had made him devoted to Thomas' sanctity. Robert expressed his devotion by completing a *Vita et miracula* of the saint probably ca. 1173

¹⁵⁷ *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*. Vol. II, ed. by J. C. Robertson. *Rolls Series* (London 1876), 97-101. My translation.

¹⁵⁸ On the Becket sources see Gransden, A., *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London 1974), 296-308. Barlow, F., *Thomas Becket* (London 1986), 1-9. Walberg, E., *La tradition hagiographique de Saint Thomas Becket avant la fin du XIIe siècle* (Paris 1929). Idem, "Affattningstiderne för och förhållandet emellan de äldsta lefnadsteckningarna öfver Thomas Becket. En källkritisk undersökning", *Lunds Universitets Årskrift*. Vol. X (1914), 1-42.

and certainly not later than 1180. Although this composition has not survived in its original form, parts of it were incorporated into an Icelandic fourteenth-century compilation of various sources on Becket, the so-called Thómas saga II.¹⁵⁹

Passages in Thómas saga II are attributed to a certain Robert of Cretel whom the Icelandic philologist Eiríkur Magnússon was the first to identify as the aforementioned Robert of Cricklade.¹⁶⁰ E. Walberg, a pioneer in the study of the Becket corpus, pointed out that Thómas saga II was not the only relic of Robert's lost *vita*, for his work had also been used by a certain Benet, a monk of St. Albans, who around 1184 completed a verse Life of the saint in the Anglo-Norman vernacular. Walberg came to this conclusion by comparing Benet's poem with the passages attributed to Robert in Thómas saga II.¹⁶¹ Moreover he also demonstrated that the so-called D-fragment – four leaves from a codex written at the beginning of the fourteenth century – derives from Robert of Cricklades work on Thomas Becket. In addition Peter Foote has established that a text preserved in Stock. perg. fol. nr. 2, from a codex written in Iceland in the first half of the fifteenth century, is drawn from a translation of Robert's work into Icelandic.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Thómas saga erkibyskups. A Life of Archbishop Thomas Becket in Icelandic. Vol. I-II, ed. by Eiríkur Magnússon. Rolls Series (London 1883).

¹⁶⁰ Thómas saga vol. II, xcii-xcv. For an overview of the Becket corpus in Old-Norse see Jakobsen, A., "Thómas saga erkibyskups", Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia. Ed. by Phillip Pulsiano et al. (New York & London 1993), 643-44.

¹⁶¹ Walberg, E., "Date et source de la vie de saint Thomas de Cantorbéry par Beneit, moine de Saint-Alban", Romania. Recueil Trimestriel 44 (1915-17), 407-426. Reprinted in Walberg, La tradition hagiographique, 9-33. La Vie de Thomas Becket par Beneit. Poème Anglo-Normand du XIIe Siècle. Ed. by Börje Schlyter. Études romanes de Lund IV (1941). The D-fragment, drawn from a *vita* is edited (along with the so-called E-fragment drawn from a Gesta post martyrium) in Thómas saga vol. II, 251-284.

¹⁶² Foote, P., "O the Fragmentary Text concerning St. Thomas Becket in Stock. perg. fol. nr. 2.", Saga-Book of the Viking Society 15 (1961), 403-450. The Stock. fragment is edited in Heilagra manna sögur. Fortællinger og legender om hellige mænd og kvinder efter gamle haandskrifter. Vol. II, ed. by C. R. Unger (Christiania 1877), 315-320. In the same article Foote also argued that the D-E fragments derived from a single version, most likely from the latter half of the thirteenth century, based on the

The unsatisfactory preservation of Robert of Cricklade's Latin Life is mirrored in the relative obscurity of his surviving compositions. With certainty it is known that apart from the Vita et miracula of Becket he wrote (or translated) four works: Speculum fidei ; De cunnubio patriarchae Jacobi ; Homilies in Ezechielem and Deflorationes historiae naturalis (a much condensed edition of Pliny's natural history).¹⁶³ Apart from the last named work none of these compositions has been edited.

Robert of Cricklade's date of birth is obscure, but it is known that as a young Austin canon he entered Cirencester abbey in Gloucester. There, according to his own words, he read widely in some of the more prominent authors of the period such as William of Malmesbury and Peter Lombard.¹⁶⁴ Around 1141 Robert became prior of the Austin house of St. Frideswide's in Oxford where he supervised an impressive building programme which included a Romanesque church and cloister.¹⁶⁵ Gerald of Wales met Robert as an old man and described him "as being erudite in scriptural and other writings and not ignorant of the Hebrew language."¹⁶⁶ Robert's interest in this field is borne out by his attempt to acquire a work of Josephus from the Jews of Oxford which he believed contained a

translation of Robert of Cricklade's work (albeit supplemented with other material on the Canterbury saint).

¹⁶³ Sharpe, R., A Handlist of the Latin Writers of Great Britain and Ireland before 1540 (Brepols 1997), 532-533. Callus, D. A., "Robert v. Cricklade", Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche. Vol VIII (Freiburg 1963), 1338. Emden, A. B., A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500. Vol. A-E (Oxford 1957), 513-514. Mistretta, M. L., "Robert de Cricklade", The New Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. XII (New York 1967), 530. The *Incipits* of De cunnubio patriarchae Jacobi are printed in Stegmüller, F., Repertorium Biblicum Medii Aevi. Vol. V (Madrid 1955), 153-154.

¹⁶⁴ See Hunt, R. W., "English Learning in the Late Twelfth Century", The Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 19 (1936), 31-33.

¹⁶⁵ Blair, J., "St. Frideswide's Monastery: Problems and Possibilities", Saint Frideswide's Monastery at Oxford: Archaeological and Architectural Studies. Ed. by John Blair (U. K. 1990), 237-242.

¹⁶⁶ "cum esset vir litteratus et in scripturis eruditus et Hebraicae linguae non ignoramus..." Giraldi Cambrensis Opera. Vol. VIII, ed. by G. F. Warner. De Principis Instructione Liber. Rolls Series (London 1891), 65. My translation.

reference to Christ.¹⁶⁷ Robert is titled *magister* by Gerald, in this period an ubiquitous term which simply implies that he had some sort of academic qualification.¹⁶⁸ Where Robert acquired his degree or precisely what learning lay behind it is impossible to say. Although he undoubtedly participated in the intellectual life in Oxford, he did not become the first chancellor of the University in 1159 as claimed in the Dictionary of National Biography.¹⁶⁹

Apart from the passages in Thómas saga II where Robert is referred to by name we have no direct knowledge of what sections of this bulky work derive from his Vita. However, a detailed reconstruction of Robert's Life was undertaken by Margaret Orme who isolated the material which only appears in Thómas saga II and compared it with all the relevant twelfth century biographical works on Becket.¹⁷⁰ By this method Orme was able to identify the sections which in all likelihood stem from the Life.¹⁷¹

Finnbogi Guðmundsson has suggested that the Master Robert mentioned in M.s.l. is none other than Robert of Cricklade, the prior of St. Frideswide's and the author of the lost Becket Vita. Finnbogi did not support his argument with close examination of the relevant sources but found it sufficient for his purpose to mention a few parallels between Thómas saga II and the Magnús corpus in general, some of which had been

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 65-66. On this curious episode see Roth, C., The Jews of Medieval Oxford. Oxford Historical Society vol. ix (Oxford 1951), 121.

¹⁶⁸ Southern, R., "From Schools to University", The History of the University of Oxford vol I. The Early Oxford Schools. Ed. by J. I. Catto (Oxford 1984), 11. Robert was the only prior of St. Frideswide (not otherwise famous for scholarship) to bear this title Legge, M. D., Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background (Oxford 1963), 250.

¹⁶⁹ Sub "Robert of Cricklade", Dictionary of National Biography. Vol. 48 (London 1896), 368-369.

¹⁷⁰ Orme, M., "A Reconstruction of Robert of Cricklade's *Vita et Miracula S. Thomae Cantuariensis*", Analecta Bollandiana 84 (1966), 379-98.

¹⁷¹ "Where T [i.e. Thómas saga II] has material which cannot be found in its extant sources and which has neither a later date of origin than 1174 nor signs of being an editorial addition, nor contradicts information in B [i.e. Benet] and Stock. 2, Robert will be tentatively presumed to be the source." Ibid., 383-84.

noted by A. B. Taylor in an introduction to his translation of O.s.¹⁷² The two scholars mention the correspondence between the conduct of the two martyrs at the scene of execution, the description of their wounds, the bad fate of their enemies and the miracles which were said to have taken place at their shrines. These observations were not, however, supported by a textual comparison between the Robert of Cricklade material in Thómas saga II on the one hand (and other relevant material stemming from Robert's work) and the Master Robert's sections of M.s.l. on the other hand (supplemented by the short Latin Leg.). Although the observations of Finnbogi and Taylor are certainly interesting, the parallels they mention are of such a general nature that they tell us next to nothing about a possible connection between the Magnús corpus and Thómas saga II. They certainly do not warrant an unqualified statement about Robert of Cricklade's authorship of the Magnús Life as the one that appears in a recent overview of medieval Icelandic literature.¹⁷³ If a connection between two works of this genre is to be established the "similarity of situation and an audible verbal echo..." must surely be the ideal criteria.¹⁷⁴ Only when a number of similarities and verbal echoes has been noted can we begin to assess the possibility of direct literary influence or even common authorship.

The philological dangers involved in making a comparison between the works of the two Roberts are obvious. Most notably we are dealing with Lives written by Englishmen which are incompletely preserved in Icelandic translations. There is a general consensus that Robert of Cricklade's Vita of Thomas Becket was translated into Icelandic ca. 1200, probably by a clergyman by the name of Bergr Gunnsteinsson.¹⁷⁵ It was

¹⁷² The Orkneyinga saga, 73.

¹⁷³ Íslensk Bókmenntasaga I. Vésteinn Ólafson ritstjóri (Reykjavík 1992), 457.

¹⁷⁴ Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar. Ed. by Guðrún P. Helgadóttir (Oxford 1987), lxvi.

¹⁷⁵ Foote, "On the Fragmentary Text", 442-444.

this translation, perhaps in a modified form, which was incorporated along with other material on the Canterbury saint, into Thómas saga II. Stefán Karlsson has attributed the saga to Arngrímr Brandsson who wrote a Life of Bishop Guðmundr Arason around the middle of the fourteenth century (1343 or later).¹⁷⁶ Stefán's solution is particularly attractive considering the parallels which Arngrímr drew between the life of Bishop Guðmundr and Archbishop Thomas Becket.¹⁷⁷ Peter Hallberg on the other hand argued that Abbot Bergr Sökkason was responsible for the composition of Thómas saga II and, as mentioned earlier, M.s.l.¹⁷⁸ However that may be, it is clear that M.s.l. and Thómas saga II are both works of fourteenth-century Icelandic hagiographers whose agenda was to make existing sources more in tune with prevailing religious concerns and stylistic trends.¹⁷⁹

Apart from the fact that both were considered martyrs soon after their death, St. Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, and St. Magnús Erlendsson, earl of Orkney, do not at first sight appear to have much in common. Where Thomas died as the incumbent of arguably the second most important office in the England and (from his point of view at least) in defence of ecclesiastical rights, Magnús' slaying was a climax to a power struggle within the Orkney earldom. The locations of their deaths were likewise worlds apart. Thomas was killed in Canterbury Cathedral, the centre of Christianity in the British Isles, whereas Magnús met his fate

¹⁷⁶ Stefán Karlsson, "Icelandic Lives of Thomas á Becket: Questions of Authorship", Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference (Edinburgh 1973), 229-239.

¹⁷⁷ Ciklamini, M., "The Hand of Revision: Arngrímr's Revision of *Guðmundar saga Biskups*", Gripla VIII (1993), 231-253.

¹⁷⁸ Hallberg, P., Stiltsignalement och författarskap i norrön sagalitteratur. Synpunkter och exempel. Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis. Nordistica Gothoburgensia (Gothenburg 1968), 144-151. Idem., "Om Magnúss saga helga", 59-70.

¹⁷⁹ See Sverrir Tómasson, "Norðlenski Benediktínaskólinn", 1009-1020. Thus one aim of the compiler of Thómas saga II was to "... rid the text of anything that might be held to disparage saint or church or give credit to Thomas's enemies. In his work there are many signs of extensive revision of style and arrangement." Foote, "On the Fragmentary Text", 445.

on a remote isle on what must have seemed to many Englishmen the northernmost edge of the world.

Following the introduction by the Icelandic author of *M.s.l.*, the prologue of Master Robert, in essence a scholarly exegesis of biblical terms associated with martyrdom, is quoted at length (see ch. 1.4.). Peter Foote has drawn attention to the parallels between this preface and the prologue of William of Canterbury's *Passio et miracula* of St. Thomas written in 1173/1174.¹⁸⁰ In both works the same passage from St. Jerome's introduction to the Book of Samuel and the Book of Kings is quoted and commented on. Although Foote concedes that the authors could have made direct use of Jerome, he nevertheless finds it likely that Robert had William's *Vita* before him when he composed his work on St. Magnús. Either way there is a good case for assuming that Robert of Cricklade lifted some material from William's composition when he wrote his work on the Canterbury saint.¹⁸¹

Although violent death is the basis for the sanctity of Magnús and Becket their early years are described in laudatory terms. Both are conscientious and obedient youths who, in contrast to their peers, find fulfilment in religious meditation and the study of holy writing.¹⁸² It seems Robert of Cricklade was more knowledgeable about, or more interested in, Thomas' youth than the other biographers. For instance, he alone includes a description of Becket's Parisian years and whereas other writers claim that he neglected his studies in this period, Robert stresses his diligence and tells that he did not participate in the less than pious student life of the city. In a passage peculiar to *Thómas saga II* we read that his youth was marked by the devotion he showed to the Virgin Mary who

¹⁸⁰ Foote, "Master Robert's Prologue", 65-82.

¹⁸¹ *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, lxix.

¹⁸² *M.s.l.*, 338-339. On the childhood of Thomas in Robert's Life see Orme, "A Reconstruction", 384.

ok hér í mót lagði honum jungfrú María svá blíðan hug, at þegar sem hann var í æskutíma kjöri hon hann sjálf til hins hæsta kennimanns, á nokkura líka mynd ok lesit er af hinum helga Davíð, at Guð Drottinn kjöri hann til konungs yfir Ísraels lýð, ok smurði hann fyrir hendr Samúelis þegar í barndómi, sem hann var smásveinn í sauðageymslu...¹⁸³

in return set such a loving heart on him, that already when he was still in the years of youth she herself chose him to be the highest among teachers, which resembleth after a fashion what is read of the holy David that the Lord God chose him to be king over Israel, and anointed him by the hands of Samuel, even in his childhood, already when he was as yet but a little swain a-shepherding.¹⁸⁴

This comparison of Thomas to king David works on at least two levels. Most clearly it refers to the archbishop's relatively humble origin. In fact Thomas himself, when taunted for his lack of noble background, wrote in a letter to his bishops that the "holy David became from a herdswain the king of Israel...".¹⁸⁵ Moreover the words underline Thomas' mission in life. Just as God chose to extend his grace to David and mark him out for kingship at an early age, thus Becket is designated for sainthood from birth. In M.s.l. a similar mode of thought is expressed in a passage deriving from Master Robert's work: Joseph was made from slave to counsellor and "the shepherd boy, David, the greatest king over all the tribes of Israel."¹⁸⁶ The question whether the use of this particular biblical allusion by the two Roberts is a coincidence must be left open.

A certain ambiguity can be detected in the portrayal of Becket and Magnús before they assume the role of archbishop and earl respectively. Concerning the latter we read, as earlier noted, that his early life was not altogether exemplary for he participated in Viking-style raids and other activities hardly befitting a saint. Master Robert asks why God permitted

¹⁸³ *Thómas saga* vol. I., 18.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 403. "at af hjarðarsveini varð heilagr Davíð konungr Ísraels..." *Ibid.*, 402.

¹⁸⁶ M.s.l., 374. *Thómas saga* vol. I, 48-49.

“his servant to lust after robbery and murder, and to be defiled with such manifold sins and misdeeds?”¹⁸⁷ The turning point for Magnús is nevertheless close at hand. Having refused to raid England with the Norwegian king, and deserted the royal army, Magnús stays at the court of Malcolm III, the king of the Scots, and with “a certain bishop of Wales”:

Ok sem hann hafði verit slíka stund í hirð Skotakonungs sem honum líkaði, sæmðr af konunginum gjöfum ok göfgu föruneysi, fór hann á Katanes ok var þar af öllum virðulega tekinn, hirt ok haldinn ok þegar kosinn ok tignaðr jarls nafni, vinsæll ok virðuligr öllum guðs vinum. Ok því næst án dvöl gerðist inn heilagi Magnús jarl Paulus af Saulo, predikari af manndrápsmanni, ok hefndi hann þat á sjálfum sér, þat er hann hafði illa lifat.¹⁸⁸

And when he had stayed as long in the Scot's king court as pleased him, honoured with the King's gifts and a noble retinue, he went to Caithness where he was well received, honoured and esteemed by all, and at once chosen and ennobled with the title of “Earl” beloved and honoured of all the friends of God. Thereafter, without delay, the holy Earl Magnús was made Paul out of Saul, a preacher from a manslayer, and he avenged on himself that which he had lived ill.¹⁸⁹

The key words here are “made Paul out of Saul” expressing a sudden conversion from a life of warfare to one of Christian virtues and self sacrifice; a conversion which coincides with Magnús' acceptance of the title of earl from the people of Caithness. As noted this passage is peculiar to M.s.l. (see ch. 1.2.).

Although biographers portrayed Thomas Becket before he became archbishop as a pious man, they could not ignore the fact that up to that point he had conducted his life as a layman. Indeed when Henry II chose him for this important ecclesiastical office he had not even received priestly orders. Thomas' military career was also an additional source of embarrassment. His behaviour was perhaps acceptable from a “secular”

¹⁸⁷ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 247. “Hví leyfði allsvaldandi guð þenna sinn svein láta gírnast rán ok manndráp ok saurgast af svá margföldum syndum ok misverkum?” M.s.l., 344.

¹⁸⁸ M.s.l., 349.

¹⁸⁹ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 251.

In Thómas saga II, Bishop Henry of Winchester addresses the following words to Becket as the latter hesitates to accept the archbishopric:

“Son minn sætasti,” sagði hann, “lát þér eigi hrygðar afla þetta efni, því at héðan í frá muntu fagrliga bæta, ef þú hefir nokkut brotið. Leið þér til minnis, hversu hann gerði Paulus, hann var fyrri mótstöðumaðr Guðs kristni, enn síðan mestr uppheldismaðr í orði ok eftirdæmi, ok dýrkaði hana at lyktum með sínu banablóði. Gefi þat Guð Drottinn, at þú líkist honum á götu lífs ok réttlætis.”¹⁹¹

“Sweetest son mine”, said he, “let this matter cause no grief to thee; for henceforth thou wilt boot in a fair wise for aught wherein thou mayst have trespassed already. Call to thy mind how he did, Paul who aforetime withstood the church of God but was sithence the greatest prop of her in word and example, and glorified her at last in his blood. May the Lord God grant that thou be like unto him in the path of life and rightwiseness.”¹⁹²

It is reasonably certain that this scene was included in Robert of Cricklade’s Vita of St. Thomas as it is peculiar to Thómas saga II, the Stockholm fragment and, interestingly, Guernes’s verse Life of Becket completed in 1174.¹⁹³ A comparison of Henry’s speech with the reference to St. Paul in M.s.l. reveals parallels worthy of attention. Both passages reflect Magnús’ and Thomas’ repentance of, and conversion from, the worldly life they had lived up to that point. Both saints, it is implied, will atone for their former sins by the martyrdom ahead and from this time onwards they excel in saintly virtues. The echo between the following sentences are worthy of note: “*hefndi hann þat á sjálfum sér, þat er hann hafði illa lifað...*”, (“and he avenged on himself that which he had lived ill...”), says M.s.l., “*héðan í frá muntu fagrliga bæta ef þú hefur nokkut brotið...*”, (“henceforth you shall make amends for whatever you have done wrong...”), writes Robert of Cricklade. The reference to Paul’s

¹⁹¹ Thómas saga vol. I, 80-82.

¹⁹² Ibid., 81-83.

¹⁹³ Unger, Heilagra manna sögur, 318. La vie de saint Thomas le martyr par Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence. Poème historique du XIIe siècle (1172-1174). Ed. by E. Walberg (Lund 1922), lines 485-490. The connection between the Lives of Guernes and Robert has not been made clear to my best knowledge. The former relied heavily on Edward Grim and he was also acquainted with William of Canterbury’s Vita. See Walberg, *La tradition hagiographique*, 92-134.

conversion on the road to Damascus may well be a medieval formula applied in circumstances of this nature.¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless it is interesting that their transformation occurs when Magnús and Becket assume the office of earl and archbishop respectively.

Like many saints of princely pedigree Earl Magnús is presented as a *rex iustus*, a just ruler, who expels pirates from his realm, supports the Christian religion and rules his people, irrespective of their social status, with a strict but fair hand.¹⁹⁵ In *Thómas saga II* we find the following passage: "*Enn höfðingjum ok stórmenni valdi hann opinberar gjafir. Af slíku, sem von var, unnu honum fátækir sem sínum feðr, enn höfðingar virðu hann sem sér jafnan, ok óttuðust hann sem sinn formann.*"¹⁹⁶ In M.s.l.:

Hann var örr af fé ok ok stórgjöfull við höfðingja; hann veitti hversdagliga mikla hjálp fátækum mönnum fyrir guðs ást. Refsaði hann mjök herrán ok stuldi, lét drepa víkinga ok illlgörðamenn, svá ríka sem fátæka. ... Margir ágætir váru þeir hans mannkostir, er hann sýndi sjálfum guði, en leyndi mennina.¹⁹⁷

He was generous of money, and open-handed to chiefs; he gave daily great money and help to poor men for God's love. He chastised much plunder and stealing, he let vikings and ill-doers be slain, as well powerfull as poor. ... Many and famous were his virtues which he showed to God himself but hid from men.¹⁹⁸

The last sentence brings to mind Robert of Cricklade's words on Becket's generosity towards the poor: "*Hér með lagði herra Thómas þá*

¹⁹⁴ It is noteworthy that the sudden conversion of Becket referred to by Bishop Henry is an anomaly in the Becket corpus. True, his biographers tend to portray his consecration in 1162 as a turning point but not, however, as a complete conversion from secular life to that of holiness. Rather it was "the dramatic realisation by divine will of a potential which had previously existed." Staunton, M., "Thomas Becket's Conversion", *Anglo-Norman Studies* 21 (1999), 205. I thank Dr. Michael Staunton for providing me with a copy of this article in advance of publication.

¹⁹⁵ See Foote, P., "Observations on *Orkneyinga saga*", *St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*. Ed. by B. E. Crawford (Aberdeen 1988), 202.

¹⁹⁶ "For these things, as might be looked for, the poor loved him, even as a father, but lords held him in honour as their equal, and revered him as their superior." *Thomas saga* vol. I, 56-57. See also Unger, *Heilagra manna sögur* II, 316 and Benet, *La Vie de Thomas Becket*, lines 181-86.

¹⁹⁷ M.s.l., 352-53. The portrayal of the royal martyr as an ideal ruler can be traced back to Bede's description of King Oswine in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Gransden, A., "Abbo of Fleury's 'Passio Sancti Eadmundi'", *Revue Bénédictine* 105 (1995), 31-32.

¹⁹⁸ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 254.

*mildi til fátækra manna ok útlendra, at úspart huggaði hann þeira vesaldir með fégjöfum, þótt þat væri leynt fyrir alþýðu.”*¹⁹⁹

General and particular similarities can be noted in the build up to the scenes of martyrdom in Canterbury Cathedral and on Egilsay. Both saints, for instance, are slandered in the presence of their main adversaries, Hákon Pálsson and Henry II, and in both cases the vilification is instrumental in bringing about their violent death. In the case of Becket the theme of evil counselling figures in a number of his Lives including, as we shall see, Robert of Cricklade's.²⁰⁰

It has been suggested that Robert was sympathetic to King Henry's cause, at least compared to some of the other early biographers of Becket.²⁰¹ It is known, for instance, that he dedicated his translation of Pliny the Elder to the king. However, such speculations must be modified in light of the following passage from a collection of homilies on Ezekiel which Robert wrote within a year of Becket's death:

Quid dicam de gloriosissimo martyre et pontifice Thoma, qui in nostris temporibus martirii coronam promeruit, qui regis minas non timuit nec temporalium honorum blandimentis cessit? Caritate enim Christi repletus omnia despexit et seipsum Christo pro libertate ecclesie hostium optulit.

What shall I say of Thomas, glorious bishop and martyr, who merited the crown of martyrdom in our time? He neither feared the king's threats nor yielded to the promise of worldly honour, but despised them all in the fullness of his Christian charity, and offered himself up as a sacrifice to Christ for the liberty of the Church.²⁰²

Judging from these words Robert of Cricklade, at least at the point when he wrote these words, supported the principles which Thomas Becket so strenuously championed. Still, Robert's attitude towards the

¹⁹⁹ *Thómas saga* vol. I, 54-55. "Unto this lord Thomas added such bounty to needy folk and foreigners, that he yielded them in their hardships unstinted comfort in gifts of money although it were hidden from knowledge of the multitude." *Ibid.*, 55-57.

²⁰⁰ E.g. the Life of Becket by William fitzStephen (1173/74). *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*. Vol. III, ed. by J. C. Craigie. *Rolls Series* (London 1878), 41-42.

²⁰¹ Foote, "On the Fragmentary Text", 429.

²⁰² Quoted from Smalley, B., *The Becket Conflict and the Schools* (Oxford 1973), 198.

king was somewhat ambivalent for, judging from Thómas saga II, it is evident that he did not consider Henry to be Becket's only enemy or, for that matter, his most important one. This honour fell to the prominent English ecclesiastics who failed to support the archbishop and betrayed him in his hour of need. The following passage of Thómas saga II derives from Robert of Cricklade:

Ok er þat finna gamlir úvinir erkibyskups, draga þeir sig framm or skugganum, ok afklæða með öllu þá bölvæða öfund ok illgirni, er þeir höfðu lengi borit í sínu brjósti. ... Sumir rægja hann fyrir eina saman ílsku sinnar úlýðsku. Má hér til nefna þrjá byskupa, er fremstir ganga, Rodgeirr af Jork, Gillibert af Lundúnum, ok Jocelin af Sarisber.²⁰³

Now the old enemies of the archbishop crawl forth out of the shadow, and uncover to the full the accursed envy and malice which they had long borne in their breast. ... Some backbite him out of the mere wickedness of their ill-nature. As foremost leaders in these matters three bishops may be named here, Roger of York, Gilbert of London and Jocelin of Salisbury.²⁰⁴

Slandering and sowing of ill will is very much in the foreground in M.s.I. In this case the slandering subordinates are Hákon's followers:

Tveir menn váru þeir með Hákon jarli, er til eru nefndir, at einna verst gengu á millum þeira frænda ; hét annarr Sigurðr, en annarr Sighvatr sokki. ... Margir váru þeir aðrir, er illan hlut áttu í þeim málum, ok váru þeir allir með Hákon, því at heilagr Magnús vildi enga rógsmenn halda í sinni hirð.²⁰⁵

Two men were they with earl Hacon who are named as having been the worst of all in going between those kinsmen ; the one's name was Sigurd ; and the other Sighvat sock. ... There were many others who had a bad share in those matters, and these were all with Hacon, for saint Magnús would not keep any backbiters in his following.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Thómas saga vol. I., 176. See also Benet, *La Vie de Thomas Becket*, 418-20 and *Heilagra manna sögur II*, 319.

²⁰⁴ Thómas saga vol. I., 177.

²⁰⁵ M.s.I., 361.

²⁰⁶ M.s.I. (Rolls Series), 261.

Although it is not certain whether this passage derives from Robert's Life we know through the Leg. that the theme of evil counselling featured in his work.²⁰⁷

As Becket's and Magnús' posthumous reputation rested on the manner of their death, it is not surprising that their martyrdoms are described in detail. The early biographers of Becket tend to give slightly different accounts of what happened on the fateful day.²⁰⁸ The same holds true in relation to the martyrdom of Magnús as presented in O.s. and M.s.l. In O.s. we are told that Hákon Pálsson arrived on Egilsay with overwhelming force although the earls had agreed to bring only a small retinue. Nevertheless, in spite of being heavily outnumbered, Magnús refuses to flee the danger. The night before his death Magnús resides in a local church where he orders a mass to be performed. In the morning, when Hákon and his henchmen burst into the church, Magnús is not to be found but shortly afterwards he gives himself up of his own accord.²⁰⁹ By leaving the church, a place of safe refuge, the good-will and trusting attitude of Earl Magnús is emphasised. Behind this description in O.s. may lie an early hagiographic account or an oral tradition relating to the killing of Magnús.

Master Robert may have found it appropriate for his purpose to change this tradition. In M.s.l. Magnús does not leave the church and he is captured there by Hákon's men following morning mass. There is a

²⁰⁷ "Satellites autem sui in necem beati Magni conspirantes, sed simulationis nube palliantes, cum beato viro pacifice in dolo locuti sunt ut beatus Magnus et Hako statuto die in quadam insula, quæ vocatur Egelesio, cum pari numero hominum et armorum convenirent." Leg., 306.

²⁰⁸ On the presentation of the martyrdom in the early hagiography on Becket see O'Reilly, J., "The Double Martyrdom of Thomas Becket: Hagiography and History", *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 7 (1985), 185-24, esp., 189-197. Idem., "'Candidus et Rubicundus': An Image of Martyrdom in the 'Lives' of Thomas Becket", *Analecta Bollandiana* 69 (1981), 303-314.

²⁰⁹ O.s., 115.

notable emphasis on the fact that Hákon and his companions break the sanctuary of the church:

En Hákon jarl, er í þenna tíma var firrðr allri guðhræðslu ok ástsemd, svívirðandi privilegia kirkjunnar, óttaðist eigi inn at ganga í heilaga kirkju, raskandi svá frið hennar ok frelsi, at hann sýndi sinn glæp því grimmiligar sem hann framdi hann í helgara stað.²¹⁰

But earl Hacon, who at that time was banished from all fear and love of God, dishonouring the privileges of the Church, was not afraid to go into the holy church violating thus her peace and freedom, so that he showed his wickedness all the more grimly that he did it in a holier place.²¹¹

Magnús' arrest is presented here as a violation of ecclesiastical independence and privileges; Hákon is the transgressor who pays no heed to the sacrosanct domain of the Church. This episode in M.s.l. can not fail to evoke the most symbolically charged violation of the same ideals which the medieval world had witnessed: the killing of Thomas Becket before the altar of Canterbury Cathedral. Although this outburst of ecclesiastical outrage in M.s.l. could be the work of the Icelandic author, it is clear that in Master Robert's work the four servants of Hákon rushed into the church in order to capture Magnús.²¹² Here I would suggest *magister* Robert improved on a tradition relating to the execution of St. Magnús, perhaps first recorded in the **Vita*, in order to make it confirm more closely to the martyrdom of the Canterbury saint.

M.s.l. describes the fearsome four in the following manner : "*Pessir fjórir, er heldr megu kallast af sínum grimmleik inir skæðustu vargar en skynsamir menn, jafnan þyrstandi til blóðs úthellingar, hlupu inn í kirkjuna mjök svá at lokinni messunni.*"²¹³ This bloodthirsty quartet brings to mind the four knights who plot against and eventually murder Thomas Becket.

²¹⁰ M.s.l., 365.

²¹¹ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 264-265.

²¹² "Irruentibus igitur in ecclesiam Domini apparitoribus..." Leg., 307.

²¹³ M.s.l., 366. "These four, who may rather be called for their cruelty the most harmful wolves than reasonable men, ever thirsting for the outshedding of blood, rushed into the church just about the end of the mass." M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 265.

As a matter of fact the presentation of two of them in Thómas saga II echoes the reference to wild beasts in M.s.I. Thus Reginald fitzUrse is “*dýrum líkr í sínum grimmleik...*”²¹⁴, and Richard le Bret “*nú vorðinn verr enn skynlauss af skynsamri skepnu ...*”²¹⁵ Later, at the scene of the murder Thómas saga II, possibly following here Robert, refers to the knights’ assault on Thomas as that of “*skæðir vargar á mildan hirði*.”²¹⁶ As seen above the same words “*skæðir vargar*” are also used to describe Hákon’s henchmen. It is of course not unique to compare killers to “*vargar*” or “wolves” in light of the fact that martyrs are traditionally likened to sacrificial lambs (a formula which of course ultimately derives from John 10: 3-4).

Another comparison, however, is more difficult to explain away in this fashion. Master Robert refers to Hákon’s underlings as “*sonum Belíals, vándum illvirkjum, ok sonum ins dáliga Dohet, er æ og æ illt unnu, frá því er þeir fæddust af móðurkviði*.”²¹⁷ The reference to Belial is reasonably clear as the name is usually applied to people in the Bible “who behave in a dissolute manner, give false testimony, or hatch infamous plots.”²¹⁸ The reference to Doeg (or Dohec), the trusted servant of King Saul, is on the other hand less common, although he was seen in Christian and Jewish tradition as the archetypal slanderer.²¹⁹ Interestingly as the four

²¹⁴ “like unto beasts in his cruelty...” Thómas saga vol. I, 514-15.

²¹⁵ “having now become from a rational being worse than the beast...” Ibid., 515-17. I have not found a direct parallel to this description in the other Becket biographies.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 542. “the wild wolves on the gentle herd.” Ibid., 543.

²¹⁷ M.s.I., 358. “the sons of Belial, wicked ill-doers, and sons of the bad Dohet who from the day they were born from their mother’s womb did do evil.” M.s.I. (Rolls Series), 259. This comparison undoubtedly figured in the Latin Life for it also appears in the Leg. “Imminente vero die statuto inter eos, prædictus Hako cum septem vel octo navibus plenis, viris Belial et sanguinem sitientibus sibi associatis, prædictam insulam applicuit.” Leg., 306.

²¹⁸ Sub. “Belial” in Encyclopaedia Judaica. Vol. 2 (Jerusalem 1971), 419-420. See the biblical references given there.

²¹⁹ Ginzberg, L., The Legends of the Jews. Bible Times and Characters from Joshua and Esther. Vol. IV (Philadelphia 1946), 1936. St. Augustine referred to Doeg as a Judas-like figure who committed sacrilegious acts (most noticeably in his Sermo ad populum). See Dervos, P., “Doeg dans l’hagiographie Byzantine chez S. Augustin et

knights plan their assault on the archbishop, William of Canterbury compares them to the sons of Belial and the adherents of Doeg.²²⁰ The same biblical reference is applied to them in the so-called Anonymous II, a work written in 1172/73 and which was in all likelihood known to William of Canterbury.²²¹ It seems unlikely, although not impossible, that the mention of "Belial and Doeg" by Master Robert, William of Canterbury and the Anonymous II is a coincidence. Again the similarity of circumstances could have induced the authors to refer to the same biblical characters. Still, considering the relative obscurity of the reference, this solution seems somewhat far fetched. In this respect Peter Foote's suggestion that William of Canterbury's Life of Becket influenced Master Robert should be kept in mind.

In addition we know that William of Canterbury, Anonymous II and Robert of Cricklade made use of John of Salisbury's epistolary account of Thomas' martyrdom written in 1171.²²² All three were presumably also acquainted with John of Salisbury's well known and widely circulated corpus of letters on the Becket conflict.²²³ Now, in a remarkable letter addressed to Becket which ominously foreshadows his martyrdom, John

dan une lettre de S. Basile", Analecta Bollandiana 111 (1993), 72-73. The Íslenzk forrit editor of the saga did not know what to make of this biblical name. M.s.l., 358. His identity was pointed out by Foote, "Master Robert's Prologue", 75 (fn. 4).

²²⁰ "Quo ruitis, viri Belial, haeredes Dohec?" Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. Vol I, ed. by J. C. Robertson. Rolls Series (London 1875), 132.

²²¹ Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. Vol IV, ed. by J. C. Robertson. Rolls Series (London 1879), 129-133. Here, however, the names do not appear together as they do in William of Canterbury's and Master Robert's works on Becket.

²²² The Letters of John of Salisbury 2. The Later Letters (1163-1180). Ed. by W. J. Millor and C. N. L. Brooke. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford 1979), 724-738. See the helpful stemma in Barlow, Thomas Becket, 5. Orme concludes that Robert of Cricklade relied heavily on John's letter in his description of the martyrdom, see Orme, "A Reconstruction", 395.

²²³ For the historical background to these letters see Duggan, A., "John of Salisbury and Thomas Becket", The World of John of Salisbury. Ed. by M. Wilks. Studies in Church History 3 (Oxford 1984), 427-438.

compares the archbishop to King David and Henry II to Saul.²²⁴ In another letter to Becket he likens those who attacked the rights of the English Church and were responsible for his exile to the slayer of the priests of Nob, i.e. Doeg (I Samuel 22: 11-13).²²⁵ In fact John of Salisbury applies the Doeg comparison more than once in relation to the ecclesiastics who failed to support Becket.²²⁶

It is worth noting that the Saul and David theme hovers over the story of Hákon and Magnús as it is presented in M.s.l. and O.s. Most conspicuously, Hákon's envy of Magnús is echoed by Saul's attitude towards the popular and much loved David. Moreover, Hákon's meeting with the Swedish soothsayer bears a certain correspondence to Saul's visit to the Witch of Endor.²²⁷ Both seek help from a divinator in order to have their political future foretold and in the process both break religious taboos.²²⁸ The reasons why they took this step are also comparable. Whereas Saul seeks out the Witch of Endor as a consequence of God's refusal to tell him what the future brings, Hákon visits the soothsayer because St. Ólafr does not deem him worthy of divinatory revelation. However, given the distinctively "Nordic" flavour of this particular episode, it seems unlikely that it appeared in Master Robert's Life.²²⁹

²²⁴ The Letters of John of Salisbury, 168 & 174. Petrus de Rheims (d. 1247) likened the archbishop to King David and Henry II, the persecutor of the Church, to Saul. Phyllis, R. B., Thomas Becket in the Medieval Latin Preaching Tradition. An Inventory of Sermons about St. Thomas Becket c. 1170 — c. 1400. Instrumenta Patristica XXV (The Hague 1992), 222.

²²⁵ The Letters of John of Salisbury, 152.

²²⁶ Ibid., 132 ; 203.

²²⁷ M.s.l., 341-344. Samuel I. 28.

²²⁸ "En ef maður fer til finna oc verðr hann sannr að þui þa er hann utlægr oc ubota maðr oc firigort fe sinu öllu... ." Norges Gamle Love indtil 1387. Vol. I, ed. by R. Keyser & P. A. Munch (Christiania 1849), 389-390. See also the law of Borgarþing, *ibid.*, 351

²²⁹ Foote, "Observations on Orkneyinga saga", 199. This episode where the soothsayer prophecies about Hákon's future glory is curious. From my perspective it represents a highly conscious piece of literary composition where the author plays on established motifs relating to rulers who seek occult knowledge. In Oddr Snorrason's saga of Ólafr Tryggvason, composed ca. 1190, the missionary king also has his future foretold by a pagan Finn. In contrast to Hákon Pálsson, who goes out of his way to seek the shaman,

Nevertheless, a comparison between Saul and Hákon on one hand and Magnús and David on the other is particularly appropriate in the light of the theme of envy which runs through the narrative: "He [i.e. Hákon] was very envious of the friendships and lordliness of saint Magnus ; Hakon would willingly, with the greediness of his bad counsellors, hinder the honour of earl Magnus... ." ²³⁰

As Avrom Saltman has pointed out, implicit in John of Salisbury's comparison of Becket to David is yet another set of identifications: that of Henry with Absalom and Bishop Gilbert Foliot with Achitophel.²³¹ The same Gilbert is indeed denounced in Robert's Life of Becket for slandering the archbishop.²³²

Key figures in Absalom's revolt against David are Achitophel and Hushai. In M.s.l. we read:

PvÍ gerðist svá, at jarlar sendu sín í meðal, með orðsendingu friðar ok sættar, ina hyggnustu ráðgjafa sína, er réttlíga bera merking þeira Chusi [i.e. Husai] ok Achitophel, er báru sáttmál milli þeira Davíðs konungs ok Absalons, sonar hans, þá er þeir váru missáttir.²³³

King Ólafr is effectively forced by his retainers to attend the meeting. Moreover in Odd's account the Finn recognises the spiritual superiority of the Christian king and in his presence his occult power begins to wane. In other words, the meeting between the two (which undoubtedly is based on oral tradition) is turned into an *exemplum*, a symbolic display, of the dying world of paganism in face of Ólaf's missionary efforts. *Saga Olafs Tryggvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk*. Ed. by Finnur Jónsson (København 1932), 66-70. In the O.s. episode (which also appears in M.s.s. and M.s.l.) on the other hand Hákon and the soothsayer meet on level terms: "But I [i.e. Hákon] have come to see thee, because I have been thinking that neither of us need [despise] the other because of his own virtues or religious beliefs." *The Orkneyinga saga*, 195.

²³⁰ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 257. "Hann [i.e. Hákon] var mjök öfundsjúkr um vinsældir ok höfðingskap ins heilaga Magnúss; vildi Hákon gjarna með ágirni sinna illra ráðgjafa fyrirkoma sæmdum Magnúss jarls... ." M.s.l., 356.

²³¹ Saltman, A, "John of Salisbury and the World of the Old Testament", *The World of John of Salisbury*. Ed. by M. Wilks. *Studies in Church History* 3 (Oxford 1984), 343-348.

²³² On Foliot's role in the Becket controversy see Knowles, D., *The Episcopal Colleagues of Archbishop Thomas Becket* (Cambridge 1951), 115-127.

²³³ M.s.l., 359.

For that, it so came about that the earls sent with messages between them for peace and atonement their most trusty counsellors, who rightly betoken Chusi and Ahitophel, who brought about the atonement between king David and Absalom his son when they had fallen out.²³⁴

This passage is somewhat curious for in the Book of Samuel Achitophel and Husai can hardly be said to be involved in peace negotiations of any sort. On the contrary, Achitophel is the evil counsellor who plots the murder of David and to that end he incites and encourages Absalom. It is only due to Husai's cunning that his plan is thwarted. Surely Hákon must here be identified with Absalom, his henchmen with Achitophel, Magnús with David and his well meaning, albeit ineffectual, counsellors with Husai. Against this background it is interesting to read in M.s.l. that Hákon awoke "at once awaking as a grim she-bear robbed of her cubs" when he heard of Magnús' return to the earldom.²³⁵ The phrase echoes a passage in II Samuel 17: 8 where Husai tells Absalom that David will react as a "bear robbed of her whelps in the field" (King James version) against any attempt on his life.

Saul and Absalom are not the only biblical tyrants whom Master Robert found it appropriate to allude to in his portrayal of Earl Hákon Pálsson. The third one is the blasphemous and covetous King Ahab (I Kings 16-22). In M.s.l. we read: "All sins come of covetousness, and all unlawful desires proceed from greediness. That was proved with Ahab the most wrongful king, who persecuted Elias [i.e. Elijah] the prophet. ... The very same showed the traitor earl Hacon... ." ²³⁶ It is noteworthy that in a letter of 1166 John of Salisbury uses the same biblical comparison when he

²³⁴ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 259.

²³⁵ Ibid., 259. "jafnskjótt vaknaði sem grimm birna at hvelpum ræntum... ." M.s.l. 358.

²³⁶ Ibid., 260. "Allar syndir gerast af girnd, ok allar fýstir óleyfðar af ágirni fram ganga. Þat reyndist með Achab, inum ranglátasta konungi, er ofsótti Heliam spámann. ... Þetta it sama svikarinn Hákon jarl... ." M.s.l., 361.

likens King Henry's persecution of Becket to Ahab's oppression of the prophet Elijah, who of course is represented by Earl Magnús in M.s.I.²³⁷

The impression is hard to escape that Master Robert was influenced by the biblical allusions adopted by John of Salisbury in his writings on the Becket controversy. Hákon and Henry II are compared, directly or indirectly, to Saul, Absalom and Ahab, all rulers who persecuted or treated wrongfully the chosen vessels of God's grace: David and Elijah or, in other words, Becket and St. Magnús. In addition we have Doeg, the evil advisor, sowing ill will and laying the groundwork for the final tragedy. In view of the many allusions he draws from these two books of the Old Testament it is hardly surprising that Master Robert considered Jerome's preface to Samuel and the Book of Kings to be an appropriate introduction to his work.

Both Becket and Magnús behave as though they were invited to a convivial gathering as they face certain death, Magnús to a feast and Thomas to a wedding.²³⁸ Again one must acknowledge that cheerfulness of martyrs, particularly those of Late Antiquity, at their hour of death is a stock formula in martyrology, as is the wedding or the feasting motif.²³⁹ Moreover it is uncertain whether this motif came into Thómas saga II through Robert of Cricklade's work for it also appears in Edward Grim's Life of Becket completed in 1172.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ The Letters of John of Salisbury, 247.

²³⁸ "Hann var svá glaðr ok kátr, er þeir handtóku hann, sem honum væri til veizlu boðit." M.s.I., 366. "He was as glad and merry when they laid hands on him as if he were bidden to a banquet.... ." M.s.I. (Rolls Series 265). Leg., 307. "Hann huggar harmþrungna, ok gerist svá blíðr, sem þeir menn væru komnir, er honum byði til brullaups." Thómas saga vol. I, 534.

²³⁹ "and then, after duplicating in her own body all her children's sufferings, she hastened to rejoin them, rejoicing and glorying in her death as though she had been invited to a bridal banquet instead of being a victim of the beasts." The martyr is St. Blandina of Lyon and the passage is from one of the earliest Christian *passiones*. Acts of the Christian Martyrs. Ed. by J. Musurillo (Oxford 1972), 797. See also *ibid.*, 209 and O'Reilly, "The Double Martyrdom", 192.

²⁴⁰ "tanquam ad nuptias illum invitaturi venissent." Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. Vol. II, ed. by J. C. Robertson. Rolls

As Magnús receives the first blow from the executioner he “*fell þá allt til jarðar ok gaf sik guði í vald, færandi honum sjálfan sik í fórn.*”²⁴¹ After Thomas receives the second blow to his head Thómas saga II says: “*fellr erkibyskup framm á gólfrit með réttum líkama, svá fagrliga sem til bænar offrandi sik lifandi fórn...*”²⁴² Again similar phrases are doubtless ubiquitous in ancient and medieval martyrology. Still the verbal correspondence here is worthy of attention.

Thómas saga II tells that three of the assassins did penance for their crime, but one of them, William de Tracy, did not atone for his deed and accordingly he immediately experienced the wrath of God in the form of a horrible illness. A similar fate befell many of those who had supported the knights in their wrong-doing.²⁴³ Interestingly this description of godly wrath turning against the archbishop's enemies is peculiar to Thómas saga II and Margaret Orme considers Robert of Cricklade the most likely source.²⁴⁴ Likewise in M.s.l. (and O.s.) the horrible fate which befell those who betrayed the martyr is noted.²⁴⁵ Whether this section figured in Master Robert's work is impossible to tell. Henry II willingly undergoes a public humiliation after the killing of Becket and Hákon Pálsson atones for his slaying of Magnús by undertaking a pilgrimage to Rome. Although both acts are historical facts the parallels are still intriguing.

In his influential study of sanctity in the later Middle Ages, André Vauchez points out that a distinctive form of sainthood prevailed in

Series (London 1876), 433. “Eductus ergo hilari mente et intrepido animo quasi ad epulas invitatus...”

²⁴¹ M.s.l., 368. “Then he fell flat on the earth and gave himself over into God's power, bringing himself to Him as an offering.” M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 267.

²⁴² “and at that blow the archbishop falleth forward his body being stretched on the floor so sweetly as though offering himself in prayer as a living sacrifice.” Thómas saga vol. I, 544.

²⁴³ Thómas saga vol. II, 38-40.

²⁴⁴ Orme, “A Reconstruction”, 396.

²⁴⁵ O.s., 120-121. M.s.l., 372.

Northern and North-Western Europe in this period. The overwhelming number of saints in Scandinavia, England and France were of noble stock: kings, princes, earls, bishops or abbots. In particular the royal martyr dominated the ranks of sainthood in England until the eleventh century and in Scandinavia into the thirteenth century. In England there was a notable shift from the veneration of royal saints to that of bishop saints; the cataclysmic event was the murder of Thomas Becket for in his death the popular and emotionally charged idea of the “innocent martyr” fused with the ideals of ecclesiastical independence. Here was an extremely potent blend and the biographers of the saintly bishops of the thirteenth and fourteenth century made frequent use of the Becket model of sanctity even though the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom rarely came into play.²⁴⁶ Thus the model of the “holy sufferer”, intimately associated with the martyrdom of secular rulers, was applied to the murder of Thomas Becket. Looking beyond authorship it is perhaps this idea which ultimately links the Latin Lives of St. Magnús and St. Thomas; it can be argued that the outstanding feature of Robert’s *Vita* of Magnús is that it supplements the hagiographic pattern associated with martyred rulers with elements from the early corpus on the Canterbury saint.

Within a year of Becket’s death Robert of Cricklade composed forty-two homilies on Ezekiel.²⁴⁷ Commenting on the prophet’s vision of the “New Temple”, the Oxford prior gives a short account, surely among the first to be written, of Becket’s life and passion. On this occasion Robert’s ambition was not to write a traditional *vita et passio* of the saint. Rather, he

²⁴⁶ Vauchez, A., *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*. Transl. by J. Birrell (Cambridge 1997, originally published in 1988), 167-173. For an Icelandic example see Cormack, “The Hand of Revision.”

²⁴⁷ The homilies are discussed in Smalley, *The Becket Conflict*, 197-200. The homilies have not been edited but the biblical passages which Robert elaborates on (the first 38 homilies) are gathered by Schneyer, J. B., *Repertorium der Lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters. Für die Zeit von 1150-1350. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters* Band xlii, Heft 5 (Münster 1974), 171-177. The work is preserved in **MS. Pembroke College Cambridge 30, fo. 145 a.**

handled the material in the manner of the sermonist who expounds Christian doctrine and virtues through *exempla*. For instance, by his life of patience and steadfastness in face of worldly pressure, his celibacy and courage, Thomas Becket makes all of us blush with shame.²⁴⁸ Indeed Robert's erudite style suggests that the work was composed with a learned congregation in mind, perhaps the resident scholars of Oxford.

In this context it is worth noting the conspicuous sermon-like tone of Master Robert's sections of M.s.l. The life and martyrdom of St. Magnús is frequently used as a reference point for moral and theological digressions. His celibacy, generosity, piety and ultimate self-sacrifice are the ideals which those reading or listening to the work should aspire to emulate:

Nú, mínir kærustu, rekum brott líkamligar fýstir, ok forðumst elsku óleyfðra hluta, sigrandi ok yfirstígandi árásir lastanna, en fylgjum fótsporum ok lífi þessa ins dýrðliga píslarváts með öllu megni várs hugskots, svá framalliga sem várr breyskleikr má bera. Fylgjum vegum lífs hans, höldum dæmum verka hans.²⁴⁹

Now, my dearest, let us cast away bodily lusts, and keep us from the love of unlawful things, conquering and rising above the attacks of blasphemy; but let us follow the footsteps and life of this the glorious martyr with all the strength of our minds, so far as our feebleness may bring us. Let us follow the ways of his life; let us hold to the pattern of his works.²⁵⁰

In a similar manner as Robert of Cricklade compares Thomas to a strong pillar supporting the Church in times of disarray, Master Robert presents Magnús as the expeller of Satan and heathendom from the Northern world and the one who "brings the tabernacle of almighty God", the Christian religion and the Church, to the region.²⁵¹ Both seem to have been fond of the tabernacle metaphor for Master Robert (albeit through St. Jerome) compares Magnús' self-sacrifice to the offerings brought into the

²⁴⁸ Smalley, *The Becket Controversy*, 199.

²⁴⁹ M.s.l., 371.

²⁵⁰ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 269-270.

²⁵¹ M.s.l., 370.

tabernacle while Robert of Cricklade likens the New Temple, which he emphasised was but another manifestation of the Tabernacle, to the temporal Church.²⁵² We know that Robert of Cricklade was familiar with Bede's *De tabernaculo* as he contributed to the current theological debate on the subject.²⁵³ The sermon-like style of Master Robert's presentation, borne out by such phrases as "*mínir kærustu*" and "*inir kæru bræðr*", the latter a translation of "*fratres carissimi*", i.e. dearest brothers. Expressions of this kind are mainly, although not exclusively, associated with medieval sermons and homilies²⁵⁴ and Robert of Cricklade frequently made use of them in his exegesis on Ezekiel.²⁵⁵

That Master Robert was influenced by the early hagiographic and epistolary corpus on St. Thomas Becket is, I believe, beyond reasonable doubt. In a somewhat tantalising fashion the fragmentarily preserved *Vita* of St. Magnús by Master Robert leads us to a small and textually incestuous group of early authorities on Becket: William of Canterbury, Robert of Cricklade, *Anonymous II* and John of Salisbury. Although this conclusion does not prove that Master Robert of M.s.I. and *magister* Robert of Cricklade were one and the same person the body of evidence certainly points strongly in that direction. Robert's presence in Scotland in the 1160s should also be taken into account here.²⁵⁶

²⁵² Ibid., 370. Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 197-200.

²⁵³ Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 109. Robert of Cricklade's stance was that the tabernacle should be interpreted allegorically rather than literally. This accords well with the way it is used in Robert's *Life of St. Magnús*.

²⁵⁴ E.g., *Gamalt norsk homiliebok*: 57, 14 ; 62, 21 ; 65, 5 ; 66, 22; 73, 3. The second numeral refers to the line-number.

²⁵⁵ At the beginning of the following homilies: nr. 3: "*oportet, fratres carissimi, textum litterae subtilius intellegere...*" Nr. 17: "*Consideremus, fratres carissimi...*" Nr. 27 "*Continuam, fratres, expositionem exhibuimus...*" Schneyer, *Repertorium*, 171-177.

²⁵⁶ Robert of Cricklade's journey to Scotland, where he shows up as a witness to a number of charters issued by King Malcolm IV, was noted by Finnbogi Guðmundsson. O.s., xlvj-xlvii. The documents where Robert's name appears have hitherto been dated between 1159 and 1165. It is, however, possible to date Robert's journey to Scotland with more accuracy. Since the publication of the acts of Malcolm IV, G. W. S. Barrow has corrected some of his manuscript readings, including a charter issued at Perth where Robert of Cricklade now appears as a witness. See the uncorrected document in *The*

Why the prior of St. Frideswide's took on this task in the first place is, however, a question that must remain open. Although Robert of Cricklade can hardly be classified with professional hagiographers of this period such as Goscelin of Saint-Bertin or Henry of Avranches,²⁵⁷ his literary output in this genre was not confined to Thomas Becket. When Robert took up his position as prior of St. Frideswide's, a Life of the patron saint of the monastery, the virgin St. Frideswide (d. 727) had already been composed (ca. 1100-1130).²⁵⁸ This work (Life A), however, was short and written in simple rather unsophisticated Latin. It was almost certainly Robert of Cricklade who undertook the task of re-writing (ca. 1140-1170) this *vita* (Life B).²⁵⁹ Robert's work, which is almost twice the length of Life A, is a "stylish literary re-working"²⁶⁰ which emphasises the moral lessons to be learned from the conduct of the virtuous virgin.²⁶¹ As suggested it appears that *magister* Robert approached the St. Magnús material in a similar way.

I do not believe the question why Robert of Cricklade, prior of St. Frideswide's, wrote a Life of St. Magnús, can be answered with certainty.²⁶² Perhaps the challenge of fitting the martyrdom of the Orkney saint within an intellectually acceptable framework appealed to him.

Acts of Malcolm IV King of Scots, 1153-1165. Collected and edited by G. W. S. Barrow. *Regesta regum Scottorum 1153-1424*, vol. I (Edinburgh 1960), 274 (nr. 260). The Perth charter was definitely issued in 1164 and therefore it appears certain that Robert stayed in Scotland during the winter of 1164-1165, presumably at the court of King Malcolm. *The Acts of William I King of Scots 1165-1214*. Edited by G. W. S. Barrow, with the collaboration of W.W. Scott. *Regesta regum Scottorum*. Vol. II (Edinburgh 1971), 118. For the possible relevance of this journey to Robert's authorship of the Magnús *Vita* see Foote, "Master Robert's Prologue", 74.

²⁵⁷ On hagiography in general in this period see, for instance, Bartlett, R., "The Hagiography of Angevin England", *Thirteenth Century England V. Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference 1993* (1995), 37-53.

²⁵⁸ Edited by Blair, J, "Saint Frideswide Reconsidered", *Oxoniensia* 12 (1982), 93-101.

²⁵⁹ Edited in *ibid.*, 103-116.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁶¹ Like the Robert of M.s.l., Robert of Cricklade uses the address "fratres karissimi". *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁶² For background sketch of the ecclesiastical ties that may have induced Robert of Cricklade to write a Life of St. Magnús, see Foote, "Master Robert's Prologue", 76.

Certainly the way *magister* Robert places the martyrdom of the Orkney saint within a historical and salvific context while at the same time alluding to the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, suggests that he took his task seriously. Beyond this point, however, we are in danger of becoming lost in the realm of pure speculation.

Part 2

The Emergence of the Cult of St. Magnús

2.1. The Elevation at Birsay and the Translation to Kirkwall

Our knowledge of the *immediate* events surrounding the emergence of the cult of Earl Magnús of Orkney is entirely derived from Orkneyinga saga.²⁶³ There is good reason to assume that the section of the saga which deals with the sanctification of the Orkney saint derives from a *Miracula* of St. Magnús, presumably compiled shortly after the translation of his bones to Kirkwall in 1136/1137. The miracle accounts in O.s. and M.s.s. start off with a miracle that involves a Shetlander by the name of Bergfinnr Skatason which leads into a description of how Bishop Vilhjálmr of Orkney was converted to the cause of Magnús' sanctity.²⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that in M.s.l. the episode of Vilhjálmr's conversion is separate from the rest of the miracles. Indeed in the section of M.s.l. where one might expect to read about the *elevatio* at Birsay there is a lacuna in the main manuscript, **ÁM 350 4to**.²⁶⁵ Moreover the saga does not refer to the translation to Kirkwall. One can only assume that the Icelandic compiler of the saga thought this event of little interest to his audience. His main aim was to present an account of the life, martyrdom and supernatural powers of St. Magnús and in this respect the development of his cult in the earldom of Orkney in the 1130s was of secondary importance.

²⁶³ There is no difference of any importance between the testimony of M.s.s. and O.s. in this respect.

²⁶⁴ O.s., 131-132. M.s.s., 334-335,

²⁶⁵ M.s.l., 374-375.

After pleading by Þóra, Magnús' mother, Hákon allowed the corporal remains of the murdered earl to be moved to Christ Church, at Birsay. Earlier Hákon is said to have refused to have him buried at a church site.²⁶⁶ We know that a church was situated on Egilsay, the isle was in fact an episcopal residence.²⁶⁷ Accordingly it was not the wish to bury Magnús in hallowed ground which lay behind the decision to have his corporal remains moved to Birsay. Christ Church had been built by Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson around the middle of the eleventh century and during his reign it became the main residence of both the bishop and earl. Þorfinnr himself had been buried at the church²⁶⁸ and there may have been a tradition in the early twelfth century of laying the Orkney earls to rest at this particular location. In any case, the burial of a ruler in an important town or ecclesiastical centre served as a symbolic manifestation of his stature.²⁶⁹ For instance, following Earl Rögnvaldr Kali's death in 1158/59 his body was transported with some ceremony from Caithness to St. Magnús Cathedral.²⁷⁰

Magnús' sanctity is said to have first been revealed by a "heavenly fragrance" near the grave and a column of light appearing over it.²⁷¹ Following these miraculous portents we are told that

²⁶⁶ O.s. 119.

²⁶⁷ Radford, C. A. R., "Birsay and the spread of Christianity to the North", Birsay: A Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power. Orkney Heritage 2 (1983), 27.

²⁶⁸ O.s., 119.

²⁶⁹ A case in point is the Icelandic poem Norégs konunga-tal, composed ca. 1200 at Oddi, where the burial places of every king of Norway from Haraldr *hárfagri* to Magnús Erlingsson (d. 1184) are duly noted. Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning 800-1200 A, bind I-II. Ed. by Finnur Jónsson (København 1912-1915), A I, 579-589. See also the elaborate description in Morkinskinna of the translation of King Magnús *góði's* corpse from Denmark (in 1047) and its burial in Nidaros. Morkinskinna. Ed. by Finnur Jónsson (København 1932), 145-148.

²⁷⁰ O.s., 315-316.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

Þvi næst gerðu menn ferð sína, bæði af Orkneyjum ok Hialltlandi, þeir er vanheilir varo, ok vauctu at leiði ins helga Magnus jarls, ok toko bot sinna meina; enn þó þorðu menn eigi þessu upp at halda meðan Hákon iarl lifði.²⁷²

...men who were sick made pilgrimages — both from the Orkneys and Shetland — and they kept vigil at the grave of Saint Magnus the Earl, and were cured of their diseases. But yet men did not dare spread this abroad while Earl Hakon was alive.²⁷³

Hákon Pálsson died ca. 1123 and was succeeded by his sons Páll and Haraldr. The latter, however, died shortly afterwards. Páll is said to have taken the same negative stance as his father had done towards the sanctity of Earl Magnús. In addition we are told that Vilhjálmr, the bishop of Orkney at the time, displayed scepticism and indifference towards rumours relating to the same matter.²⁷⁴

The state of the cult in the period between Magnús' death in 1117 and the official recognition of his sanctity in 1135 is impossible to reconstruct (for these two dates see below). The miracles are not particularly helpful in this respect for the majority of them occur after the *translatio* to Kirkwall and can thus be seen as an advertisement for the corporal relics enshrined at that location. It is likely, however, that in the absence of a relic-centred cult, those places that had been associated with his reign became important in keeping his memory alive. Here it is worth noting the land-marks and places in Shetland which bear the name of the saint.²⁷⁵ A hint of the decentralised nature of the cult before his canonisation can perhaps be

²⁷² Ibid., 120.

²⁷³ The Orkneying saga, 212.

²⁷⁴ O.s., 120. "Hann [i.e. Bishop Vilhjálmr] tortrygði lengi heilagleik Magnus jarls." O.s. 121. "Viljalmr byskup drap ok mioc i egg því, er menn saugðu fra iarteinum Magnus jarls, ok kallaði aftru micla at fara með slicu." Ibid., 131. "For a long time he disbelieved in the sanctity of Earl Magnus." The Orkneying saga, 213. "Bishop William also took much of the edge off what men said about Earl Magnus' miracles and declared it heresy to go about with such tales." Ibid., 219.

²⁷⁵ Crawford, B. E., "The Cult of St. Magnus in Shetland", Essays in Shetland History: heiðursrit til T. Y. M. Manson 1984, 9th February 1984. Ed. by B. E. Crawford (Lerwick 1984), 75-79. It is naturally impossible to establish the age of these place-names.

gleaned from O.s. which tells that before the grave at Birsay became a place of pilgrimage "men began often to call on him if they stood in any danger, and immediately the prayers were answered which they made."²⁷⁶

O.s. thus gives the impression that the initial stage in the development of the cult was marked by a spontaneous belief in his sanctity. Why this devotion appeared in the first place is difficult to assess and the saga material is not very helpful on the issue. It has been suggested that the involvement of Magnús in clearing out pirates and raiders from Shetland may have enhanced his posthumous popularity in this part of the earldom.²⁷⁷ O.s. tell that in tandem with Hákon he eliminated a pirate by the name of Þorbjörn in Burra Firth in Shetland.²⁷⁸ This event was of sufficient significance for it to have been mentioned in a (now lost) poem on Hákon and Magnús. Moreover it is noteworthy that Shetlanders feature in the majority of those miracles where the place of origin of the people involved is noted.²⁷⁹ Furthermore the only recorded miracle that occurred

²⁷⁶ The Orkneyinga saga, 212. "Síþan toku menn at heita a hann opt, ef i haska varo staddir, ok greiddiz þegar þeira mal, sem þeir beiddu." O.s., 120. It has been argued that a church was built and dedicated to Magnús on Egilsay not long after his death. The primary function of this church "was to mark one of the sites associated with the martyrdom..." Fernie, E., "The Church of St. Magnus, Egilsay", St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance. Ed. by B. E. Crawford (Aberdeen 1988), 159. For an interesting study of the way cults were able to flourish in the absence of official recognition, patronage, hagiographic literature etc., see Smith, J. M. H., "Oral and Written: Saints, Miracles, and Relics in Brittany, c. 850-1250", Speculum 65 (1990), 309-43.

²⁷⁷ Crawford, "The Cult of St. Magnus in Shetland", 77-79.

²⁷⁸ O.s., 111. It is not clear whether this is the same poem as the one composed about Hákon (see ch. 1.1.). The wording "kvæde því, er ort er um þa.." suggests that the author of O.s. was familiar with another lost poem dealing with the joint reign of Magnús and Hákon.

²⁷⁹ It is evident that the three versions of the miracles of St. Magnús are redactions of a lost collection. Each collection contains materials – both whole miracles and incidental details – which do not appear in the other versions. Altogether O.s., M.s.l. and M.s.s. contain twenty-four miracles attributed to Magnús. Of these two take place at his grave at Birsay, seventeen at his shrine in Kirkwall, one in Iceland, one in Norway, one in England and two at an unknown location. Two aspects relating to the Magnús miracles are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, the prominence of Shetlanders. Of the eighteen miracles where the place of origin of the people from the earldom is noted, sixteen involve people from Shetland whereas only three from Orkney and one from Caithness (one miracle involves two men from both areas) are cured. Moreover, the same Shetland farmer, Bergfinnr Skatason, plays a part in five miracles both before and after the translation of Magnús' remains to Kirkwall. Secondly, eight miracles involve the

before the *elevatio* involves Shetlanders who kept vigil at Magnús' grave.²⁸⁰ There can be little doubt that the high profile of Shetlanders in the early stage of the cult reflects the fact that the isles formed a part of Magnús' half of the earldom.

The first earl to support the cult of St. Magnús was Rögnvaldr Kolsson, the son of Kolr Sæbjarnarson, a chieftain from Agðir in south-western Norway, and Gunnhildur, the sister of the martyr. In 1129 King Sigurðr *Jórsalafari* of Norway (1103-1130) bestowed the title of earl on Rögnvaldr along with the share of the earldom which had belonged to Magnús.²⁸¹ For reasons that are not elaborated on in O.s., Rögnvaldr did not immediately claim his inheritance. However in 1135 King Haraldr *gilli* of Norway confirmed the grant²⁸² and in the spring of the same year Rögnvaldr sent envoys to the Northern Islands and Caithness in order to test his support in the region and negotiate with the reigning earl, Páll

cure of madness and devil possession. The others include the cure of leprosy, paralysis, blindness and other ailments. The ratio of mental disturbance is noticeably high compared, for instance, with the miracles attributed to St. Ólafr of Norway. Of the ten healing miracles narrated by Snorri Sturluson in *Heimskringla* not a single one involves the curing of madness or possession. See Whaley, D., "Heimskringla and its Sources: The Miracles of Ólafr Helgi", *The Sixth International Saga Conference 28.7.- 2.8. Workshop Papers II* (Copenhagen 1985), 1083-1103., esp. 1084-1085. Of the forty-five or so miracle accounts recorded in *Passio et miracula beati Olai* only two involve cure of mental illness. *Passio et miracula*, 80-92 ; 106-107. Of the 176 miracles attributed to the Icelandic saints, St. Þorlákr, St. Jón Ögmundarson and Guðmundr Arason (not canonised) only twelve involve cures of mental illnesses. Whaley, D., "Miracles in the Biskupa sögur: Icelandic Variations on an International Theme", *The Ninth International Saga Conference. Akureyri 31.7 - 4.8 1994. Samtíðarsögur. The Contemporary Sagas. Vol. II, pre-print* (Reykjavík 1994), 856. In the miracle collections of St. Þorlákr of Iceland only one account deals with possession or mental illness. Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson, "Diabolical Possession and Exorcism in Medieval Iceland", Unpublished Manuscript (1994), 2. That St. Magnús was particularly associated with healing madness and devil possession (closely related in this period) has further support in the Icelandic *Árna saga byskups* from the early fourteenth century. The saga tells of an Icelandic priest who was cured of devil possession in the Faroe Islands when he called upon Magnús in a church dedicated to the saint. *Árna saga byskups*, 183-184.

²⁸⁰ O.s., 131-132.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 154.

²⁸² Ibid., 156.

Hákonarson.²⁸³ Predictably the messengers carried back Páll's refusal to hand over half of the earldom. Next summer Rögnvaldr arrived in Shetland with his followers but was outwitted on this occasion by Earl Páll and returned to Norway.

Rögnvaldr is first associated with St. Magnús' cult at a war-council he held in Norway in 1137, shortly before his second expedition to the earldom and after the *elevatio* of the earl. At this meeting his father is said to have advised him to call on Magnús to aid and protect him in the campaign ahead.²⁸⁴ In the spring of 1137 Rögnvaldr arrived again in the earldom, secured for himself Shetland and the North Isles of Orkney. Through the mediation of the Orkney bishop a temporary truce was agreed upon; Rögnvaldr set up camp on mainland Orkney while Páll went to Rousay. However, the impending showdown between the two earls never materialised. For reasons that need not detain us here, Earl Páll was taken into custody by a powerful local magnate, Sveinn Ásleifarson, and shipped to Scotland. This marked the end of Páll's reign and in the late summer of 1137 Earl Rögnvaldr Kali had assumed sole rulership in the Earldom of Orkney. In the same year, or at least not long afterwards, he commenced the building of St. Magnús Cathedral.

The official recognition of the cult of St. Magnús was the work of Bishop Vilhjálmr although, as mentioned earlier, he is said to have been to begin with less than enthusiastic about the earl's saintly reputation. When miracles were reported and pilgrims began to arrive at the martyr's grave, he "took much of the edge off what men said about Earl Magnus' miracles and declared it heresy to go about with such tales."²⁸⁵ Vilhjálmr's opposition did not cease with Hákon's death (ca. 1123) and the succession

²⁸³ Ibid., 157-159.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 176-177.

²⁸⁵ The Orkneyinga saga, 254. "Viljalmur byskup drap ok mioc i egg því, er menn saugðu fra iarteinum Magnus iarls, ok kallaði aftru micla at far með slicu." O.s., 131.

of Páll. One summer, however, the bishop is travelling home from Norway when stormy weather forces him to stay in Shetland. Vilhjálmr vows that he will not stand against the canonisation of Earl Magnús if the weather abated. The bishop then travels safely to Kirkwall but fails to keep his promise and as a punishment for his oath-breaking he is struck blind. Finally though sight is restored to him at the grave of Magnús and after this "the Bishop summoned to him all the men of highest rank in the Orkneys, and made it known to them that he was now going to search the grave of Earl Magnus."²⁸⁶

Ok er til var grafit, var kistan up komin or iorpu. Let byskup þa þva beinunum ok varo allvel lit; hann let þa taka einn kaugul ok reynir i vigpum elldi þrysvar, ok brann eigi, helldr varþ hann alitz sem gull. Þat er sumra manna saugn, at hann væri þa runninn i kross. Þar urðu þa margar iartegnir at helgum domi Magnus iarls. Var þa licaminn i skrin lagðr ok sett yfir altari; þat var Luciumessudag: þa hafði hann i moldu legit i vetr ok xx. Var þa i laug tekit at hallda hvarntveggia daginn, upptaukudaginn ok anndlazdaginn. Heilagr domr Magnus iarls var þar varþveittr neccvara hriþ.²⁸⁷

And when the grave was opened, the coffin was taken up from the earth [more correct translation: "the coffin had come up from the earth" (i.e. of its own accord)]. The bishop then had the bones washed, and they were very clean and bright. Then he had a knucklebone taken and tried it thrice in hallowed fire, and it burned not, but rather did shine like gold. Some men say that it ran into the form of a cross. In this place there were many miracles through the holy relics of Earl Magnus. That was on Saint Lucia's Day; he had then lain in the earth twenty-one years. Then the custom was established that each day should be hallowed – the day that he was taken up and the day of his death. The holy relics of Earl Magnus were kept there for some time.²⁸⁸

As noted the O.s. account of the canonisation on Birsay and subsequent translation of the relics to Kirkwall appears to have served as an introduction to *miracula* of St. Magnús.²⁸⁹ In a sense the episode takes

²⁸⁶ The Orkneyinga saga, 220. "Eptir þat heimti byskup at ser alla ina gaufguztu menn i Orkneyium, ok gerði þa bert fyrir þeim, at hann villdi þa leita til leiðis Magnus iarls." O.s., 133.

²⁸⁷ O.s., 133.

²⁸⁸ The Orkneyinga saga, 220.

²⁸⁹ On *translatio* – the retrieval of relics and their enshrinement – as genre in Danish hagiography see Gad, *Legenden*, 126. In general see Martin Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes*. *Tyoplogie des sources du moyen age occidental* 33 (Brepols Turnhout 1979).

the form of a dialogue between Vilhjálmr and the saint where the bishop responds appropriately to the supernatural signs directed to him.²⁹⁰

Scholars have found much to explain in the chapter of the saga that tells of the elevation of Magnús and the chain of events which led up to it. Thus early this century Dietrichson attempted to "translate this legendary language into historical language."²⁹¹ He went on to suggest that Vilhjálmr met Rögnvaldr (or his father) in Norway and realised that the pendulum of power was swinging in the earl's direction and thus he came to the conclusion that his future (and that of the Orcadian Church) no longer lay with Páll's cause. In the opinion of Dietrichson, Vilhjálmr's miraculous conversion was entirely political in nature. This hypothesis has been taken up by notable historians of medieval Orkney such as Hugh Marwick.²⁹² W. P. L. Thomson went a step further and speculates that prior to Rögnvald's second expedition to Orkney, the earl sent Vilhjálmr a message which carried "secret terms ... sufficiently attractive to send him hurrying off to Norway."²⁹³ Presumably this included a promise to begin the construction of St. Magnús Cathedral.

Admittedly it is tempting to interpret the episcopal canonisation of Magnús as the outcome of a plot between Bishop Vilhjálmr and Earl

²⁹⁰ A variation of the "reluctant bishop" *topos* can be found in the early thirteenth-century Danish hagiographic work on St. Theodgarus (d. in the 1060s) entitled *De Sancto Theodgaro*. Shortly after the death of Theodgarus a priest sees a heavenly light shining over his grave. Encouraged by the local population in his effort to have the sanctity of Theodgarus recognised, the priest secures the consent of the pope and on October 30, 1067, his bones are elevated and placed on the altar. However Ulfricus, the local bishop, and King Sven Estridsson refuse to believe in his holiness. The king orders Ulfricus to defrock the said priest which the bishop does and moreover submits the relics of Theodgarus to an elaborate trial by fire. When the bones are retrieved unscathed from the fire the bishop is convinced of Theodgarus's sanctity. Ulfricus tells the king about what had happened and he is also persuaded. *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 14-16.

²⁹¹ Dietrichson, L. H. S., & J. Meyer, *Monumenta Orcadia. The Norsemen in the Orkneys and the Monuments they have left* (Kristiania 1906), 25-26.

²⁹² "one is disposed to conclude that Rögnvald and Kol had been active in collusion with William ever since the latter's visit to Norway..." Marwick, H., *Orkney* (1951), 62-3.

²⁹³ Thomson, *History of Orkney*, 61.

Rögnvaldr. The fact that Vilhjálmr kept his office after the change of power and even followed Rögnvaldr on his famous pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the early 1150s suggests that the two were on good terms. It must be stressed, however, that nowhere does the saga hint at a co-operation between the bishop and the earl in this matter. Although the silence of the source does not rule out the possibility that this was the case, it is nevertheless essential to look closer at the chain of events before any generalisations can be made.

Unfortunately the chronology regarding the *elevatio* of Magnús and the subsequent translation of his relics to Kirkwall is not altogether clear, mainly because the section which tells of these events is less than ideally integrated into the main narrative of O.s.²⁹⁴ As a result the involvement of Bishop Vilhjálmr is presented in a sort of historical vacuum. No date, for instance, is mentioned when he embarks on his journey to Norway; it is simply told that it "happened one summer that Bishop William sailed east to Norway... ." ²⁹⁵ Moreover the saga does not say how much time lapsed between the elevation and the translation.

About one aspect O.s. is clear. Vilhjálmr elevated Magnús in the reign of Páll Hákonarson for the saga states that the bishop "promised that he would take up the holy relics of Earl Magnus whether Earl Paul liked it well or ill... ." ²⁹⁶ From O.s. we also gather that Páll was still in power when the relics were moved from Birsay to Kirkwall for when Bishop Vilhjálmr announced that they were to be transported to a new site the earl is said to have been present.²⁹⁷ If this piece of information is to be believed

²⁹⁴ Bishop Vilhjálmr is thus twice introduced to the story and his scepticism regarding Magnús' sanctity is mentioned twice in very similar manner. First in chapter 52 and later in chapter 56. O.s., 121 ; *ibid.*, 130-31.

²⁹⁵ The Orkneyinga Saga, 219. "Þat var eit sumar, at Vilialmr byskup for austr til Noregs... ." O.s., 132.

²⁹⁶ The Orkneyinga saga, 220. "ok het því, at hann skyldi upp taka helgan dom Magnus iarls, hvart er þat licapi Pali iarli vel æpa illa... ." O.s., 133.

²⁹⁷ O.s., 134.

– and there seems no reason to do otherwise – the *elevatio* and *translatio* could, in theory, have taken place at any time during Páll's reign, that is between ca. 1123 and 1137.

O.s. says that Magnús "had lain in the earth twenty-one winters" when Bishop Vilhjálmr elevated his bones.²⁹⁸ Unfortunately this does not solve the problem of dating Magnús' elevation as the precise date of Magnús' death is not altogether clear. The dates mentioned in O.s. (1091) and M.s.l. (1104) are clearly useless in this respect.²⁹⁹ The uncertainty regarding the date of the martyrdom is indeed notable in scholarly literature. In a recent publication *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopaedia* Paul Bibire gives the date as 1117 while Henry Kratz, in the same work, has it as 1115. Another standard handbook, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, mentions 1116³⁰⁰ while Ingrid De Geer prudently assumes that Magnús was killed 1115/17.³⁰¹

Magnús Már Lárusson, in a detailed study of all the relevant sources relating to this problem, came to the conclusion that Magnús' death probably occurred in 1117 although he concedes that 1116 is a possible alternative.³⁰² 1115 must be excluded because April 16th of that year was Good Friday. O.s., however, tells that Magnús was killed after Easter and, in any case, a martyrdom on such a holy day would undoubtedly have left a mark in the hagiographic literature. Although the year 1116 can not be ruled out, 1117 nevertheless seems the more likely date. Both M.s.l. and the liturgy on the saint mention that Magnús was killed on Monday (*feria secunda*) and in the year 1117 April 16th fell on Monday.

Magnús Már Lárusson's contribution does not solve the problem of dating the elevation for if we trust the statements of O.s. and M.s.s. we

²⁹⁸ O.s., 133. M.s.s. mentions twenty winters. M.s.s., 326.

²⁹⁹ O.s., 119. M.s.l., 369 ; 371.

³⁰⁰ *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. Ed. by David Hugh Farmer (Oxford 1992), 313.

³⁰¹ De Geer, Earl, Saint, Bishop, Skald, 110-111.

³⁰² Magnús Már Lárusson, "Sct Orcadensis Comes", 485-498.

come up with the years 1137 and 1138 for this event. As noted earlier O.s. tells that Páll was in power when the translation to Kirkwall took place. St. Magnús was elevated on the 13th of December, the feast of St. Lucy, and in that month in the year 1137 Rögnvaldr had already been the sole ruler of the earldom for some months and Earl Páll had been taken into custody. If this is correct the elevation of St. Magnús took place prior to 1137 and the statements of O.s. and M.s.s. on the dating of this event cannot be taken at face value.

December 13th, 1135, appears to be the most probable date for the *elevatio* for political events in Norway earlier in that year provide a plausible background for Bishop Vilhjálmr's undertaking. In January of that year King Haraldr *gilli* captured and effectively dethroned his co-ruler King Magnús Sigurðarson. The shift in the balance of power in Norway was undoubtedly of considerable interest to Vilhjálmr for his position very much depended on Norwegian support (see ch. 2.3.) and hence it must have been a matter of some urgency for the bishop to secure his standing with Haraldr *gilli*. In the spring of 1135 the king confirmed Rögnvaldr's claim to the earldom³⁰³ and, as noted, it was in the summer-time that Vilhjálmr set out for Norway.³⁰⁴

Vilhjálmr's elevation of Magnús' bones later in the year fits well into this political context. Knowing of Harald's support for Rögnvaldr he may well have taken this course of action in order to distance himself from Earl Páll. There are indeed signs that in the early months of 1136 relations between Vilhjálmr and Páll were not at their best.³⁰⁵ Nevertheless the bishop, as noted, acted as mediator between Rögnvaldr and Páll in 1137³⁰⁶ and if he had been openly supporting either faction at that time he would hardly have been cast in this particular role. Thus according to my

³⁰³ Rögnvaldr was on Harald's side in the power-struggle in Norway. O.s. 154-156. The dating is different from the one given by Taylor in his translation of O.s. The Orkneyinga saga, 235. O.s. is however clear on the matter that Haraldr made his statement in the spring following the battle of Fyrileiv (early August 1134).

³⁰⁴ O.s., 159. Rögnvaldr left for the Orkneys in the middle of the summer.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 172-174. The bishop helped in the escape of a murderer whom Earl Páll had tried to apprehend.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 184-85

estimation Vilhjálmr returned from the visit to Norway in the autumn or winter of 1135 and elevated Magnús' relics on December 13th in the same year.

O.s. says that the relics of St. Magnús were kept in Birsay "for some time."³⁰⁷ Then a certain Gunni from Vestray came to Birsay with the message that Magnús had appeared to him in a dream and demanded to be translated to Kirkwall. Bishop Vilhjálmr ignored the less than enthusiastic reactions of Earl Páll and transported the shrine to Kirkwall. There it was placed in a church which in all likelihood was dedicated to St. Ólafr of Norway.³⁰⁸ As Páll was still in Birsay when this occurred the *translatio* must be dated before the truce agreed between him and Rögnvaldr in the spring of 1137.

This is what O.s. tells about about the *elevatio* and *translatio* of Earl Magnús. Although details of the saga account can be disputed the overall picture is clear. When Rögnvaldr Kali finally assumed sole rulership the cult of his uncle had already been placed on an organised footing by the bishop of the earldom. Here I have only attempted to place the *immediate* events relating to the official recognition of Magnús' saintliness within a plausible chronological framework. It is my understanding, however, that there were deeper, more fundamental, reasons behind the recognition of the cult by the ecclesiastical and the secular authorities in the earldom of Orkney.

³⁰⁷ "neccvara hriþ". Ibid., 133.

³⁰⁸ Dietrichson, Monumenta Orcadia, 74-76.

2.2. The Earl

There can be little doubt that the cult of St. Ólafr of Norway was an important model for Earl Rögnvaldr when he commenced the building of St. Magnús Cathedral in 1137 or thereabouts, thus associating his authority with the memory of his martyred uncle.³⁰⁹ By the first half of the twelfth century Ólafr Haraldsson had become a symbol of a united Norway under the rule of his kinsmen. In 1134 King Haraldr *gilli*, allegedly, vowed that if St. Ólafr would aid him in his struggle against King Magnús *blindi*, he would erect a church in honour of the saint in the town of Bergen.³¹⁰ Two years later Kolr, Earl Rögnvald's father, is said to have encouraged his son to build a cathedral in Kirkwall in honour of his murdered uncle if the saint brought him victory over Earl Páll.³¹¹ Although the veracity of the two scenes cannot be attested, the similarities between them are still noteworthy. Certainly O.s. suggests that a tradition was in place which associated Rögnvald's political ambitions with the cult of his uncle. At the height of his power-struggle with earl Páll the saga tells that Rögnvaldr spoke the following words to his supporters:

³⁰⁹ St Ólafr was a popular saint in the Orkney earldom in the medieval period. In Shetland alone nine churches are known to have been dedicated to the Norwegian saint. In comparison only five are known to have been dedicated to St. Magnús (Laxobigging, Houll, Tingwall, Hamnavoe and Sandwick). See Cant, "The Medieval Churches", 47-50.

³¹⁰ *Heimskringla* III, 286.

³¹¹ O.s., 159. Indeed the general influence of Rögnvald's father in relation to the emergence of St. Magnús' cult should not be underestimated. Kolr was well connected with the Norwegian royal household and he was, for instance, a member of Magnús Ólafsson's retinue during the king's expedition to Britain (1098); O.s. tells that Kolr was close to the king. O.s., 100-103.

“Pat hygg ek, ef gud vill, at ek fái ríki í Orkneyium, at hann myni gefa mér styrk til ok inn helgi Magnus iarl, frændi minn, at halda því, þott þer farit heim til eigna ydvarra.”³¹²

“If God will that I gain the realms in the Orkneys, methinks He must surely give me strength for the task, and so will Saint Magnus the Earl, my kinsman, to hold it [and defend it], although you sail home to your own lands.”³¹³

Although it would be naive to take this passage at face value as a proof of Rögnvald's attitude towards the cult of St. Magnús, it would be equally misguided to dismiss out of hand the sentiments which it conveys. At least we can say that at the time O.s. was written there was a tradition in place which linked Rögnvald's successful struggle for power with the saintly reputation of his martyred uncle.

Prior to Rögnvald's take-over of the earldom in 1137, he had never been in permanent residence in the Northern Isles. Hence one can assume that he was considered somewhat of an outsider by the inhabitants of Orkney and Shetland, at least in comparison with his opponent Earl Páll Hákonarson. As his power-struggle with Páll was to a considerable extent a competition for support among the populace, he clearly needed to identify himself with the history of the people over whom he aspired to rule. In this respect it is worth noting that when Rögnvaldr received the title of earl from King Sigurðr in 1129 he is said to have changed his name of birth, the somewhat prosaic Kali, to Rögnvaldr, thus evoking the reign of his famous ancestor Earl Rögnvaldr Brúsason.³¹⁴ A parallel to this name-changing can be found in Sverris saga where Sverrir Sigurðarson, the outsider *par excellence* of Norwegian medieval history, is reported to

³¹² O.s., 186.

³¹³ The Orkneyinga saga, 254.

³¹⁴ O.s., 154.

have adopted early in his career the name of Magnús (after King Magnús *góði*) after St. Ólafr told him to do so in a dream-vision.³¹⁵ Just as Rögnvaldr created a point of contact with the inhabitants of Orkney by associating himself with the illustrious Rögnvaldr Brúsason, thus Sverrir assumed the name Magnús in order to identify himself with the fondly remembered King Magnús *góði*, the son of St. Ólafr Haraldsson. With this in mind the tradition recorded in O.s. that Earl Rögnvaldr saw and presented his cause as being hallowed by the supernatural authority of his saintly uncle should not be dismissed out of hand.

Barbara E. Crawford has pointed out that the history of the Northern Isles in the tenth and the eleventh centuries "was dominated by the rivalry over the earldom lands and possessions between the two Earldom lines, descendants of Paul and Erlend Thorfinnsson."³¹⁶ She has furthermore argued that the cult of St Magnús was supported by Rögnvaldr in order to make the claim of his line to power more secure. In addition the Shetlanders were particularly supportive of Rögnvaldr in his confrontation with Earl Páll. Shetland formed a part of Magnús' half of the earldom and its inhabitants were, as the miracle accounts show, the most fervent believers in his sanctity. One commentator has even suggested that "an active propaganda industry was at work [in Shetland] ... on Rögnvald's behalf."³¹⁷

From the emergence of the earldom of Orkney in the ninth century the earls recognised at least the nominal overlordship of the Norwegian kings. The extent of Norwegian involvement in Orcadian affairs was essentially

³¹⁵ Sverris saga, 4. On the other hand the thirteenth-century Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus claims that Sverrir adopted the name in order to identify himself with his (alleged) great-grandfather, King Magnús *berfættr*. Saxo Grammaticus, *Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia*. Books X-XVI. The texts of the first edition with translation and commentary in three volumes by Eric Christiansen. Vol I: Books XIV, XV and XVI. Text and translation, tables and maps. *British Archaeological Report* (International Series) 118 (1) 1981, XIV, liii, 548-549.

³¹⁶ Crawford, "The Cult of St Magnus", 67.

³¹⁷ Thomson, *History of Orkney*, 61

dependent on the ambition of the incumbent king. Thus during the peaceful reign of Ólafr *kyrri* (1066-1093) Páll and Erlendr were left to their own devices. In contrast, when the unruly Magnús *berfættr* (1093-1103) embarked on his military campaigns to the British Isles, he unceremoniously deposed the two brothers and put his own young son in their place.

The main source of friction within the earldom itself was the question of power-sharing between the male members (whether through male or female line) of the ruling house. Although O.s. is essentially the single source on this issue it is evident that no fixed procedure of succession was in place. Any male of the dynasty could stake his claim; success depended on the ability to muster support among the leading men of the earldom and/or secure support or recognition from the kings of Norway and Scotland. One method of limiting inter-dynastic feud and accommodating different claimants was to divide the dominion between them. However, this arrangement was inherently unstable for the death of an incumbent earl, or the appearance of a new candidate on the scene, could all too easily upset the equilibrium of power.³¹⁸

As noted earlier Páll and Erlendr, took over the earldom ca. 1065 following the death of their father, Þorfinnr Sigurðarson, and to begin with they ruled it jointly instead of dividing the land between them. This arrangement did not last and, as a result of the ambition of their sons, the earldom was divided “as it had been in the reign of Þorfinnr and Brúsi.” The termination of the joint rulership of Páll and Erlendr was in a sense a turning point in the history of the ruling dynasty of Orkney for it was from this point that we see the emergence of the two rival lines – the Erlend-line and the Páll-line – who would compete for power throughout the twelfth

³¹⁸ A case in point is the division of the earldom between the four sons of Earl Sigurðr Hlökkvisson after his death at the battle of Clontarf in 1014. O.s., 23.

century. One can only speculate that the habit of dividing the earldom between the two branches strengthened their notion of separate identity. With this dynastic background in mind the hypothesis, that Rögnvaldr promoted the cult of St. Magnús in order to legitimise his own claim to power and, by the same token give the Erlendr-line of the dynasty an edge over their rivals, is particularly tempting.

The Hungarian historian Gábor Klaniczay has argued that in Anglo-Saxon England, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe princely cults were used not only to legitimate

... the claim of a certain branch of the ruling dynasty to retain power with the support of the cults they patronized, but, in fact also contributed to the institutionalization of the new royal power. They constituted an intermediary phase between rulership bound to the innate virtues of a certain dynasty (constantly giving rise to rivalries between the pretenders) and the more stable hereditary order, where one lineage could assert its supremacy.³¹⁹

There are notable similarities between the ruling house in Orkney in the twelfth century and the princely dynasties of the relatively newly converted, peripheral lands of Christian Europe such as Kievan Rus', Hungary, Bohemia, Denmark and Norway in the same period. As in Orkney, succession to rulership was ill defined and extended to all male members of the princely house without any clear-cut hereditary order being followed or recognised. In such a situation there was a notable tendency for the ruling house to split into different branches who then would jostle for power.

A key concept in Klaniczay's passage is the notion of an "intermediary phase". In one sense the promotion of princely cults by rulers in the less politically advanced lands of Christian Europe

³¹⁹ Klaniczay, G., "From Sacral Kingship to Self-Representation: Hungarian and European Royal Saints", *The Uses of Supernatural Power. The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early-Modern Europe*. Tr. by Susan Singerman, ed. by K. Margolis (U. K. 1990, 86 [First published in *Continuity and Change. Political Institutions and Literary Monuments in the Middle Ages*. Ed. by Elisabeth Vestergaard (Odense 1986), 61-86.].

represented a primitive way of legitimizing power; one which predated the introduction of primogeniture or the paraphernalia of “institutionalised” Christian rulership, such as coronation and unction. Although a dynastic cult added lustre and prestige to the ruler and his office, it was an ineffectual way of narrowing the power-base to a single line of the dominant dynasty. Klanizcay might have pointed out that in one exceptional case all these factors – the establishment of a princely cult, the “institutionalization” of royal power and the monopolization of authority by one scion of the ruling house – came together. On one and the same occasion in 1170 King Valdemar I of Denmark had his son crowned (thus introducing both coronation and the concept of primogeniture) and his father, Duke Knud Lavard, canonised. This event effectively put a formal seal on on a *de facto* situation: the exclusion of the Niels-line of the royal dynasty from power (see ch. 3.2).

Both the saga tradition and the political context in the earldom of Orkney support the hypothesis that Earl Rögnvaldr commenced the building of St. Magnús Cathedral and promoted the cult of Magnús in order to strengthen his own rule at the expense of the Páll-line of the dynasty. However it is vital to distinguish between Rögnvald’s intentions on the one hand and the subsequent development of the cult on the other hand; as will become clear in the course of this study, the princely cults developed in tune with changing political and ecclesiastical circumstances.

In 1138 Earl Rögnvaldr was effectively forced to give up half the earldom to Haraldr Maddaðarson, the grand-son of Hákon Pálsson, and following Rögnvald’s death in 1158/59, Haraldr became the sole ruler of the earldom, a position which he held (admittedly with much difficulty) until his own death in 1206. It was precisely in the reign of Haraldr, a member of the Páll-line, that significant progress was made in the construction of St. Magnús Cathderal; in the 1180s works on “a new

crossing, enlarged transept chapels and a greatly extended eastern limb were started virtually simultaneously... ”³²⁰ Although it was the the bishop who oversaw the building of the Cathedral one has to assume that it was the earl who provided the financial clout behind the project

Thus in the long run the identification of the cult of St. Magnús with one particular scion of the Orkney ruling house was not to last. In this respect the cult was not unique in medieval Europe. There are number of cases where kings and princes, who had assumed power at the expense of rival kinsmen, promoted the cults of their deceased ancestors or relatives in order to strengthen their own precarious rule. Such motives were behind King Ladislaus’s canonisation of his father King Stephan of Hungary in 1083³²¹ and Grand-Prince Jaroslav of Kiev’s promotion of the cult of his half-brothers Boris and Gleb (see 3.1). However, while the more narrow political and dynastic origins of these cults faded with time, St. Stephan and Boris and Gleb emerged as the the patron saints of their respective lands. This, I would argue, was also the case in relation to the cult of St. Magnús.³²²

³²⁰ Fawcett, R., “Kirkwall Cathedral: an Architectural Analysis”, St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney’s Twelfth-Century Renaissance. Ed. by B. E. Crawford (Aberdeen 1988), 97.

³²¹ Klaniczay, G., “Königliche und dynastische Heiligkeit in Ungarn”, Politik und Heiligenverehrung im Hochmittelalter. Herausgegeben von Jürgen Petersohn. Vorträge und Forschungen XLII (Sigmaringen 1994), 349-354.

³²² There can be little doubt that the parallels between the cults of St. Magnús and St. Ólafr were noted by contemporaries. As St. Ólafr was seen as the ultimate overlord of the Norwegian kings, the authority of the Orkney earls was hallowed by St. Magnús. Not only did the ambitious scope of St. Magnús Cathedral testify to the material wealth of the earls but it also projected to the outside world that they saw themselves on a par with other rulers of medieval Christendom. Against this background it is not difficult to envisage how the cult of St. Magnús could have developed into a focal point of Orcadian opposition against Norwegian hegemony. In this respect one only has to think of how the cult of St. Wenceslas helped to forge a political identity among the Bohemians in their relation to the Empire. Graus, F., “St. Wenzel, der heilige Patron des Landes Böhmen”, Lebendige Vergangenheit. Überlieferung im Mittelalter und in den Vorstellungen vom Mittelalter (Köln /Wien 1975), 159-179. There is no evidence that the cult of St. Magnús was exploited in the often turbulent dealings which the Orcadian earls had with their Norwegian overlords. The Norwegian kings, at least, had no qualms about seeking supernatural aid from the saint. In 1263 King Hákon Hákonarson embarked on an military expedition to restore Norwegian control over this part of the kingdom which increasingly had come under Scottish rule. His mission was ineffective and on his return he wintered in Orkney. During his stay he fell ill and,

2.3. The Bishop

As in the other Nordic dominions the eleventh and the early twelfth centuries were of pivotal importance in the organisation of the Church in the Northern Isles.³²³ Christianity was of course not new to the region. There is evidence that as early as the seventh century the Celtic population of Orkney and Shetland had come into contact with, and even adopted, the religion. Indeed it can not be ruled out that Christianity survived in some shape even after the coming of Vikings. In any event it is generally assumed that in the first half of the tenth century the Norse inhabitants were turning to Christianity.³²⁴

In the late twelfth century the Norwegian Theodoricus monachus wrote that King Ólafr Tryggvason of Norway had forced Earl Sigurðr Hlöðvisson of Orkney to accept the new religion (ca. 995).³²⁵ Whatever truth lies behind this story we can be certain that the Orkney earls adopted Christianity around the turn of the millenium and not long afterwards they began to take an active interest in the organisation of religious life. In the context of this study it is the position of the highest ecclesiastical authority in the earldom, the bishop, which is of primary significance.

In all main aspects the episcopal development in the Northern Isles was similar to that of the other lands inhabited by the Norse people. An

according to the contemporary *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, he pleaded to the Orkney saint (unsuccessfully) to restore his health. *Flateyjarbók* II, 302.

³²³ E.g. Sawyer, P., "Dioceses and Parishes in Twelfth-Century Scandinavia", *St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth Century Renaissance*. Ed. by B. E. Crawford (Aberdeen 1988), 36-46.

³²⁴ Cant, R. G., *The Medieval Churches and Chapels of Shetland* (Glasgow 1975), 7-8. Idem., "The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Northern and Western Isles in the Norse Period", *Northern Studies* 21 (1984), 2-5.

³²⁵ *Monumenta Historica Norwegiae*, 28.

initial period of non-resident, or missionary bishops, was followed by the establishment of a permanent territorially defined diocese.³²⁶ In this respect the Orkney earldom can be compared to Iceland where the *alþingi* formally accepted Christianity in the year 999. Missionary bishops were then active in the country until the first bishopric, that of Skálholt, was established in 1056.

No list of early bishops consecrated for Orkney has survived. Although the episcopal lists of the archbishopric of Nidaros include Orcadian bishops, the earliest mentioned is Bishop Vilhjálmr who came into office in the first decade of the twelfth century.³²⁷ As a result we are heavily dependent on Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis* (written between 1072-1085) for the ecclesiastical situation in Orkney in this period.³²⁸ In book four of Adam's work, where he focuses on the Nordic countries, a note is made of a certain Henricus who became the first bishop of Lund around 1060 at the behest of King Sven Estridsson of Denmark.³²⁹

³²⁶ See Andersen, P. S., "The Orkney Church of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries – a Stepdaughter of the Norwegian Church", *St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth Century Renaissance*. Ed. by B. E. Crawford (Aberdeen 1988), 57-60.

³²⁷ Kolsrud, O., "Celtic Bishops in the Isle of Man, the Hebrides and Orkneys", *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* ix, i (1913), 374-5. For the bishops' lists, see *ibid.*, 247-255. *Idem.*, "Den norske kirkes erkebiskoper og biskoper indtil Reformationen", *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. Vol. 17 (Christiania 1913), 293-308. Cowan, I. B., "The Medieval Bishops of Orkney", *Light in the North. St Magnus Cathedral through the Centuries*. Ed. by R. G. Cant and H. W. Firth (Kirkwall 1989), 25-36. Crawford, B. E., "Bishops of Orkney in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries: Bibliography and Biographical List", *The Innes Review* 47 (1996), 1-14. De Geer, Earl, Saint, Bishop, Skald, 77-88.

³²⁸ *Magistri Adam Bremensis Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*. Ed. by Bernhard Schmeidler. *Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum Ex Monumentis Germaniae Historicae Seperatim Editi*. (Hannover & Leipzig 1917).

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, viii, 235-236. In Ari's *Íslendingabók*, composed ca. 1133, it is told that a certain Heinrekr stayed two years in Iceland and in *Hungurvaka*, a brief ecclesiastical history of Iceland written in the first half of the twelfth century, he is mentioned as one of the bishops who visited Iceland during the episcopacy of Ísleifr (1056-1080). *Íslendingabók – Landnámabók*. Seinni hluti. *Íslensk fornrit* II. Jakob Benediktsson gaf út (Reykjavík 1968), 18; *Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek* 11: *Kristni saga, Páttir Þorvalds ens víðforla, Páttir Ísleifs biskups Gizurarsonar, Hungurvaka*. Ed. by B. Kahle (Halle: Niemeyer 1905), 95. Oluf Kolsrud has suggested that this Heinrekr is the same person as the Henricus mentioned by Adam of Bremen. Kolsrud, "Den norske kirkes", 294. The fact that Adam does not link Henricus with Hamburg-Bremen and taking into account his English and Danish connections it seems likely that he was sent on the initiative of the archbishopric of York. The dating of his (presumably brief) visit to

According to Adam, this Henricus had previously been a bishop in Orkney and the keeper of King Canute's treasury in England. He thus came to the Northern Isles before the string of bishops sent there (or at least consecrated to Orkney) by Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen sometime between 1043 and 1072.

At the end of his third book Adam names the bishops whom Adalbert consecrated for work in the northern lands: nine for Denmark, six for Sweden and two for Norway. Besides he appointed "a certain Turolf to the Orkneys. Thither also he sent John, who had been consecrated in Scotland, and a certain other who bore his name, Adalbert."³³⁰ These bishops were missionary legates whom Adalbert exhorted with counsel and reward "to preach the word of God to the barbarians."³³¹

Adalbert's plan was to enhance the influence of the metropolitan see in the North and for that purpose, for instance, he dispatched bishops to Iceland to preach in the decades prior to the establishment of the bishopric of Skálholt.³³² His aim was to transform his own archbishopric into a patriarchate overseeing the ecclesiastical affairs of northern Germany and the newly christianised people of Scandinavia. Although Adalbert was unable to fulfill his plan he did obtain a letter of privilege from Pope Clement II (dated 1047) that gave him authority over the newly converted people in the north and the regions around the Baltic coast.³³³ His ultimate

Orkney can not be established with any certainty. Kolsrud suggests ca. 1050 while D. E. R. Watt proposes sometime after 1035. *Ibid.*, 294. Watt, D. E. R., *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ Medii Aevi ad annum 1638*, 2nd draft. *Scottish Record Society*, new series (Edinburgh 1969). 247.

³³⁰ Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*. Translated with an introd. and notes by Francis J. Tschan (New York 1959), 183. "Preterea Turolfum quendam posuit ad Orchadas. Illuc etiam misit Iohannem in Scotia ordinatum et alium quendam Adalbertum, cognominem suum." *Magistri Adam Bremensis*, III, lxxvii, 224.

³³¹ Adam of Bremen, 183. *Magistri Adam Bremensis*, III, lxxvii, 224.

³³² Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga Saga I. Þjóðveldisöld* (Reykjavík 1956), 167-173.

³³³ This privilege was confirmed in 1053 and 1055 by succeeding popes, Leo IX and Victor II. *Regesta Norvegica I: 822-1263*. Ed. by Erik Gunnes (Oslo 1989), 35-36.

failure in Scandinavia was not least due to the independent stance adopted by the rulers he had to deal with.³³⁴ Thus King Haraldr *harðráði* of Norway refused to send bishops for consecration to Hamburg-Bremen and instead chose to dispatch them for the same purpose to England and France. In a letter to the metropolitan, written sometime between 1053 and 1066, Haraldr also refused to recognise his ecclesiastical authority in Norway, declaring that he did not know of any higher ecclesiastical authority within his realm save himself.³³⁵

Although Adalbert had difficulties in imposing his authority in the major Nordic countries his missionaries were frequent, even sought after, visitors in the more peripheral lands. Adam of Bremen tells that legates were sent from Gotland, Greenland, Iceland and Orkney “entreating him to send preachers as indeed he immediately did.”³³⁶ A direct result of this pleading was probably the commissioning of Turolf, Adalbert and John to the earldom of Orkney. About the last named little is known apart from Adam’s aforementioned statement that he was consecrated in Scotland.³³⁷

³³⁴ Kolsrud, O., *Norges Kyrkesoga I. Millomalderen* (Oslo 1958), 175-179. Maurer, K., *Die Bekehrung des Norwegischen Stammes zum Christentume in ihrem geschichtlichen quellenmassig geschildert*. II. Band (Osnabruck 1965: Neudruck des Ausgabe 1855-56), 649-667.

³³⁵ Magistri Adam Bremensis, III, xvii, 160. For the dating of this letter see *Regesta Norvegica*, 38.

³³⁶ Adam of Bremen, 180. “Inter quos extremi venerant Islani, Gronlani Gothorumque et Orchadum legati, petentes, ut illuc predicatorum dirigeret; quod et statim fecit.” Magistri Adam Bremensis III, lxxiii, 220-221.

³³⁷ The assumption that Johann had also been a missionary in Iceland is perhaps built on a misunderstanding. Kolsrud, “Den norske kirkes”, 295 ; Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga I*, 171. True, in *Íslendingabók* a certain Jóhann (or Jón) “inn írski” is said to have worked as a missionary in Iceland for a few years. *Íslendinga bók*, 18. Accordingly it is tempting to identify this Johann with his namesake in *Gesta Hammaburgensis*. The nickname “inn írski” has been explained on the grounds that in the same chapter where the Orkney bishop is mentioned, Adam tells of another Johann, “a bishop of Scotland”, who was killed in Slavia. Magistri Adam Bremensis III, lxxvii, 183. From the context, however, it is far from certain that the two Johanns are one and the same person. In *Hungrvaka* the brief reference in *Íslendingabók* is embellished with the addition that according to “some people’s accounts” Johann went from Iceland to “Vindland”, i.e. Pommern or Slavia, where he died as a martyr. *Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek* 11, 94. The author of *Hungrvaka*, writing in the beginning of the twelfth century and almost certainly using a version of *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, has apparently, rightly or wrongly, associated the Johann mentioned in Ari’s work with the missionary martyred by the Slavs. On the textual link between *Hungrvaka* and Adam’s *Gesta*

The most interesting of these three bishops is Turolf (or Torolf). Adam mentions islands "in the ocean off Norway", meaning the Northern and Western Isles, which nearly all "are now subject to the rule of the Norwegians and so are not to be overlooked by us because they also belong to the diocese of Hamburg."³³⁸ Following a brief geographical description of the islands, Adam concludes his discussion with the following statement: "For these same Orkney Islands, although they had previously been ruled by English and Scottish bishops, our primate on the pope's order consecrated Thorolf bishop for the city of Blascona, and he was to have the cure of all."³³⁹ Although Adam does not give a date for Turolf's ordination, it has been associated with Earl Þorfinn's pilgrimage to Rome.³⁴⁰ O.s. tells that after Þorfinnr had finally secured his hold of the Orkney earldom and following the death of King Magnús góði of Norway in 1047 he embarked on a tour which took him to Norway, Denmark, Saxony and Rome.³⁴¹ If O.s. is to be believed, Þorfinn's relationship with the Norwegian kings had been strained ever since King Ólafr Haraldsson sought to strengthen his lordship over the earldom around 1020.³⁴² The earl's dealings with Ólaf's son and successor, Magnús góði, were hardly

Hammaburgensis see Bibire, P., "Hungrvaka", Medieval Scandinavia An Encyclopedia. Ed. by Philip Pulsiano (New York & London 1993), 307. Turville-Petre suggests that the author may have been influenced by Adam's work through oral transmission and cites the example of Jóhann írski as possible evidence for this. Turville-Petre, G., Origins of Icelandic Literature (Oxford 1956), 204.

³³⁸ Adam of Bremen, 215. "Is habet ex adverso Nortmanniae insulas multas non ignobiles, quae nunc fere omnes Nortmannorum ditioni subiacent, ideoque non pretereundae sunt a nobis, quoniam Hammaburgensem parrochiam et ipsae respiciunt." Magistri Adam Bremensis IV, xxxv, 269-270.

³³⁹ Adam of Bremen, 215. "Ad easdem insulas Orchadas, quamvis prius ab Anglorum et Scothorum episcopis regerentur, noster primas iussu papae ordinavit Turolfum episcopum in civitatem Blasconam, qui omnium curas ageret." Magistri Adam Bremensis IV, xxxv, 271.

³⁴⁰ To my best knowledge the first was P. A. Munch, Det norske folks historie. Anden del (Christiania 1855), 216-217. Konrad Maurer found this argument unconvincing. Maurer, Bekehrung, 617-18.

³⁴¹ O.s., 85.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 32-38.

more congenial, for as the saga vividly describes, Porfinnr had killed his co-earl Rögnvaldr Brúsason, the king's friend and supporter.³⁴³

O.s. tells that before Porfinnr began his journey south he visited Haraldr *harðráði* in Norway who by that time had succeeded to the whole kingdom. The visit was a success and the king pledged his friendship.³⁴⁴ Admittedly it is uncertain whether at this stage Harald's animosity towards the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen had developed into the open hostility discernible in the 1050s.³⁴⁵ It is likely, however, that his enmity and mistrust can be traced back to the wars he fought against King Sven Estridsson who at that time (i.e. in the late 1040s) was on good terms with Adalbert.³⁴⁶

Against this background Adam's statement that Bishop Thurolf was consecrated by Adalbert "*iussu papae*" becomes more understandable. The process of ordaining a bishop in this period did not require the consent of the papacy. Even the act of founding a new bishopric was, on occasions, undertaken on the initiative of local rulers. For instance, as late as 1112/13 King Sigurðr *Jórsalafari* established a bishopric in Greenland without apparently consulting higher ecclesiastical authorities.³⁴⁷ However, it appears that Earl Porfinnr (or his legate) went directly to the pope (probably Leo IX 1049-1055) to have his bishop ordained, thus by-passing the authority of Hamburg-Bremen. The words "*iussu papae*" can hardly be interpreted otherwise. In view of the strained relations between the Norwegian king and the metropolitan, Porfinnr may have considered it wise not to involve Adalbert in this matter. Thurolf was thus nominated by Porfinnr, approved by the pope who ordered him to be consecrated by

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 76-79.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 32-38.

³⁴⁵ See especially Magistri Adam Bremensis, III, xvii, 159-161.

³⁴⁶ Maurer. *Die Bekehrung*. 660.

³⁴⁷ Joys. Biskop og konge. Bispevalg in Norge 1000-1350 (Oslo 1948). 143.

Archbishop Adalbert. It is worth noting that the Icelanders adopted a similar tactic in relation to the consecration of their first bishop, Ísleifr Gissurason, in 1056.³⁴⁸

Adam of Bremen says that Thurolf was consecrated to a particular episcopal seat "*in civitatem Blasconam*", a place-name which P. A. Munch was the first to interpret as a corrupt latinisation of *Birgsanam*, i.e. Birgisá (modern form: Birsay).³⁴⁹ Later scholars have accepted Munch's explanation and pointed out that this piece of information ties well with a statement in O.s. that Porfinnr "lived usually in Birsay, and had Christ's Kirk built there, a magnificent church. The episcopal seat in the Orkneys was first established there."³⁵⁰

It should be noted, however, that O.s. does not state outright that Porfinnr founded the Orkney bishopric but only that the episcopal seat "was first established there." Nevertheless Thurolf's episcopacy is of undoubted significance because for the first time the earl was directly involved in the election of the Orkney bishop. Thus in the 1060s a new phase had begun in the episcopal development of Orkney. The missionary stage had come to an end and the bishop of the earldom had acquired a fixed place of residence under the protective wing of the secular authority. It is from the appointment of Bishop Thurolf that we see the earls of

³⁴⁸ Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga* I, 173-175.

³⁴⁹ Munch, *Det norske folks historie*. Anden del, 217.

³⁵⁰ The Orkneyinga saga, 189. "Hann sat jafnan í Byrgisherade ok let þar gera Kristzkirkju, dyrligt musteri; þar var fyst settr byskupsstoll í Orknneyjum." O.s., 86. Barbara E. Crawford, although accepting the connection, points out that if it were not for the saga evidence "it seems unlikely that the names Blascona and Birsay would ever have been connected." Crawford, B. E., "Birsay and the Early Earls and Bishops of Orkney", *Birsay: A Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*. *Orkney Heritage* 2 (Kirkwall 1983), 103. It has usually been assumed that Kristkirkja, i.e. Christchurch, was located on the Brough of Birsay. Lamb, on the other hand has argued that Porfinnr founded a monastery on the Brough of Birsay near his palace and had Christchurch erected at another location. Lamb, R. G., "The Cathedral and the Monastery", *Birsay: A Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*. *Orkney Heritage* 2 (Kirkwall 1983), 36-46. Idem., "The Cathedral of Christchurch and the Monastery of Birsay", *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 105 (1972-1974), 200-205.

Orkney becoming more involved in the episcopal affairs within their dominion.³⁵¹

Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson died ca. 1065 and was succeeded by his two sons, Páll and Erlendr. Little is told about their reign in O.s. The two seem to have initially shared the earldom undivided and in peace until their respective sons came of age and we are told that it was due to a disagreement between Hákon Pálsson and Erlingr Erlendsson that, on the advice of “goodwilling men”, the earldom was divided into two parts.³⁵²

Only with the help of English sources do we catch a glimpse of the ecclesiastical landscape in the reign of Páll and Erlendr; a reflection of the increasing interest of the archbishopric of York in bringing the Northern Isles (and indeed Scotland) into its sphere of influence. A letter addressed to Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury, dated 1072/73, from Archbishop Thomas of York, tells that Páll had sent a cleric to him whom the earl had chosen as bishop for Orkney.³⁵³ Thomas then asks Lanfranc to supply two bishops to attend the consecration at York. Lanfranc reacted swiftly and in a letter (probably written in the same year) he bade Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester and Bishop Peter of Chester to be of assistance.³⁵⁴ According to Hugh the Chanter the name of the bishop elect was Radulf.³⁵⁵

Páll’s decision to have the successor of Thurolf consecrated by the archbishop of York indicates a change of policy from the one pursued by Earl Þorfinnr who had had no dealings with York (and had even attempted to bypass the authority of Hamburg-Bremen). What motives lay behind Páll’s decision is difficult to assess. The sources are next to silent

³⁵¹ See also Crawford, “Birsay and the Early Earls”, 101.

³⁵² O.s., 91-92.

³⁵³ *The Letters of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury*. Ed. and tr. by Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson. *Oxford Medieval Texts* (Oxford 1979), 79-81 (nr. 12).

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 81-83 (nr. 13).

³⁵⁵ Hugh the Chanter, *The History of the Church of York 1066-1127*. Ed. and transl. by Charles Johnson. Revised by M. Brett, C. N. L. Brooke, and M. Winterbottom. *Oxford Medieval Texts* (Oxford 1990), 52.

regarding the political situation in the Orkney earldom around the time Lanfranc sent his letter; indeed it is not even clear when the aforementioned division of the domain between the two brothers took place.³⁵⁶ Judging from O.s. it appears to have occurred in the 1070s or the 1080s.³⁵⁷ The fact that the letter is solely addressed to Páll and no mention is made of Erlendr, suggests that the former was seeking a bishop especially for his part of the earldom.

Archbishop Adalbert died in 1072 and a successor had not been nominated. Páll “may therefore have felt compelled to find another ecclesiastical authority to consecrate his nominee.”³⁵⁸ However, an alternative route was open to Earl Páll. The Icelanders were confronted with a comparable dilemma after *alþingi* had chosen Gissur Ísleifsson in 1081 to succeed his father to Skálholt. By that time Archbishop Liemar of Hamburg-Bremen was under excommunication by Pope Gregory VII as a result of his support for Emperor Henry IV. Accordingly Gissur chose to turn directly to Rome where the pope duly sent him to Bishop Hartvig of Magdeburg for consecration.³⁵⁹ Indeed it has been suggested that other Scandinavian bishops may have gone the same route.³⁶⁰

The fact that the Orkney earls must have felt more secure in their position in the reign of Ólafr *kyrri* in Norway (1066-1093) than during the reigns of Haraldr *harðráði* and Magnús *góði* probably had a bearing on Páll’s decision. Ólafr was above all occupied with internal affairs in Norway and paid scant attention to the more peripheral lands of the Norwegian Crown. Páll may therefore have found himself free to seek out the support of the English Church which had grown in prestige and

³⁵⁶ Crawford, “Birsay and the Early Earls”, 106.

³⁵⁷ O.s. 92.

³⁵⁸ Crawford, “Birsay and the Early Earls”, 106.

³⁵⁹ Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 11, 97-99.

³⁶⁰ Joys, C., Biskop og konge, 89.

influence following the Norman Conquest.³⁶¹ In any case the fact that Páll had turned to York for the consecration of his candidate must have assured the English archbishopric that Orkney was now firmly within its sphere of influence.

The reign of Páll and Erlendr was terminated by the first expedition of King Magnús *berfættr* to the British isles in 1098/99. The Norwegian king sent the two earls to Norway and instated his young son, Sigurðr, to rule over the earldom under guardianship.³⁶² Bishop Vilhjálmr of Orkney was in office, according to O.s., for sixty-six years, or from 1102 to his death in 1168.³⁶³ If this statement is to be believed Vilhjálmr took up his office during Sigurðr Magnússon's period in Orkney (1098-1103).³⁶⁴ With the death of King Magnús in 1103, Sigurðr returned to Norway to succeed his father. O.s. tells that "one or two winters" after this Hákon Pálsson arrived in Orkney and took over the whole earldom. Hákon had been a loyal follower of King Magnús³⁶⁵ and one has to assume that he acknowledged the position of Bishop Vilhjálmr.

Of Vilhjálmr we hear nothing until after the death of Earl Magnús in 1116/17. However, there are indications that his position in the earldom was far from secure in the decade or so leading up to the meeting on Egilsay. In a letter dated to 1108/1109, Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury – whose involvement in Orcadian affairs stemmed from the fact that there was a vacancy in York between May 1108 and April 1109³⁶⁶ – implored

³⁶¹ Thomas had professed personal obedience to Lanfranc in 1172. It is interesting to note that the two letters concerning the Orkney bishop reflect the dispute between Lanfranc and Thomas about their respective status. See Gibson, M. T., *Lanfranc of Bec* (Oxford 1978), 116-131. The Letters of Lanfranc, 3-6. MacDonald, A., *Lanfranc. A Study of His Life, Work and Writing* (Oxford 1926), 191-197.

³⁶² O.s., 100-103. Power, R., "Magnus Barelegs' Expeditions to the West", *The Scottish Historical Review* 60, 2 (1986), 107-132.

³⁶³ O.s., 121.

³⁶⁴ Kolsrud, *Norges kyrkjesoga*, 180.

³⁶⁵ O.s. 98-106.

³⁶⁶ Watt, *Fasti Ecclesiae*, 248.

Earl Hákon to uphold and strengthen the Christian religion in his earldom and subject himself to a certain bishop whose name is not revealed.³⁶⁷ Here Anselm is probably referring to a certain Roger who, according to Hugh the Chanter, was consecrated by Archbishop Gerard of York sometime between June 1100 and February 1108.³⁶⁸ At this point in time the earldom was divided between Magnús Erlendsson and Hákon Pálsson although this state of affairs is not recognised in Anselm's letter. From this it appears that it was Hákon who held a protective hand over Bishop Vilhjálmr and prevented the York candidate from taking up his position.

Not long after Anselm wrote his letter Roger must either have died or given up his claim to the Orkney bishopric for sometime between 1109 and 1114 Archbishop Thomas of York consecrated to the same see a certain Radulf Nuell, a priest from York.³⁶⁹ Our knowledge of this development derives again from Hugh the Chanter who was close to the two archbishops of the period, Thomas (d. 1114) and Thurstan (d. 1140), and wrote his account between 1137-49.³⁷⁰ The most noteworthy feature of his reference to Radulf is that Orcadians are said to have been present and involved in his consecration: "*Radulphum vero, urbis Eboracensis presbyterum, in ecclesia Sancti Petri ab Orcadensibus electum T[homas] Orcadum insularum ordinavit episcopum....*"³⁷¹ Here we get an important indication that the claim of York to ecclesiastical authority in Orkney was more than a symbolic gesture; the archbishopric appears to have played on the divisions within the earldom to achieve its agenda. Although the identity of the Orcadians mentioned by Hugh the Chanter can not be

³⁶⁷ *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*. Vol. V: *Epistolae Anselmi*. Ed. by F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgh 1964), 389 (letter nr. 442).

³⁶⁸ Hugh the Chanter, *The History of the Church of York*, 52. The possibility cannot be excluded, however, that Anselm is referring here to Radulf. It is simply not known when he died or gave up his office.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁷⁰ Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 123-125.

³⁷¹ Hugh the Chanter, *The History*, 52.

established, it is tempting to see them as followers of Earl Magnús Erlingsson seeking a bishop to counter the authority of Bishop Vilhjálmr.

This second Radulf is mentioned in a letter issued by Pope Calixtus II at the council of Rheims on October 19th, 1119.³⁷² The letter is addressed to all the bishops of Scotland subject to the metropolitan see of York and was issued at the request of Thurstan, its newly consecrated archbishop.³⁷³ Calixtus' bull is a general exhortation to the bishops in Scotland to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the new archbishop of York and as such it yields no information about the position of Bishop Radulf in Orkney. However, in another bull promulgated on the same occasion, the pope commands the co-rulers of Norway, Sigurðr Magnússon and Eysteinn Magnússon (in their capacity as Hákon's overlords), to allow Radulf to enjoy his episcopal rights in peace.³⁷⁴ Then in 1125 Pope Honorius II addressed a bull to King Sigurðr where he pointed out that Archbishop Thomas had consecrated Radulf to Orkney but that an intruder had arrived in the see.³⁷⁵

If Bishop Vilhjálmr is the intruder mentioned in Pope Honorius' letter it is strange that it took over fifteen years for York and Rome to denounce him.³⁷⁶ Assuming that Vilhjálmr came into office in 1102, or seven years before the York candidate was consecrated to the Orkney see, it is difficult to see how he could have intruded on Radulf Neuell. Of course the pieces of the puzzle would fall more smoothly into place if, as some have maintained, O.s. is not to be trusted in relation to the length of Vilhjálmr's episcopacy. For instance, if Vilhjálmr had been bishop for fifty-six

³⁷² Ibid., 124-126.

³⁷³ Ibid., 118.

³⁷⁴ *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*. Vol. III, ed. by J. Raine. *Rolls Series* (London 1894), 39 (illustrative document nr. 21).

³⁷⁵ "Auribus nostris intimatum est, quod venerabilis frater noster, Thomas Eboracensis archiepiscopus, Radulfum Orcheneia episcopum consecravit. Postmodum vero, sicut accepimus, alius est ibidem intrusus." Ibid., 50-51 (illustrative document nr. 34).

³⁷⁶ Hugh the Chanter, *The History of the Church of York*, xlviii (fn. 5).

winters, instead of the sixty-six claimed by O.s., and thus assumed office in 1112,³⁷⁷ he would have intruded on an already incumbent bishop (whether present in Orkney or not), that is Radulf Nuell who, as noted, was consecrated sometime between 1109 and 1114. Moreover this would suggest that Vilhjálmr had been chosen by King Sigurðr (perhaps in association with his brother and co-ruler King Eysteinn) after he came back from his pilgrimage to the Holy Land ca. 1110. This appointment, in turn, accords well with later episcopal appointments overseen by Sigurðr in both Norway and Greenland.³⁷⁸ Although the question whether Vilhjálmr came into office in 1102 or 1112 can not be answered with certainty, it is clear that until ca. 1125 there was considerable pressure on both the earls of Orkney and the kings of Norway to have him removed from office.

Radulf Nuell's position in the earldom of Orkney may have been stronger than implied by the Icelandic and the English sources. It is noteworthy that Calixtus' letter was issued only two years after the death of Earl Magnús Erlingsson. As Earl Magnús had had notable ties with England and Scotland it is possible that Radulf was the bishop for his half of the earldom.³⁷⁹ With the death of his secular patron he may well have been forced to leave his see.

The Worcester chronicles mention Radulf in connection with the consecration of the bishop of St. Andrews by Archbishop Thurstan of York in 1128.³⁸⁰ We are told that Radulf had not been elected with the assent of

³⁷⁷ First suggested by Munch, *Det norske folks historie*. Anden del, 622.

³⁷⁸ See for instance Joys, *Biskop og konge*, 95-107. Although the archbishopric of Lund, founded in 1104, had *de jure* authority over the Norwegian Church the kings of Norway appear to have continued to nominate bishops on their own initiative. On occasions they did have their candidates approved by Lund. *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁷⁹ See Crawford, "Birsay and the Early Earls", 107-111.

³⁸⁰ *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*. Vol. III: *The Annals from 1067 to 1140 with the Gloucester Interpolations and the Continuation to 1141*. Ed. and transl. by P. McGurk. *Oxford Medieval Texts* (Oxford 1998), 174.

the “*principis terrae*”,³⁸¹ the clergy or the people he was supposed to serve. Radulf was shunned by everyone and, because he was not a bishop of any city, he was attached to either York or Durham and employed there as an assistant.³⁸² In brief, it seems that Earl Páll continued the policy of his father in relation to the Orkney bishopric: to protect the position of Bishop Vilhjálmr and deny the claim of the York candidate. In passing it is worth noting that this did not prevent Earl Páll Hákonarson from enjoying good relations with King Henry I of England in the 1120s.³⁸³

A late glimpse of the hapless Radulf is found in contemporary chronicles which tell that he gave a rousing speech to the English before their battle against King David I of Scotland in 1138 (the Battle of the Standard).³⁸⁴

Here above I have given an outline of the history of the Orkney bishopric from the first half of the eleventh century to the fourth decade of the twelfth century.³⁸⁵ In the initial phase the bishops were consecrated by the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen and operated on a missionary basis. A second stage in the development was reached around the middle of the eleventh century when the bishop of Orkney took up a fixed place of residence and the earls began to take a more active interest in their nomination.

³⁸¹ It is not clear whether this is a reference to the king of Norway or the Orkney earl.

³⁸² “Qui Radulphus, quoniam nec principis terræ, nec cleri, nec plebis electione vel assensu fuerat ordinatus, ab omnibus refutatus et in loco pontificis a nemine susceptus erat. Hic, quia nullius episcopus urbis, modo Eboracensi modo Dunhelmensi adhærens, ab eis sustentabatur, et vicarius utriusque in episcopalibus ministeriis habebatur.” The Chronicle of John, 89.

³⁸³ “Paulus Orcadum comes, quamvis Noricorum regi hereditario jure subjectus, ita regis amicitias suspiciebat ut crebra ei minuscula missitaret: nam et illa prona voluptate exterarum terrarum miracula inhiabat...” Willelmi Malmebiriensis, *De Gestis* vol. II, 485.

³⁸⁴ Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum. The History of the English People*. Ed. and transl. by Diana Greenway. *Oxford Medieval Texts* (Oxford 1996), 712-714. See also *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houedene*. Vols. I-IV, ed. by W. Stubbs, *Rolls Series* (London 1867-1871), vol. I, 193.

³⁸⁵ The basic outline has of course been dealt with by other scholars. Eg. B. E. Crawford, “Birsay and the Early Earls”, *Idem.*, “Bishops of Orkney”.

It is my argument that the episcopacy of Vilhjálmr marked a new stage in the development of the Orkney bishopric. For (at least) the first two decades of his reign in office his position had been decidedly precarious. Although he had enjoyed support from Norway and the Páll-line of the ruling dynasty, the legitimacy of his authority was neither recognised by the archbishop of York or the papacy. Moreover a rival candidate was waiting in the wings and perhaps already making his presence felt.

However, at the time he began promote the sanctity of Earl Magnús his position had seemingly become unassailable. Although Pope Honorius' letter of 1125 shows that York had not formally relinquished its claim over the Orkney bishopric, the reference in the Worcester chronicle shows that its candidate, Radulf Nuell, had effectively given up hope of taking office. Indeed in the period between 1125 and the establishment of the Archbishopric of Nidaros in 1152/53 we hear no more of York's involvement in the ecclesiastical affairs of the Orkney earldom.

Thus by the early 1130s the external threat to Bishop Vilhjálmr's position had receded and it was at this point that the bishop could afford to loosen the ties that had bound him to his main secular patron. Vilhjálmr's episcopacy had from the beginning been intimately associated with the Páll-line of the ruling house. Indeed the sources can sustain the interpretation that from the last quarter of the eleventh century the resident bishops in the isles had effectively been the private chaplains of this particular line of the Orkney dynasty. Of course this arrangement was of undoubted benefit to the bishop in times of uncertainty. However, with changing ecclesiastical and political circumstances the dependency on the Páll-line became of less importance for the Orkney bishop.

Within this context the deeper motives that lay behind Vilhjálmr's canonisation of Earl Magnús become clearer. By presenting himself as a

guardian of the relics of an earl who had been the victim of inter-dynastic feud, Vilhjálmr gave a clear signal that his authority did not rest on the support of any one scion of the ruling house. In this respect the *translatio* of the relics from Birsay to Kirkwall was both a practical and symbolic act. Birsay had been the main episcopal centre in the earldom and the main power-seat of the Páll-line³⁸⁶ while Kirkwall had traditionally lain within the half of the earldom ruled by the Erlendr-line.³⁸⁷

However, Vilhjálmr's translation of the relics to Kirkwall did not signify a simple change of allegiance from one dynastic line to the other for a new factor in the three-way relationship between the bishop and the two competing earldom lines had emerged. As the keeper of Magnús' relics in Kirkwall the Orkney bishop now acquired a patron whose authority was not dependent on the shifting political situation in the earldom; in this respect the cult helped to strengthen the identity and independence of his bishopric. Viewed from this angle the timing of Vilhjálmr's canonisation of Earl Magnús - when Earl Páll's authority was being eroded and Earl Rögnvaldr had not fully made his presence felt - appears both opportune and highly symbolic.

Cults of native saints played an important role in enhancing the identity and independence of relatively newly established bishoprics of Scandinavia. In the first half of the twelfth century the Norwegian bishoprics of Nidaros and Oslo appropriated to themselves the cults of St. Ólafr and St. Hallvard (see ch. 3.1.) respectively while the bishopric of Bergen upheld the sanctity of the Irish virgin St. Sunniva (killed in Norway according to the legend).³⁸⁸ Around the turn of the twelfth century the Icelandic assembly recognised the sanctity of Bishop Þorlákr

³⁸⁶ Crawford, "Birsay and the Early Earl", 110-118.

³⁸⁷ Clouston, *A History of Orkney*, 36.

³⁸⁸ The relics of the martyr were translated from Selja to Bergen in 1170. Helle, K., "Det første bispedømmet på Vestlandet", *Selja - heilig stad in 1000 år*. Red. av Magnus Rindal (Oslo 1997), 249-250.

Pórhallsson of Skálholt and that of Bishop Jón Ögmundarson of Hólar and both became patron saints of their respective bishoprics. About a decade or so earlier the cult of Niels, son of King Knud Magnusson of Denmark, was promoted by the bishopric of Århus (see ch. 5.4). A saint of this nature provided bishoprics with a heavenly patron who could serve as a counterweight to the authority of the earthly one.

The promotion of these native cults could only but enhance the identity of bishoprics which had relatively recently taken up permanent seats in urban centres. There were of course important differences between the Orkney bishopric and, for instance, that of Bergen or Århus. To begin with, in a territorial sense the authority of the Orkney bishop coincided with the temporal power of earl. Moreover, considering that the main ecclesiastical centre at Birsay was also the seat of the earl (or, more precisely, one line of the earldom dynasty), the opportunities for the Orkney bishop to enhance the identity and independence of his see were decidedly limited. It is this peculiar situation which explains why the *translatio* of his relics coincided with the translation of the episcopal seat from Birsay to Kirkwall; the office of the Orkney bishop had become synonymous with the relics of the newly elevated martyr.

Repairs on St. Magnús Cathedral in 1848 led to the discovery of the remains of Bishop Vilhjálmr in a stone cist. Within it was found a lead plate which on the front had the inscription **H. REQVIESCIT: WILLIAMVS: SENEX FELICIS MEMORIE**. On the back an inscription reads: **PMVS EPIS**, i.e. the first bishop of Orkney.³⁸⁹ Although the latter inscription is factually incorrect, it does suggest that people in the second half of the twelfth century believed that there had been something unique about the reign of Vilhjálmr in office. In a sense this was true for in

³⁸⁹ Mooney, J., "Notes on the Discoveries in St Magnus Cathedral", Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 59 (1924-1925), 243.

his time the bishopric made a crucial step in establishing its own identity and for that purpose the cult of St. Magnús Erlendsson played an important part. With some justification it can be said that the episcopacy of Vilhjálmr marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Orkney see.

I do not wish to give the impression that the Orkney bishops from Vilhjálmr onwards were not dependant on the patronage of the earls. However, there can be little doubt that the cult of Earl Magnús played an important role in improving both the fiscal independence and the spiritual prestige of the Orkney see. Although precious little is known about the economic basis of the bishopric in this period, one must assume that Earl Rögnvaldr endowed the bishopric with land in connection with the founding of St. Magnús Cathedral. As the miracle accounts show Kirkwall became a focal point for religious life in the earldom, both as the seat of the Orkney bishop and a centre of pilgrimage.³⁹⁰

³⁹⁰ The earliest evidence relating to fiscal matters of the bishopric dates from the thirteenth and the fourteenth century. Andersen, "The Orkney Church", 60-64.

2.4. The Canonisation of Earl Rögnvaldr Kali

The relatively independent status of the Orkney bishops in the second half of the twelfth century is underlined by the canonisation of Earl Rögnvaldr Kali which was undertaken by Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson in 1192 according to Icelandic annals.³⁹¹ O.s. describes the canonisation of Rögnvaldr in the following manner:

Andlæzðagr Rognvalldz iarls kala er v nottum eftir Mariumesso hina fyrri um sumarit. Foru þeir Haralldr iarl þadan ut i Orkneyiar med likit med fogru foruneyti, ok veittu groft at Magnuskirkiu ok hvilldi hann þar til þers er gud birti hans verdleika med morgum ok storum iarteinum, enn Biarni byskup let upp taka helgan dom hans at leyfvi pafvans. Þar a steininum, sem blod Rognvalldz iarls hafði a komit, þa er hann letz, ma sia enn i dag svo fagrt sem nyblætt see.³⁹²

Earl Rögnvald Kali's death-day is five days after the first Assumption of Saint Mary in summer. Earl Harald and his men went thence out to the Orkneys with the body with a goodly company, and prepared a tomb in Saint Magnus Cathedral, and it remained there till the time that God revealed his merit with many great miracles, and Bishop Bjarni by the leave of the Pope had his relics taken up. There on the stone which the blood of Earl Rognvald had dropped on when he lost his life, that blood may be seen even to-day as if it were new-shed.³⁹³

This passage yields no information about the state of the cult in the period between Rögnvald's death in 1158/59 and his canonisation in 1192. Nothing is told of miracles taking place at the site of Rögnvald's death or rumours about his sanctity. Indeed the statement that his body was kept in St. Magnús Cathedral "till the time that God revealed his merit with many great miracles" may indicate that his cult was a relatively recent phenomenon in the early 1190s. Moreover, the cult appears to have been the creation of Bishop Bjarni as no mention is made of Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson in relation to the canonisation.

³⁹¹ Islandske annaler, 120 ; 108 ; 324.

³⁹² O.s., 315-316.

³⁹³ The Orkneyinga saga, 337-338.

Few years prior to the canonisation of 1192 a grandson of Earl Rögnvaldr, Haraldr *ungi* Eiríksson, had received the title of earl from King Magnús Erlingsson of Norway and the overlordship of half of Caithness from King William I of Scotland (see below ch. 5.3.). Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson refused however to share the earldom with his younger namesake. W. L. Thomson sees a parallel between the emergence of the cults of St. Magnús and that of Earl Rögnvaldr. In both cases the position of reigning earls (i.e. Páll and Haraldr) of the Páll-line was threatened by a member of the Erlendr-line (i.e. Rögnvaldr and Haraldr *ungi*) and, moreover, in both instances bishops of Orkney (i.e. Vilhjálmr and Bjarni) sanctified a member of the Erlendr-line. Thus, Thomson concludes, “Haraldr Maddaðsson and Bishop Bjarni must have seen dangers in the cult of Rognvald, but apparently proved equally powerless to stand in the way of popular enthusiasm.”³⁹⁴

However, in contrast to the cult of Magnús, nothing suggests that popular enthusiasm was a factor behind Bishop Bjarni’s decision to canonise Rögnvaldr. Moreover there is no evidence that Haraldr *ungi* posed a threat to Earl Harald’s position before 1197/98 (see below). Moreover from *Sverris saga* we know that in 1195 Bishop Bjarni helped Haraldr Maddaðarson to negotiate with Sverrir Sigurðarson after the earl had supported an unsuccessful uprising against the Norwegian King (1193-94).³⁹⁵ It appears that Bishop Bjarni was on good terms with Haraldr Maddaðarson; indeed he was related to the Páll-line of the dynasty.³⁹⁶

Rather it appears that it was the desire to honour the founder of St. Magnús Cathedral, and perhaps the hope that a new cult might enhance Kirkwall as a place of pilgrimage, that provided the incentive for the

³⁹⁴ Thomson, *History of Orkney*, 76.

³⁹⁵ *Sverris Saga etter Cod. AM 327 4o*. Ed. by Gustav Indrebø (Kristiania 1920), 131.

³⁹⁶ Bjarni was a second cousin to Earl Haraldr. Crawford, B., “Bishops of Orkney”, 12.

canonisation of the murdered earl.³⁹⁷ In brief, the fact that Bishop Bjarni was confident enough to carry out a canonisation of a member of the Erlend-line of the Orkney dynasty whilst a member of the Páll-line was in power, suggests that the standing of the Orkney bishops in relation to the secular authority had noticeably improved in the second half of the twelfth century.

³⁹⁷ For a similar interpretation see Crawford, B. E., "St. Magnus and St. Rognvald - Two Orkney Saints", Scottish Church History Society Records 28 (1998), 33-37. Crawford also points out that it is likely that Bishop Bjarni was behind the extension of the east end of St. Magnus Cathedral which was undertaken to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims visiting the shrines of the two Orcadian saints. On the architectural aspect see Cant, R. G., "Norwegian Influences in the Design of the Transitional and Gothic Cathedral", St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance. Ed. by B. E. Crawford (Aberdeen 1988), 127-140.

2.5. Concluding Remarks

Erich Hoffmann, in his study Die heiligen Könige bei den Angelsachsen und den skandinavischen Völkern. Königsheiliger und Königshaus, emphasises the political role of the princely cults in medieval Scandinavia. In his view they were created and maintained in order to add legitimacy and prestige to the secular power, in particular, to narrow succession to one particular branch within the ruling houses:

Die Einrichtung und Förderung der Kulte für die königlichen Märtyrer stand in einem sehr engen Zusammenhang mit den Thronfolgeordnungen in den drei Reichen und den Bestrebungen einzelner machtvoller Könige, die Königssippe ihres Landes auf den eigenen Familienzweig zu beschränken.³⁹⁸

Although Hoffmann does not deal with St. Magnús, his general conclusions can be applied to the cult of the Orkney martyr. From the stand-point of Hoffmann's model Orkney represents a kind of miniature version of the three major Scandinavian lands.

It only does up to a point though. In the Northern Isles it was the highest ecclesiastical authority within the earldom, the bishop, that on its own initiative officially recognised the sanctity of Earl Magnús. This act can only be understood when placed within the context of both the ecclesiastical and political situation of the period. In the final analysis it helped to enhance the position of the Orkney bishopric within a society where the ecclesiastical authority was almost totally dependent on the patronage of the secular arm. In such a situation it was crucial for the Church to adapt to existing circumstances and play the few cards it held to their utmost. In this respect Vilhjálmm's promotion of the Magnús cult is a

³⁹⁸ Hoffmann, *Die heiligen Könige*, 210.

good example of how the Church could enhance its own position by aligning and adapting its own interest to that of the secular power.

The case of St. Magnús' cult is a relatively straightforward one: we have had to rely on a single source in which the secular and ecclesiastical authorities were represented by only two figures, Earl Rögnvaldr and Bishop Vilhjálmr. Still the pattern which emerges from this one case justifies a reappraisal of the evidence regarding the emergence of the better known cults of secular leaders in eleventh- and twelfth-century Scandinavia.

Part 3

The Emergence of the Scandinavian Princely Martyr Cults of the Eleventh and Twelfth Century

3.1. St. Ólafr Haraldsson of Norway

The cult of St. Ólafr Haraldsson originated in a period marked by two pivotal developments in medieval Norwegian history: the emergence of Christian kingship and the organisation of the Church. The history of the cult can not be separated from these developments. At the coronation of Magnús Erlingsson in 1163/1164, overseen by Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson of Nidaros, the newly anointed king vowed to rule justly and support and to protect the independence of the Church. Not long after the coronation these promises were further expressed in a letter of privileges (*privilegiebrev*) where Magnús acknowledged Ólafr Haraldsson as the ultimate ruler of the realm and presented himself as the saint's vassal on earth.³⁹⁹ Moreover the archbishop of Nidaros, as the guardian of Ólaf's relics, was granted extensive fiscal privileges for his Church.

³⁹⁹ "Deo namque in hac die gloriose resurrectionis me cum regno in perpetuum et glorioso martyri regi Ola(u)o [cui] integraliter speciali deuocione secundo post dominum regnum assigno Norwegie, et huic regno, quantum deo placuerit, velut eiusdem gloriosi martyris possessioni hereditarie sub eius dominio tamquam suus vicarius et ab eo tenens presidebo." *Latinske dokument til norsk historie fram til år 1204*. Ed. by Eirik Vandvik (Oslo 1959), 60. Schreiner, J., "De første kongekroninger i Norden", *Historisk tidsskrift* (norsk) 34 (1946-1948), 25-46. Tobiassen, T., "Tronfølgeoven og privilegiebrev. En studie i kongedømmets ideologi under Magnus Erlingsson", *Historisk tidsskrift* (norsk) 42 (1964), 181-272. Hoffmann, E., "Coronations and Coronation Oaths in Medieval Scandinavia", *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*. Ed. by János M. Bak (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford 1990), 124-131.

In 1163/64 Church and Crown appropriated the cult of St. Ólafr in order to support their own political and ecclesiastical agenda. By receiving his crown directly from St. Ólafr, Magnús Erlingsson not only asserted his divine right to kingship, but also side-stepped the sensitive issue of his immediate (and somewhat weak) hereditary claim to the throne. Similarly, the archbishop's endorsement of Magnús' kingship was a calculated move which aimed at securing a more stable royal authority. The king, in turn, was expected to consolidate and extend the precious independence which the Church had acquired in the course of the twelfth century, most notably after the founding of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1152/53. On this occasion the cult of St. Ólafr thus provided a bridge between the interests of *regnum* and *sacerdotium*.

In another sense the cult served as a barometer for the relationship between the two authorities in this period. The change in the guardianship of the saint's corporal relics was particularly telling in this respect. According to saga tradition the eleventh-century Norwegian kings treated the relics as their own personal possession. Heimskringla tells that before Haraldr *harðráði* embarked on his ill-fated invasion of England he locked the reliquary and threw away its key.⁴⁰⁰ About a century or so later Eysteinn crowned Magnús Erlingsson not only in his capacity as archbishop of Nidaros but also as the guardian of Ólaf's reliquary.

⁴⁰⁰ Heimskringla III, 175-176 ; 449. This captures well the close identification of the Norwegian kings with the cult of St. Ólafr. A less well known story, preserved in the thirteenth-century Chronica Manniae, tells how Harald's son, King Magnús *berfættr*, had the impunity to open the reliquary on his own accord. Shortly afterwards Ólafr appears to Magnús in a dream and tells him that as a punishment for his deed he is left with two options: to stay in Norway and die shortly afterwards or to try his luck abroad. The king chooses the latter option, embarks on a military expedition to the British Isles on which he is killed (1103). Chronica Regum Manniae et Insularum. The Chronicle of Man and the Sudreys. Ed. by P. A. Munch (Christiania 1860), 6. The two accounts also neatly sum up the ambivalent nature of the relationship between the Norwegian kings and St. Ólafr. While Ólafr brings lustre to their rule they are no more than his substitute rulers on earth and any transgression on their part will be punished.

Thus in 1163/64 Church and Crown stepped forward as partners with their respective powers sanctified by St. Ólafr. The equilibrium between the two authorities did not last; it effectively ended with the fall of Magnús Erlingsson at the battle of Fimreiti in 1184 and the coming of Sverrir Sigurðarson to sole rulership in Norway. In the preceding civil war both factions had claimed to have the backing of St. Ólafr. On one side we have King Sverrir Sigurðarson enforcing laws attributed to the saint and declaring that he had experienced visions of the saint dubbing him as his warrior and designated heir,⁴⁰¹ and in the other camp we have Archbishop Eysteinn who is believed to have composed a *passio et miracula* in honour of the saint during his exile in England (1181-83). When Eysteinn finally returned to Norway he concentrated on the building of a new cathedral to house Ólaf's relics.

Of course the cult was not confined to the Norwegian scene. King Ólafr was the first native saint of the Nordic lands and, to a certain extent, the patron saint of that region as a whole. As early as the second half of the eleventh century his cult had spread to Denmark and church dedications show that Ólafr was a popular saint in the Northern Isles.⁴⁰² Accordingly, when the the Danes and the Orcadians later acquired their own princely cults they were well acquainted with cults of this nature. A similar observation has been made in relation to Sweden and the cult of King Erik Jedvardson.⁴⁰³

The well known story of how the martyrdom of King Ólafr Haraldsson came about does not require detailed retelling here.⁴⁰⁴ Ólafr

⁴⁰¹ Sverris Saga, 3-5.

⁴⁰² See above footnote nr. 311.

⁴⁰³ Janse, O., "Om Olafskult i Uppland", *Studier tillägnade Oscar Montelius*. Ed. not specified (Stockholm 1903), 163.

⁴⁰⁴ Among the numerous retellings of Ólaf's life a concise one is by Brøgger, A. W., "Olav Haraldsson", *Norsk biografisk leksikon*. Vol X (Oslo 1949), 374-390. For a more analytical survey see Bull, E., "Kong Olav Haraldsson", *Historisk tidskrift* (norsk) 28 (1923), 141-170.

was born around 995 and came to the throne in 1015, thus filling the power vacuum which had emerged as a result of King Canute's preoccupation with consolidating his authority in England. It has usually been assumed that Ólafr saw and presented himself as a member of the *Ynglingar* dynasty which had, at least since the reign of Haraldr *hárfagri* in the first half of the tenth century, claimed Norway as their own *óðal*, or ancestral land. Whether Ólafr himself made such a claim or whether we are confronted here with a construction of later medieval commentators are still debated questions.⁴⁰⁵ In any event King Canute was not willing to surrender his influence over Norway and in 1028 his henchmen joined forces with the heathen population (who disliked the king's missionary activity) and local magnates (who saw their position threatened by Ólaf's centralising tendency) and in tandem they forced Ólafr into exile. Two years later as the news reached Ólafr that Earl Hákon Eiríksson, Canute's substitute ruler in Norway, had died he left his asylum in Rus' and returned to Norway. The army which Ólafr was able to assemble was no match for the one which awaited him at the fields of Stiklastaðir and there he was defeated and killed.

Heimskringla, following an unknown source, tells that two farmers transported Ólaf's body from the battlefield to the outskirts of the town of Trondheim where it was kept overnight in a deserted shed (*eyðiskemma*). The corpse was then buried in a nearby location where it lay for a whole year.⁴⁰⁶ When a rumour arose that Ólafr was a saint the people of the

⁴⁰⁵ Krag, C., "Norge som odel i Harald Hårfagres ætt. En møte med en gjenganger", Historisk tidsskrift (norsk) 68 (1984), 288-302.

⁴⁰⁶ Heimskringla II, 397-398. On this episode see Blom, G. A., "Snorri Sturlasons [sic] bruk av Olavslegenden i Store Saga om Olav den hellige og Heimskringla", Innsikt og utsyn. Festskrift til Jørn Sandnes. Red. av Kjell Haarstad et al. (Trondheim 1996), 49-52. On the archaeological evidence relating to St. Ólaf's first resting place see Christophersen, A., "Olavskirke, Olavskult og Trondheims tidlige kirketopografi – problem og perspektiv", Kongsmenn og Krossmenn. Festskrift til Grethe Authén Blom. Red. av Steinar Supphellen. Det kongelige norske videnskabers selskab, skrifter nr. 1 (Trondheim 1992), 39-67.

region of Trøndelag called on Bishop Grímkell – an Englishman who had worked alongside Ólafr as a missionary – to return from his voluntary exile in the region of Uppland. Hearing of the miracles which the fallen king was reported to have performed, Grímkell approached Einar Eindriðason, a prominent chieftain who had not taken part in the stand against Ólafr. Then, the saga states, Grímkell and Einar brought Ólaf's sanctity to the attention of Canute's new substitute ruler, his young son Sven, and his Anglo-Saxon mother, Álfífa. The king told Grímkell and Einar to do whatever they considered appropriate and on August 3, 1031, the bishop translated Ólaf's corporal relics to St. Clement's Church in Nidaros.⁴⁰⁷ Prior to placing them upon the altar Bishop Grímkell proclaimed him a saint and the king assented to this judgement along with all those present.⁴⁰⁸

The most noteworthy feature of the saga tradition on Ólaf's canonisation is the role played in the proceedings by King Sven Álfífuson.⁴⁰⁹ The saga says that the king attended and oversaw this event

⁴⁰⁷ Heimskringla II, 403–404.

⁴⁰⁸ It can not be ruled out that a work was composed on the translation of King Ólafr. It has been suggested that Theodoricus Monachus, writing around the year 1180, was following that source in the following passage: "Quomodo vero mox omnipotens Deus merita martyris sui Olavi declaraverit cæcis visum reddendo et multa commoda ægris mortalibus impendendo, et qualiter episcopus Grimkel ... post annum et quinque dies beatum corpus e terra levaverit et in loco decenter ornato reposuerit in Nidrosiensi metropoli, quo statim percata pugna transvectum fuerat, quia hæc omnia a nonnullis memoriae tradita sunt, nos notis immorari superfluum duximus." *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae*, 43–44. The Icelander Einar Skúlason may also have been familiar with this work as he composed his poem *Geisli* on the occasion of the founding of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1152/53. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* A I, 459–473. Holtsmark, A., "Sankt Olavs liv og mirakler", *Studier i norrøn diktning* (Oslo 1956), 121–133. Anne Holtsmark has furthermore pointed that the so-called *Erfidrápa*, ("Memorial poem"), composed by Sighvatr Þórðarsson around 1040, contains a reference to a mass for King Ólafr. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning* A I, 245. This suggests that at this early date an *officium* dedicated St. Ólafr was in place.

⁴⁰⁹ On Grímkell (or Grímkellus), one of the missionary bishops who came to Norway with King Ólafr Tryggvason, see Johnsen, A. O., "Om misjonbiskopen Grímkellus", *Historisk tidsskrift* (norsk) 54 (1975), 22–34. On the activities of the English missionary bishops in Norway in general see Jørgensen, T., "From Wessex to Western Norway: Some Perspectives on one Channel for the Christianisation Process", *Church and People in Britain and Scandinavia*. Ed. by Ingmar Brohed. *Bibliotheca Historica-Ecclesiastica Lundensis* 36 (Lund 1996), 29–44, esp. 37–43. Abrams, L., "Eleventh-

in co-operation with Bishop Grímkell.⁴¹⁰ Interestingly, Fagrskinna, a Norwegian compilation from the first quarter of the thirteenth century, tells that Ólaf's body was not elevated on the advice of Grímkell but a certain Sigurðr,⁴¹¹ a missionary bishop who had been in the entourage of the king and is presumably the same Sigurðr mentioned in a *scholium* in Adam's Gesta Hammaburgensis.⁴¹² It should be noted that Fagrskinna says that Sven and Álfífa were involved in the canonisation, as does the so-called Legendary saga of St. Olaf, a Norwegian work preserved in a manuscript from the middle of the thirteenth century, but believed to have been composed around 1200.⁴¹³

In contrast Theodoricus monachus gives Grímkell all the credit for this act and Einar Skúlason in his poem Geisli (ca. 1152) proceeds directly from Ólaf's posthumous miracles to the reign of his son, Magnús góði

Century Missions and the Early Stages of Ecclesiastical Organisation in Scandinavia", Anglo-Norman Studies 17 (1995), 21-41. Although the evidence is far from conclusive it is tempting to identify Bishop Grimkell with Bishop Grimkellus of Selsey (1038-1047). That he came from an aristocratic family from Devon and was related to Archbishop Aelnoth of Canterbury (1020-1038) is an interesting possibility. Birkeli, F., Tolv vinter hade kristendommen vært i Norge (Oslo 1995), 159-161. This would square well with the fact that the earliest known liturgical material on the saint (ca. 1060) is from England. See Libri Liturgici Provinciae Nidrosiensis Medii Aevi. Vol. II: Ordo Nidrosiensis Ecclesiae. Ed. by Lilli Gjerløw (Oslo 1968), 123. Hohler, C., "The Red Book of Darley", Nordiskt Kollokvium II i latinsk liturgiforskning (Stockholm 1972), 39-47. See also Dickins, B., "The Cult of S. Olave in the British Isles", Saga-Book of the Viking Society 42 (1945), 53-80, esp., 56-7. E. Bull argues that the cult of St. Ólafr entered the British Isles by two routes: from Orkney into Northern Scotland and from Norway to the east coast of England. Bull, E., "The Cultus of Norwegian Saints in England and Scotland", Saga-Book of the Viking Society 8 (1913-14), 134-148.

⁴¹⁰ Heimskringla II, 403-405.

⁴¹¹ "Æinum vætri æftir fall Olafs konongs var upp tækinn licamr hans oc skrinlagðr at augnsiandum allum Þrændum. at raðe Sigurðar biscups. þar varo þau oc Svæinn oc Alfiva moðer hans. Fagrskinna, 183. "One winter after the fall of King Olaf his body was exhumed and enshrined in the presence of all the people of Trondheim on the advice of Bishop Sigurðr. Also present were Sven and his mother Álfífa." My translation. It is likely, although not certain, that Snorri was familiar with Fagrskinna when he composed Heimskringla. Íslensk bókmenntasaga, 365.

⁴¹² Magistri Adam Bremensis, III, lxxvii, 233. See also Koht, H., "De første norske biskoper", Historisk tidsskrift (norsk) 33 (1943-46), 128-134.

⁴¹³ Olafs saga hins helga; Die "Legendarische Saga" über Olaf den Heiligen (Hs. Delagard. saml. nr. 8^{II}). Ed. and transl. by A. Heinrichs, D. Janshen, E. Radicke, H. Röhn (Heidelberg 1982), 206.

(1035-1047).⁴¹⁴ Considering the testimony of Heimskringla, Fagrskinna and the Legendary saga one has to ask whether Theodoricus and Einar chose to ignore King Sven's involvement. A "censorship" of this sort should not be a matter of surprise: for Norwegians in the second half of the twelfth century the fact that a member of the Danish royal dynasty had been the first king to promote Ólaf's sanctity was surely a potential source of embarrassment.

An alternative scenario can be envisaged, that Snorri's version is untrustworthy in the sense that King Sven Álfífuson and his mother did not play a part in Ólaf's canonisation. Glælognskviða, a skaldic poem in ten strophes, composed by the Iclander Þórarinn *loftunga*, is the one near contemporary source which connects King Sven with the cult of St. Ólafr.⁴¹⁵ Snorri informs us that Þórarinn had been in the service of Sven and composed Glælognskviða in his honour while the king was still in Norway. If this information is taken at face value the poem was composed sometime between 1031 and 1035, that is shortly after the canonisation.⁴¹⁶

In the first strophe the poet simply tells that King Sven Álfífuson came to Norway along with his retinue. In the second stanza he states that a king (*"þjóðkonungr"*) has now established himself in Nidaros and from this place the generous ruler will govern his realm. In the following strophes the attention shifts from the young king to St. Ólafr and the various supernatural signs that have testified to his sanctity. The body of the saint is still incorrupt, his hair and nails grow as though he were alive and bells miraculously chime of their own accord. People flock to the place where he rests; the blind gain sight and the dumb gain speech. In strophe nine Þórarinn directly addresses addresses a certain king and

⁴¹⁴ Monumenta Historica Norvegiae, 43-44. Den norsk-isländske skjaldedigtning A I, 459-473.

⁴¹⁵ Den norsk-isländske skjaldedigtning A I, 324-327.

⁴¹⁶ Heimskringla II, 406.

expresses the hope that Ólafr will allow him to rule the land for only the saint can secure peace and prosperity from the Almighty. Although Glælognskviða is a short and incompletely preserved poem it paints a picture of a surprisingly developed cult. The shrine is already a centre of pilgrimage, a set of miracles is in place and, more strikingly, the notion of Norway as the preserve of St. Ólafr has already emerged.

The mature state of the cult at such an early point in time has made one commentator, Staffan Hellberg, question the early dating of Glælognskviða.⁴¹⁷ In the most detailed examination of the work since Halevard Magerøy published his monograph on it in 1948,⁴¹⁸ Hellberg argues that the first strophe of the poem, where King Sven is mentioned, stems from another, now lost, skaldic poem that is unrelated to the following nine verses. In support of this hypothesis Hellberg draws attention to the curious structure of the poem. Glælognskviða begins in the usual manner associated with laudatory skaldic poems, the subject is King Sven and one would expect an embellished account of his (admittedly somewhat meagre) military achievements to ensue. Instead the bulk of the poem deals with St. Ólafr and his supernatural power.

Hellberg maintains that although Þórarinn *loftunga* may have fathered the first stanza of the poem, Snorri was mistaken when he assumed that it went together with the following nine stanzas. If this is the case both the dating of Glælognskviða and Sven Álfíuson's association with the cult of Ólafr has to be questioned. This in turn opens up the possibility that strophes 2-10 were composed on the occasion of later translations of St. Ólaf's relics which took place in the reigns of Magnús *góði* (1035-1047), Haraldr *harðráði* (1046-1066) and Ólafr *kyrri* (1066-1093). Hellberg

⁴¹⁷ Hellberg, S., "Kring tilkomsten av *Glælognskviða*.", Arkiv för nordisk filologi 99 (1984), 14-48.

⁴¹⁸ Magerø, H., Glælognskviða av Totaren lovtunge (Oslo 1948). See also Lange, W., Studien zur christlichen Dichtung der Nordgermanen 1000-1200. Palaestra 222 (Göttingen 1958), 113-120.

argues that the canonisation of King Ólafr was undertaken on the sole initiative of the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics who had supported the king in his missionary efforts and the appearance of King Sven in this context in Heimskringla – undeniably curious in light of the fact that it was his father, King Canute, who had been instrumental in bringing about Ólaf's downfall – can be explained by Snorri's misreading of Glælognskviða. In further support of this argument he might have added that when Adam of Bremen tells of St Ólaf's cult in his Gesta Hammaburgensis he does not refer to King Sven. Considering that King Sven Estridsson of Denmark, a kinsman of Sven Álfífuson,⁴¹⁹ was an important source for Adam's account, a reference to that effect would seem natural. Particularly as Adam of Bremen goes out of his way to describe Harald *harðráði*'s negative stance towards the cult, even going as far as accusing Ólaf's brother of confiscating offerings which pilgrims had brought to the saint.⁴²⁰

From my stand-point Hellberg's hypothesis leaves questions unanswered regarding the history of the cult in the period between Ólaf's death and the start of Magnús *góði*'s reign in 1035.⁴²¹ In particular, it fits uneasily with the description in Heimskringla of Sven's participation in the canonisation of 1031. Even if Snorri was mistaken when he associated the whole poem with the king, it is difficult to imagine how this by itself could have induced him to compose his description of the canonisation. The detail in which he describes this event – especially the trial of Ólaf's bone by fire and Álfífa's objections to his sanctity – suggests that Snorri was familiar with a tradition independent of Glælognskviða. More significantly, Hellberg fails to take into the equation that Fagrskinna and

⁴¹⁹ Sven Estridsson was the nephew of Canute the great.

⁴²⁰ Magistri Adam Bremensis, III, xvii, 159-160.

⁴²¹ Else Mundal has pointed out that although there is no proof that the poem, as it now stands, was dedicated to Sven it squares well with the fact that Þórarinn composed another poem, Tøgdrápa (ca. 1028), in honour of the king's father, King Canute the Great. Mundal, E., "Legender, helgenkult og missionsstrategi i kristningstida", Selja – heilig stad i 1000 år. Red. av Magnus Rindal (Oslo 1997), 99.

the Legendary saga also tell that King Sven and Álfífa attended the canonisation.

It is noteworthy that Sven's apparent patronage of a cult of a "political enemy" has a certain parallel in the English scene in the second half of the tenth century and the first half of the eleventh century. Thus his father, King Canute, promoted the cult of St. Edmund of East Anglia (d. 869), the victim of a Danish war-band. Canute's policy in this matter has generally been seen as effort on his part to bridge the cultural and political divide between the Danes and the Anglo-Saxons.⁴²² Mention can also be made of the cult of Edward the Martyr who was treacherously murdered in 979 on a visit to his stepmother. Although the involvement of his successor, Æthelred II, in the killing was never established the murder nevertheless cast a shadow over his reign. Scholars have argued that Æthelred promoted the cult of his murdered brother in order to pacify his opponents and ingratiate himself in their eyes,⁴²³ a hypothesis, however, which has not found favour with all commentators.⁴²⁴ From this perspective King Sven's patronage of the cult can be seen as an effective way of neutralising opposition from those who may have used Ólaf's saintly reputation as a weapon against the Danish king.

Although there seems little reason to question King Sven Álfífuson's role in the canonisation of Ólafr Haraldsson, it was first in the reigns of Magnús Ólafsson and Haraldr Sigurðarson – the martyr's son and half-brother respectively – that the royal authorities began to take an active interest in the promotion of his cult. It was the former king who probably stipulated that the feast of the saint should be kept in Norway on the day of

⁴²² Ridyard, *The Royal Saints*, 227-233.

⁴²³ Brook, C. N. L., *The Saxon and the Norman Kings* (2nd ed. London 1978), 126. Rollason, "Cults of Murdered Royal Saints", 17-21.

⁴²⁴ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints*, 154-171.

his martyrdom.⁴²⁵ Our most important source is again Snorri Sturluson.

The following passage from Heimskringla is worth quoting in full:

Magnús konungr Ólafsson lét gera Ólafskirkju í Kaupangi. Í þeim stað hafði náttsett verit lík konungs. Þat var þá fyrir ofan bæinn. Hann lét þar ok reisa konungsgarðinn. Kirkjan varð eigi algör, áðr konungr andaðisk. Lét Haraldr konungr fylla þat, er á skorti. Hann lét ok efna þar í garðinum at gera sér steinhöll, ok varð hún eigi algör, áðr hann lét reisa af grundvelli Máriaúrkirkju uppi á melinum, nær því er heilagur dómr konungsins lá í jörðu inn fyrsta vetr eptir fall hans. Þat var mikit musteri ok gort sterkliga at líminu, svá at varla fekk brotit, þá er Eysteinn erkibyskup lét ofan taka. Heilagur dómr Ólafs konungs var varðveitt í Ólafskirkju, meðan Máriaúrkirkja var í gørð. Haraldr konungr lét húsa konungsgarð ofan frá Máriaúrkirkju við ána, þar sem nú er. En þar, sem hann hafði höllina látit gera, lét hann vígja hús þat til Grégóriúskirkju.⁴²⁶

King Magnus Olafson built Olaf's church in Kaupangen, on the spot where Olaf'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 Harald had the church called Maria Kirke built from the foundations up, at the sand-hill 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 minster, and so strongly built with lime that it was difficult to break it when the archbishop Eysteinn had it pulled down. Olaf's holy remains were kept in Olaf's church while Maria kirke was being built. King Harald had the king's house erected below Maria Kirke, 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.⁴²⁷

In this dense but illuminating passage Snorri recounts a tradition that Magnús *góði* promoted the cult of King Ólafr by erecting a church in his honour at the place where the saint's body had been kept following the battle, a site which one can assume served as an early focal point for the cult. The passage also suggests that Magnús had Ólaf's corporal relics translated from St. Clement's church, where it had been kept since the

⁴²⁵ Heimskringla III, 20-21. Snorri appears to have read this into Sighvat's skaldic poem Erfidrápa from ca. 1040.

⁴²⁶ Heimskringla III, 121. The translation of St. Ólafr by King Ólafr *kyrri* is also mentioned in Ágrip. Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum. Fagrskinna-Nóregskonunga-tal. Bjarni Einarsson gaf út. Íslensk Fornrit XXIX (Reykjavík 1985), 40.

⁴²⁷ Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla. Part Two. Sagas of the Norse Kings. Transl. by Samuel Laing. Revised with introduction and notes by Peter Foote (London/Melbourne/Toronto 1961), 189-190.

eleventh century. To my best knowledge no scholar has examined the cult from this particular angle. Erich Hoffmann, for instance, is silent on the subject although he goes out of his way to point out the manifold ecclesiastical and political links between Norway and England in this period.⁴³¹ Likewise in a volume of papers from a recent conference on St. Ólafr the possible eastern connection is not even mentioned.⁴³² This state of affairs is somewhat surprising in light of the fact that similarities between the Norwegian cult and that of Boris and Gleb have not escaped the attention of scholars in the field of Rus' studies. They, however, have argued that it was the Norwegian cult that inspired Grand-Prince Jaroslav to promote the sanctity of his half-brothers, Boris and Gleb.⁴³³ The opposite route of influence is, I believe, more plausible.

As noted King Ólafr spent his time in exile between 1028 and 1030 at the court of Jaroslav. As Ólafr returned to Norway he left behind his young son Magnús who stayed there until 1035 when he was escorted back to Norway to succeed his father on the throne. Haraldr Sigurðarson had also notable links with the Kievan court. The Old-Norse sources tell that he became a high-ranking figure in Jaroslav's army and it is known that he participated in the Byzantine expedition to Sicily as a member of the Russo-Varangian corps.⁴³⁴ Haraldr then married Elisabeth (1044?), the daughter of the grand-prince, thus putting a formal seal on ties between the princely dynasties of Norway and Kievan Rus'.⁴³⁵ Moreover, the sources

⁴³¹ Hoffmann, *Die heiligen Könige*, 58-89.

⁴³² *St. Olav, seine Zeit und sein Kult*. Red. av G. Svahnström. *Acta Visbyensia* (Visby 1981).

⁴³³ Sciacca, F. A., "The Kievan Cult of Boris and Gleb: The Bulgarian Connection", *Proceedings of the Symposium on Slavic Cultures: Bulgarian Contribution to Slavic Culture* (Sofia 1983), 58-60.

⁴³⁴ A concise overview of Harald's career in the East is given by Koht, H., "Harald Hardraade", *Norsk biografisk leksikon*. Vol. X (Oslo 1931), 463-469. See also Sigfús Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium*. Tr. and revised by Benedikt S. Benediktz (Cambridge 1978), 54-103.

⁴³⁵ See Birnbaum, H., "Yaroslav's Varangian Connection", *Scando-Slavica* 24 (1978), 5-25.

indicate that Haraldr was at the court of Jaroslav on two separate occasions. He probably arrived in 1031 and stayed for few years. In the early 1040s he was back and then returned to Norway in 1045.⁴³⁶ There can be little doubt that when Haraldr came to power in Norway 1046 he was better acquainted with the Kievan and the Byzantine models of rulership than, for instance, that of Anglo-Saxon England.

Harald's exposure to the political scene in the East has led scholars to speculate in what way it could have influenced his political outlook.⁴³⁷ Particular attention has been given to the king's uncompromising stance towards outside interference in matters ecclesiastical; most succinctly expressed of course in his dealings with Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen in the 1050s. It has been argued that in this field Haraldr was influenced by the eastern concept of omnipotent kingship and the complete control of the Church by the secular ruler.⁴³⁸ His interest in gaining control of Denmark (Jylland in particular) has also been seen as an attempt to carve out for himself a principality in the Russian or Byzantine mould which would have left him in control of a large portion of the trade between Western Europe and the East.⁴³⁹ In light of these (admittedly not always convincing) speculations it is surely justifiable to place Harald's patronage of his half-brother within a similar eastern context, particularly as his reign from 1046 to 1066 was a crucial period in the development of the cult.

⁴³⁶ Heimskringla III, 69. Morkinskinna, 56; 87-88. For these dates see Birnbaum, "Jaroslav's Varangian Connection", 9.

⁴³⁷ E.g. Joys, Biskop og konge, 37-38. Johnsen, A. O., "Biskop Bjarnhard og kirkeforholdene i Norge under Harald Hardråde og Olav Kyrre", Björgvin bispestol. Byen og bispedømmet. Ed. by P. Juvkam (Bergen 1974), 11-16. Ciggaar, K. N., Western Travellers to Constantinople. The West and Byzantium, 962-1204: Cultural and Political Relations (Leiden/New York/Köln 1996), 116-128. Edsman, C. M., "Det sakrale kungadömet i forskningshistorisk belysning", Kongens makt og aere. Skandinaviske herskersymboler gjennom 1000 år. Ed. by M. Blindheim et al. (Oslo 1985), 19-28.

⁴³⁸ Joys, Biskop og konge, 37-38.

⁴³⁹ Andersen, Samlingen av Norge, 165.

Following the death of Vladimir I in 1015, a power struggle ensued between his numerous sons (begotten by nearly as many wives).⁴⁴⁰ One of them, Prince Sviatopolk of Turov, occupied the throne and immediately took steps to secure his position by eliminating possible contenders among his nearest relatives. For this purpose he recruited assassins to murder his rivals, among them the young princes Boris and Gleb. However, in 1019 Sviatopolk was himself ousted by another of Valdemar's sons, Jaroslav of Novgorod. Until 1036 the Kievan realm was shared by Jaroslav and the fifth brother, Mstislav, when the former assumed sole rulership.⁴⁴¹

The emergence of the cult of Boris and Gleb is a much debated subject in Old-Rus' studies.⁴⁴² In some ways the scholar in this field is confronted with problems comparable with those that relate to the origin of St. Ólaf's cult. In both cases he faces the task of explaining how a princely cult could emerge and thrive in a newly converted society, a society, moreover, where organisation of religious life was still in an embryonic form under the tutelage of a secular authority which had only recently embraced Christianity.

It is generally accepted that it was Grand-Prince Jaroslav who began promoting the cult of Boris and Gleb in the 1020s, an interpretation

⁴⁴⁰ Franklin, S. & Shephard, J., The Emergence of Rus 750-1250 (London/New York), 183-208. Vernadsky, G., Kievan Russia (New Haven/London 1948), 74-83.

⁴⁴¹ The accepted version of events follows an entry for the year 1015 in the Laurentian Chronicle. Lenhoff, G., The Martyred Princes Boris and Gleb: A Socio-Cultural Study of the Cult and the Texts (Ohio 1989), 12. Interestingly another, very different, version of what happened after Vladimir's death is inspired by an ingenious reading of the Icelandic short saga (*þáttur*) of Eymundr Hringsson. According to this theory, generally dismissed by Old-Russian scholars, it was Jaroslav himself who orchestrated the killing of Boris and Gleb. See Cook, R., "Russian History, Icelandic story and Byzantine Strategy in Eymundar þáttur Hringssonar", Viator 17 (1986), 65-89.

⁴⁴² See the overview given by Lenhoff, The Martyred Princes, 11-16. Due to linguistic reasons much of the scholarly literature on the cult of Boris and Gleb has been inaccessible to me. As a result, however, of almost complete lack of interest shown by Soviet scholars in the study of hagiography and saints' cults this is not the serious handicap one might expect. To put the scholarly literature on Boris and Gleb into perspective see the review article by Franklin, S., "Towards Post-Soviet Pre-Modernism: on recent approaches to early Rus(s)ian hagiography," Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 18 (1994), 250-275.

primarily based on the so-called Narrative, Passion and Encomium of Boris and Gleb.⁴⁴³ While Sviatopolk, the murderer of the two princes, is still in power the corporal remains of the martyred princes are neglected. However, pillars of fire and burning candles at the sites testify to their saintly status. When Jaroslav has ousted Sviatopolk from the principality “he began to inquire about the bodies of the saintly ones, how and where they were placed.”⁴⁴⁴ Jaroslav buries them with appropriate honours and immediately miracles begin to occur. When the grand-prince hears of this he

...praised God and the holy martyrs; he then summoned the Metropolitan and joyfully told him. Hearing this, the Archbishop lifted his praise to the Lord, and gave the Prince good and pious counsel, that he should build a church of surpassing beauty and holiness. The advice pleased the Prince, and he erected a great church with five cupolas, decorated throughout with frescoes, and he adorned it with all manners of finery. And the Metropolitan John and Prince Jaroslav and the entire clergy and the people came with crosses, and they translated the saints and consecrated the church. And they established the twenty-fourth of the month of July as a feast day for celebration. It is the day on which the most blessed Boris was slain; and on that the very day the church was consecrated and the saints were translated.⁴⁴⁵

This passage, written at some point from late in the reign of Jaroslav to the mid twelfth century,⁴⁴⁶ describes a canonisation jointly overseen by the metropolitan and the grand-prince in the year 1039. Haraldr *harðráði* visited Jaroslav in 1042 or when the promotion of the cults of Boris and Gleb was already under way. It is worth noting that the church mentioned in the passage was erected at the grave-site of Boris and Gleb⁴⁴⁷ and, as earlier noted, Haraldr built a church close to the site where Ólafr had lain the year following his death at Stiklastaðir.

⁴⁴³ The Hagiography of Kievan Rus', 197-215. "Most scholars believe that the cult developed in the 1020s, soon after Jaroslav became sole ruler in Kiev.... ." Ibid., xxvii.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 193.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 211-213.

⁴⁴⁶ See Ingham, N. W., "Genre Characteristics of the Kievan Lives of Princes in Slavic and European Perspective", American Contributions to the Ninth International Congress of Slavists, Kiev September 7-13 1983. Vol II: Literature, Folklore and History. Ed. by P. Debreczeny (Columbus, Ohio 1983), 229.

⁴⁴⁷ The Hagiography of Kievan Rus', xxvi.

The work also describes a translation of the martyrs in 1072 into a new church in Kiev attended and organised by the three sons and heirs of Jaroslav along with the most eminent representatives of the Kievan Church. The immediate incentive for this undertaking appears to have been the re-conquering of Kiev by one of the brothers, Prince Izjaslav. Most historians have seen this second translation as reflecting Izjaslav's wish to show his gratitude to Boris and Gleb for their aid in his military victories and, in the process, strengthen his precarious rule over the city of Kiev.⁴⁴⁸ The event can also be viewed as a symbolic manifestation of the unity of the Kievan principality at a time when it had effectively been divided up between the heirs of Jaroslav. Interestingly, King Ladislaus of Hungary was a visitor in Kiev when the 1072 translation took place and it has been argued that this event may have inspired him to translate the corporal relics of his own father, King Stephan, in 1083. It is also worth noting that the Hungarian royal dynasty, like the Norwegian one, had dynastic links with the ruling house of Kievan Rus'.⁴⁴⁹

Izjaslav was not the only brother to promote the sanctity of Boris and Gleb; Sviatoslav, the ruler of the important city of Chernigov (1054-1076), was an enthusiastic patron of the cult of the two martyrs.⁴⁵⁰ It seems that

⁴⁴⁸ Slavic Lives, 215-217. Lenhoff, *The Martyred Princes*, 49; 129. It has been argued that the 1072 event was the first translation of Boris and Gleb and that the one attributed to Jaroslav and Ioann, the metropolitan, was a later invention. Poppe, A., "La naissance du culte de Boris and Gleb", *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 24 (1981), 31. Reiterated, idem., "Politik und Heiligenverehrung in der Kiever Rus'. Der apostelgleiche Herrscher und seine Martyrsöhne", *Politik und Heiligenverehrung im Hochmittelalter*. Herausgegeben von Jürgen Petersohn. *Vorträge und Forschungen*. Band XLII (Sigmaringen 1994), 412. A detailed study of the *Narrative* and the *Nestor Chronicle*, however, shows that there is little reason to distrust the testimony of the sources regarding the canonisation, see Müller, L., "Zur Frage nach dem Zeitpunkt der Kanonisierung der heiligen Boris und Gleb", *The Legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius to Kiev and Moscow. Proceedings of the International Congress on the Millennium of the Conversion of Rus' to Christianity Thessaloniki 26-28 November 1988*. Ed. by Tachiaos, Anthony-Emil N. (Thessaloniki 1992), 3321-3339.

⁴⁴⁹ Klaniczay, "From Sacral Kingship", 89.

⁴⁵⁰ Dimnik, M., "Sviatoslav and the Eparchy of Chernigov (1054-1076)", *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 34 (1992), 373-390.

Sviatoslav was the first to promote souvenir amulets of the saints intended for pilgrims and he certainly commenced the building of a church in their honour which, if completed, would have been the largest one in the principality.⁴⁵¹ Thus Sviatoslav not only identified his own persona with the martyrs but he also provided the bishopric of Chernigov with a focal point for religious observance.⁴⁵² In this respect the translations of Boris and Gleb in the second half of the eleventh century by the successors of Grand-Prince Jaroslav can be compared with the translations of Ólaf's relics by Magnús góði, Haraldr *harðráði* and Ólafr *kyrri*. By these acts these rulers personally associated their position of power with the cults of their kinsmen.

Of course it is not possible to prove that the Kievan cult of Boris and Gleb influenced Haraldr in his promotion of St. Ólaf's sanctity. Still, taking into account the contacts he had with Grand-Prince Jaroslav during a period when the latter had established himself as the sole ruler of Kievan Rus' and begun to take interest in the cults of his half-brothers, such an influence appears highly likely.⁴⁵³ As noted the Anglo-Saxon input in the emergence of Ólaf's cult has often been stressed.⁴⁵⁴ The Englishmen working in Norway were well acquainted with the idea of royal sanctity

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 388-390.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 390.

⁴⁵³ Without claiming that the hagiography of Kievan Rus' influenced that on St. Ólafr it is noteworthy that some of the hagiographic commonplaces associated with the Norwegian saint are found in the Slavic Narrative, Passion and Encomium of Boris and Gleb. For example the motif of the pillar of light seen over the grave of many of the Anglo-Saxon royal martyrs (and that of St. Ólafr) appears in the Russian hagiography (more specifically as a pillar of fire). See *Medieval Slavic Lives*, 193. One motif associated with St. Ólafr that I have not found in English hagiography is the miraculous appearance of lighted candles at the king's shrine (the earliest reference in *Glælognskviða*). Lighted candles appeared over the grave of the the Russian martyrs. Ibid., 193. Roman Jakobson has pointed out that burning candles appear at the graves of other Slavic saints. Jakobson, R., "Some Russian Echoes of Czech Hagiography", *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves* 7 (1944), 155-180. Lenhoff, *The Martyred Princes*, 39-40. See also on Þorleifr *breiðskeggr* in ch. 5.5.

⁴⁵⁴ Hoffmann, *Die heiligen Könige*, 58-89. Blom, G. A., "St. Olav in norwegischer Geschichte, Königsheiliger in vielen Gestalten", *St. Olav, seine Zeit und sein Kult*. Red. av G. Svahnström. *Acta Visbyensia* (Visby 1981), 27-38.

and the value such cults could have in strengthening religious life and promoting the ideals of Christian kingship. However, it is legitimate to ask whether from the royal perspective the model for the cult of St. Ólafr should not be sought in Kievan Rus', a region which both Magnús and Haraldr were certainly more familiar with than England.

Norway and the principality of Kievan Rus' had a number of things in common in the mid eleventh century. For one thing the existence of the realms as independent political units was far from self-evident in this period. The Danish kings had territorial claims to Norway while local separatism, headed by powerful magnates, was rife. The Kievan realm was under constant external pressure as the fluctuating borders of the principality, particularly in the tenth century, shows. In a similar way as the unification of Norway, or at least the notion of a unified Norway, was forged in the reign of the two missionary kings (Ólafr Tryggvason and Ólafr Haraldsson) the Kievan realm emerged as a relatively compact unit in the reigns of Grand-Princes Vladimir I (ca. 980-1015) and Jaroslav the Wise (1019-1054). The cohesive element which these rulers brought to their respective lands was Christianity. Although the religion had already gained some headway, the official conversion (meaning the adoption of the religion by the secular ruler) of both realms took place in the last decades of the tenth century; with Vladimir in 989 and king Ólafr Tryggvason in 995. In both lands the organisation of the Church was in a rudimentary state and ecclesiastical assistance from abroad was of pivotal importance; from England in the case of Norway and the Byzantine Empire in the case of Rus'.

The question of influence apart, the parallels between the cults of Ólafr and the Kievan princes Boris and Gleb are noteworthy. In both cases we see princely cults promoted in order to strengthen the rule of specific

dynasties and provide symbols of unity in principalities prone to fragmentation.

Excursus: King Haraldr harðráði and the Cult of St. Hallvard

The earliest reference to the cult of St. Hallvard appears in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis*. Adam writes that he has been told by King Sven Estridsson of Denmark that martyrs of the faith can be found in both Norway and Sweden. Among those is a certain Hericus (i.e. Erik), a missionary, who "won the martyr's crown by having his head cut off while he preached in the farther parts of Sweden."⁴⁵⁵ Although Hericus is not mentioned in any other sources it has been argued, on somewhat weak ground, that the royal cult of King Erik Jedvardson which emerged in the latter half of the twelfth century was a continuation of the cult of his eleventh-century namesake.⁴⁵⁶ Adam then proceeds to tell of a certain Allwardus (i.e. Hallvard), a man of noble birth, who was killed by his own friends as he strove to protect an enemy.⁴⁵⁷ At their resting place, where numerous miracles have taken place, the Norwegians and the Swedes venerate Alwardus and Hericus. In Icelandic medieval annals Hallvard's martyrdom is dated to 1043.⁴⁵⁸ In light of Adam's early testimony there is no reason to reject this dating out of hand. A three part *Lectiones de S.*

⁴⁵⁵ "martyrii palmam capitis abscisione meruit." Magistri Adam Bremensis, III, liiii, 199.

⁴⁵⁶ Stjerna, K., *Erik den Helige. En sagohistorisk studie. Meddelanden från det literaturshistoriska seminariet in Lund. Lunds universitets årskrift* Band 34, Afdeln. 1 N:r 2., (1898), 1-35. Forcefully dismissed by Janse, O., "De nyaste åsikterna om Erik den helige", *Historisk tidskrift* (svensk) 19 (1898), 324-325.

⁴⁵⁷ "Alter quidam Alwardus nomine, inter Nortmannos sancta conversatione diu latenter vivens abscondi non potuit. Ille igitur dum protexit inimicum, occisus est ab amicis. Ad quorum requietionis locum magna hodieque sanitatum miracula populis declarantur." Magistri Adam Bremensis, III, liiii, 199.

⁴⁵⁸ *Islandske annaler*, 17 ; 58 (has it 1042) ; 108 ; 250 ; 409.

Halvardo is found in the Breviarium Nidarosienses printed in 1519 of which a slightly fuller version (Legenda) is preserved in a Utrecht manuscript from the end of the sixteenth century. Two fragments of an Icelandic saga or Life of Hallvard have also survived.⁴⁵⁹

The Legenda tells that Hallvard's father was Vébjörn, a rich farmer from the Vestfold region, and his mother a certain Þóra, a daughter of Guðbrandr *kúla*. It is noted that this Guðbrandr was the grandson of St. Ólafr and hence Hallvard was a member of the Norwegian royal dynasty. In his youth he was diligent, honest and pure of heart. On his way to another part of the country Hallvard arrives at the banks of the river Dram. A pregnant women approaches him and begs him to help her cross. As Hallvard and the women are making the journey across they are approached by a boat carrying three men. The women explains that the men want to punish her for a theft of which she has already proved her innocence by undergoing a trial by iron. On hearing this Hallvard refuses to hand over the women and consequently both are killed. Hallvard's body is thrown overboard with a stone around its neck but by a miracle the corpse floats to the surface. At this point both the Legenda and the Lectiones terminate. One of the Icelandic fragments, however, tells that Hallvard's corporal remains were shortly afterwards brought to Oslo: "*ok hvilir sidan þar i hofutkirkiu þess kaupstadar, ok vegsamadr sidan af öllu folki sem, verdugt er.*"⁴⁶⁰

There is a notable discrepancy between the brief account in the Gesta Hammaburgensis and what we read in the later hagiography on Hallvard's martyrdom. For the first part there is a clear causal link in Adam's account between his martyrdom and the less than ideal religious state of the two Scandinavian countries. This portrayal of religious life in Norway accords

⁴⁵⁹ All three works are printed in Heilagra manna søgur I, 395-399.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 396. "and rests in the main church of that town and is venerated, as is fitting, by all people." My translation.

well with Adam's negative assessment of King Haraldr *harðráði*'s attitude towards the Church and the Christian religion in general.⁴⁶¹ Although he does not explicitly state that Hallvard was killed by pagans in defence of Christianity, we are left in no doubt that his murder was committed in a semi-pagan country. Moreover, as presented by Adam, St. Hallvard shares the fate of those saints who come to a violent end through no fault of their own and, significantly, by the hands of people they trusted. As noted he tells that Hallvard was killed by friends ("*occisus est ab amicis*") in the act of sheltering an enemy.

The extant hagiography on St. Hallvard thus partly fits into hagiographic pattern on the princely martyr unjustly killed. Although Hallvard is neither a prince nor a king his royal pedigree is noted. Like many martyrs of that stock his behaviour as a youth is exemplary and his purity in body and noble spirit are stressed. It is indeed no coincidence that in medieval pictorial representations of St. Hallvard and St. Magnús they are invariably beardless; a feature which underlines their youthfulness and innocence.⁴⁶² Still, one element associated with the hagiography of princely martyrs is absent from the Hallvard corpus: the treacherous betrayal of the main protagonist. Whether the appearance of this element in *Gesta Hammaburgensis* reflects a genuine Norwegian tradition or simply Adam's interpretation – fitting the story of Hallvard into an hagiographic framework which he was familiar with – is impossible to tell.

Hallvard's kinship to St. Ólafr has led some scholars to the conclusion that Haraldr *harðráði* was behind the promotion of the cult.⁴⁶³ This hypothesis was first put forward by P. A. Munch around the middle of the nineteenth century and later taken up by Halvdan Koht in an entry on the

⁴⁶¹ E.g., Adam of Bremen, III, xvii (16), 127-128.

⁴⁶² Blindheim, M., "St. Magnus in Scandinavian Art", *St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*. Ed. by B. E. Crawford (Aberdeen 1988), 168.

⁴⁶³ It can not of course be excluded that this tradition emerged at a later stage.

king in Norsk biografisk leksikon.⁴⁶⁴ Munch pointed out that the centre of Hallvard's cult was Oslo, a town that King Haraldr founded according to saga tradition.⁴⁶⁵ In a comparable way as the relics of St. Ólafr provided a focal point for Christianity in the region of Trøndelag, so Haraldr may have envisaged a similar role for St. Hallvard in Oslo. By translating Hallvard from the Lie region to Oslo the king would have had cults of his kinsmen in two of the more vital regions of his realm, Trøndelag in the north and Viken in the south.

In the second half of the eleventh century Oslo was emerging as a centre of population in the important region of Viken and a major market place in southern Norway.⁴⁶⁶ This may seem to contradict Snorri Sturluson's claim that Haraldr *harðráði* himself founded the town. If, on the other hand, we interpret the words of Snorri as indicating that Haraldr incorporated Oslo into the expanding mechanism of royal power rather than creating the town *ex nihilo*, we are probably on firmer ground.⁴⁶⁷ In this context the strategic importance of Oslo, located in a region particularly susceptible to Danish influence, should not be underestimated.⁴⁶⁸

Archaeological evidence shows that as early as the beginning of the eleventh century a *grafter-kirkja*, a church with burial rights, had been

⁴⁶⁴ Munch, Det norske folks historie. Anden del (Christiania 1855), 197-203. Koht, "Harald Hardraade", 466-467.

⁴⁶⁵ "Haraldr konungr lét reisa kaupstað austr í Osló ok sat þar opt." Heimskringla III, 139.

⁴⁶⁶ See Nedkvitne, A. & Norseng, P. G., Oslo bys historie. Bind 1: Byen under Eikaberg. Fra byens oppkomst til 1535 (Oslo 1991), 9-75. Helle, K., "Descriptions of Nordic Towns and Town-like Settlements in Early Literature", The Twelfth Viking Congress. Developments around the Baltic and the North Sea in the Viking Age. Ed. by Björn Ambrosiani & Helen Clarke. Birka Studies 3 (Stockholm 1994), 28-32.

⁴⁶⁷ Eric Schia points out that Snorri Sturluson makes every Norwegian king, from Ólafr Tryggvason to Ólafr *kyrri*, responsible for the establishment of one significant town. Schia, E., "Urban Oslo Evolution from a Royal Stronghold and Administrative Centre", Archaeology and the Urban Economy. Festschrift til Asbjørn E. Herteig. Arkeologiske Skrifter Historisk Museum Universitet i Bergen no. 5 (1989), 51-73.

⁴⁶⁸ Andersen, Samlingen av Norge, 154.

built in Oslo. It is generally assumed that this church was dedicated to St. Clement although this can not be established with certainty. If that was the case it has been suggested that the wooden church was a royal foundation similar to the church which King Ólafr Tryggvason is said to have built and dedicated to St. Clement in Trondheim.⁴⁶⁹ Moreover around the middle of the eleventh century King Haraldr had a church, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, erected close to the royal residence.⁴⁷⁰ Thus in the reign of King Haraldr *harðráði* there was an ecclesiastical framework in Oslo, supported by the royal authority, within which a cult of St. Hallvard could have emerged. However, on Harald's involvement with the cult the sources are silent.

Through Fagrskinna, Heimskringla and the Icelandic annals it is known that around 1130 a church in the town was dedicated St. Hallvard.⁴⁷¹ The church was dedicated to Hallvard in the first quarter of the twelfth century, that is, not long after the bishop of Oslo took up permanent residence in the town (ca. 1100).⁴⁷² Before that occurred the bishop had made use of existing churches in the town (St. Mary's, St. Edmund's and St. Clement's). St. Hallvard's church, however, was modelled on the great Romanesque cathedrals of Europe and there can little doubt that it was intended from the start to be an episcopal

⁴⁶⁹ Cinthio, E., "The Churches of St. Clemens in Scandinavia", Res Medieuales. R. Blomquist oblatae. Archaeologica Lundensia 3 (Karlshamn 1968), 103-117. Alternatively the early church may have been a missionary and/or a merchant church of the sort that were dedicated to St. Clement in other eleventh-century urban communities in Scandinavia (Trondheim, Lund and Roskilde). Lidén, H., "Development of Urban Structure in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries", Archaeological Contributions to the Early History of Urban Communities in Norway. Institutt for sammenlignende kulturforskning. Serie A: Forelesninger XXVII. Ed. by A. E. Herteig et. al. (Oslo 1972), 90-107. For an helpful overview of the early churches of Oslo see Norseng, P. G., "Oslo 1000 år", Nytt lys på middelalderen. Red. av Jørgen Haavardsholm (Oslo 1997), 109-128, esp. 113-116.

⁴⁷⁰ Andersen, P. S., "Oslo i middelalderen indtil 1319", Oslo bispedømme 900 år. Historiske studier. Ed. by Fridtjov Birkeli et al. (Oslo/Bergen/Tromsø 1974), 19.

⁴⁷¹ "Hann [i.e. King Sigurðr Jórsalafari] var jarðaðr at Hallvarðskirkju, lagðr í steinvegginn útar frá kórinum syðra megin." Heimskringla III, 276. See also idem., 16-22. Fagrskinna, 348; Íslandske annaler, 120; 180; 329.

⁴⁷² Andersen, Oslo i middelalderen, 21.

residence.⁴⁷³ The cult of St. Hallvard is thus one example of a native princely cult adopted by a bishopric at an important stage in its development. A similar pattern can be observed in the cases of the cults of St. Magnús and St. Rögnvald in Orkney, St. Knud in Odense (see ch. 3.2.), St. Niels in Århus (see ch. 3.2.), St. Erik in Uppsala (see ch. 3.3.) and, of course, St. Ólafr in Nidaros.

Per Sveas Andersen has argued that this was also the first church to contain the shrine of St. Hallvard. In support of this hypothesis he points out that Adam of Bremen does not say that a church served as a focal point for Hallvard's cult; on the contrary he states that people sought miracles at the site of his grave.⁴⁷⁴ From my perspective Andersen bases his conclusion on a somewhat arbitrary reading of the sentence, "*Ad quorum requietionis locum magna hodie que sanitarum miracula populis declarantur.*" Adam is here referring both to Erik and Hallvard and the word "*requietionis*" does not rule out the possibility that the resting place of the latter was of a more formal nature than Andersen is inclined to believe. It is worth noting that even when Adam speaks about the shrine of St. Ólafr he is rather vague: "*Cuius egregia merita testantur haec miracula, quae cotidie fiunt ad sepulcrum regis in civitate Trondemnis.*"⁴⁷⁵ In short, Adam's words can not be used to prove or disprove that the relics of St. Hallvard had been translated to a church by the time Gesta Hammaburgensis was composed.

⁴⁷³ Nedkvitne & Norseng, Oslo bys historie, 21.

⁴⁷⁴ Magistri Adam Bremensis, III, iiii, 199.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., III, xvii, 159.

There seems little reason to reject the saga tradition that the sanctity of King Ólafr Haraldsson was first promoted by an English bishop with the support of a Danish king. Only at a later stage did the Norwegian kings identify their own rule with their saintly kinsman. In the eleventh century the rudimentary organisation of the Norwegian Church, still in its missionary phase, ensured that the royal power appropriated the cult for its own purposes. The early establishment of a proper framework for the cult and the assurance with which the Norwegian kings took political advantage of it can be explained by the familiarity of the Anglo-Saxon missionaries with royal cults and the influence which the Kievan cults of Boris and Gleb had on King Haraldr *harðráði*. The brief, and at first sight surprising, involvement of King Sven Álfúson in the canonisation of King Ólafr suggests that Bishop Grímkell, and the ecclesiastics at his side, were not able, or were unwilling, to establish a cult on an official basis without royal sanction and patronage. First with the establishment of an episcopal seat in Nidaros in the reign of Ólafr *kyrri* (1066-1093) can we assume that the Church began to appropriate (or rather re-appropriate) the cult of St. Ólafr for its own purposes. A similar pattern can perhaps also be seen as regards the cult of St. Hallvard in Oslo which may have been established by King Haraldr *harðráði* in the 1040s but had certainly had become the preserve of the Oslo bishopric in the early twelfth century.

3.2. The Danish Princely Cults of the Twelfth Century: St. Knud of Odense and St. Knud Lavard

St. Knud of Odense. The question why the people of Jylland rose in revolt against King Knud IV, and finally slew him in the church of St. Albans in Odense in the year 1086, has been a matter of long standing debate. It is generally assumed, however, that the onerous burden which Knud's planned invasion of England placed on the shoulders of his subjects was a key factor in turning popular opinion against him.⁴⁷⁶

Passio sancti Kanuti regis et martiris (composed in 1095 or shortly thereafter), Aelnoth of Canterbury's Gesta Swenomagni (ca. 1120) and the so called Tabula Othiniensis (1095), are the most important sources on the origins of Knud's cult.⁴⁷⁷

Passio sancti Kanuti is clear on the subject that it was the clerical community of the town, encouraged by the general population and some unidentified "*episcopis et sacerdotibus*", that undertook the *elevatio* of the king in 1095.⁴⁷⁸ An interesting feature relating to this earliest stage of the cult appears in the so-called Tabula Othiniensis, a copperplate made to commemorate this occasion.⁴⁷⁹ The inscription on the plate bears out that although Knud was to be the centre of veneration, the Odense clergy also extended the crown of martyrdom to the king's brother, Benedict, and

⁴⁷⁶ Danmarks historie. Bind 1: Tiden til 1340. Ed. by Inge Skovgaard-Petersen (Copenhagen 1977), 246-248. For an overview and assessment of Knud's reign see Hoffmann, E., "Knud der Heilige und die Wende der dänischen Geschichte im 11. Jahrhundert", Historische Zeitschrift 218/3 (1974), 529-570.

⁴⁷⁷ Vitae Sanctorum Danorum, 62-71, 77-136.

⁴⁷⁸ "Hijs mox diuulgatis Iutenses cum episcopis et sacerdotibus admodum religiosus ad nos fide bona et deuotione uenerunt, consilium una nobiscum inierunt, et in eo decreuerunt, ut ossa regis et martiris cum digno honore eleuari debuerunt." Vitae Sanctorum Danorum, 70.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 60-62.

seventeen other (named) retainers.⁴⁸⁰ It is evident that the ecclesiastics who organised the elevation of 1095 were not thinking in terms of a cult exclusively centred on King Knud but one which included those who had died in his defence.

This extension of martyrdom to Knud's retainers gives us an insight into the motives which lay behind the establishment of the cult. The inclusion of Knud's brave followers in the cult can be seen as a potent expression of the sacrosanct nature of Christian kingship. The killing of a king – the patron and protector of both Church and Christianity – was unlawful and those who sacrificed their life in his defence were justly rewarded in the after-life. Moreover one has to assume that this sentiment struck a chord in a society which valued highly heroic death and loyalty in the face of overwhelming odds.⁴⁸¹ One commentator has suggested that the cult "in a wider perspective contributed to a more permanent state of security for the clergy in Danish society by criminalizing rebellion against the royal protector of the Church."⁴⁸² It is worth noting that a similar argument has been put forward in relation to the Anglo-Saxon princely martyr-cults of the tenth century. David Rollason has pointed out that in the wake of a papal legatine mission to England in 786, which promulgated a strong condemnation of royal murder, ecclesiastics began to show an increasing interest in cults of this nature. In other words, the promotion of a cult of a slain prince could further an ecclesiastical agenda to counter regicide.⁴⁸³ If the ecclesiastics of Odense were of English

⁴⁸⁰ "Qui omnes sicut dei gratia cum suo rege ac domino socii passionum martyrii fuerunt. ita consolationis et premii cum eo consortes merito erunt." Ibid., 61-62.

⁴⁸¹ On the loyalty of Knud's retainers in the context of Nordic and Anglo-Saxon literature see Frank, R., "The Ideal of Men dying with their Lords in the Battle of Maldon: Anachronism or Nouvelle Vague", *People and Places in Northern Europe. Essays in Honour of Peter Hays Sawyer*. Ed. by Ian Wood and Niels Lund (U. K. 1991), 95-107, esp. 104-105.

⁴⁸² Breengaard, Muren omkring, 329 (English summary). For his general interpretation of Knud's cult see Ibid., 122-149.

⁴⁸³ Rollason, D., "The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints", 11-22. See also in relation to the cult of St. Edward, Ridyard, *The Royal Saints*, 167.

origin, as is often assumed, they were undoubtedly conscious of this potential dimension to the cult of King Knud and his retainers.

The *elevatio* of Knud IV took place in the spring of 1095 or while King Olaf, his brother and successor, was still in power. However, neither the Gesta Swenomagni or Passio mention Olaf in connection with this event. In the thirteenth-century Icelandic Knýtlinga saga a tradition of unknown derivation is recorded where Olaf is shown to be sceptical, if not hostile, to Knud's saintly reputation. The king, on a visit to the island of Fyn, is informed by a priest of St. Albans that a light can sometimes be seen over Knud's grave and that other miraculous signs have also taken place at the same location. The priest enquires of the king whether something should not be done about King Knud's apparent holiness. Olaf dismisses this out of hand and the saga tells that no one dared raise this subject again while the king was alive.⁴⁸⁴ It is worth noting that the author of Knýtlinga saga shows no awareness of the fact that a translation of Knud's remains had taken place during Olaf's reign; this is in notable contrast to the Passio and the Gesta Swenomagni where this event precedes his death and in a sense brings it about.⁴⁸⁵

Apart from the fact that King Knud had founded a church in Odense dedicated to St. Alban which housed a relic of the proto-martyr apparently imported from England, precious little is known about the clerical community which undertook the *elevatio* of 1095. At this early date there was certainly no monastery in the town; rather it appears that the community consisted of priests who served the church of St. Albans. Moreover the episcopal situation in Odense is also unclear. Although Aelnoth emphasises the central role played by Bishop Hubald of Odense in the canonisation of 1100/1101, neither he nor the author of the Passio

⁴⁸⁴ Danakonunga sǫgur, 204-205.

⁴⁸⁵ "et nunc deo disponente, facta beati Kanuti martiris translatione exaltationis, euenit huius Olai depositio terrene dignitatis." Vitae Sanctorum Danorum, 71 ; 129-123.

mention that Hubald (or another bishop of the same diocese) was behind the *elevatio* of 1095. Indeed there is little or nothing which supports the assumption that Hubald had become bishop of Odense at this stage⁴⁸⁶ and there is a distinct possibility that the bishopric was vacant.⁴⁸⁷ In any case the earliest hagiographic work on St. Knud (see 1.3.) shows that for the Odense clergy the king was a martyr for the cause of a Church which was operating in a society that held on to outdated values. Knud's cult provided an ideal platform from which these intransigent sentiments could be criticised.

Following Olaf's death in August of 1095, Erik, another brother of King Knud, succeeded to the throne. Erik (nicknamed *ejegod* or "evergood") is nowhere associated with Knud's *elevatio* and the idea promulgated by some scholars that he was involved behind the scenes is pure speculation.⁴⁸⁸ Such an involvement by Erik would surely have been recognised in either Aelnoth's work or the *Passio*. Although the king's later support of the cult is beyond dispute, it would be mistaken to project this development onto the events of 1095.

The initial recognition of Knud's sanctity was therefore an initiative of the religious community in Odense. Even Saxo Grammaticus, an ardent admirer of King Erik *ejegod*, acknowledged the local origin of Knud's

⁴⁸⁶ Assumed by King, P., "The Cathedral Priory of Odense in the Middle Ages", *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger* 7 (1966), 2; Hoffmann, "Politische Heilige", 285-286; Folz, *Les Saints Rois*, 38. Questioned by Kluger, H., "Othinse (Odense)", *Series Episcoporum Ecclesiae Catholicae Occidentalis. Ab Initio usque ad annum MCXCVIII. Series VI: Brittania, Scotia et Hibernia, Scandinavia. Tomus II: Archiepiscopatus Lundensis*. Ed. by H. Kluger (Stuttgart 1992), 59.

⁴⁸⁷ Nyberg, T. S., *Die Kirche in Skandinavien. Mitteleuropäischer und Englischer Einfluss im 11. und 12. Jahrhundert. Anfänge der Domkapitel Børglum und Odense in Dänmark*. Herausgaben von Horst Fuhrmann. *Beiträge zur Geschichte und Quellenkunde des Mittelalter* Band 10 (Sigmaringen 1986), 113-118. King, P., "English Influence on the Church at Odense in the Early Middle Ages", *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 13 (1962), 144-155.

⁴⁸⁸ *Danmarks historie*, 259. This is also (albeit tentatively) suggested by Koch, H., *Den danske kirkes historie*. Band I: *Den ældre middelalder indtil 1241*. (København 1950), 118.

cult: "The universal church has consecrated the virtue of his life, and of his miracles, too, which were first revered in private by the Odensers."⁴⁸⁹

If the Passio and the Gesta Swenomagni present the elevation of 1095 in terms of local initiative, the latter work also makes it explicitly clear that when Erik *ejegod* came to the throne he wasted little time before he began supporting the cult of his brother. The king asked the Benedictine abbey of Evesham in England to supply a community of monks to tend Knud's shrine and in 1095/96, with the approval of King William Rufus, twelve monks from that illustrious foundation arrived in Odense.⁴⁹⁰ These would not have been strangers to tending royal shrines for their abbey was the centre of the cult of St. Wigstan (d. ca. 850), a Mercian princely martyr whose relics, like those of St. Knud, had been subjected to a trial by fire.⁴⁹¹ In addition Erik sent envoys to Pope Pascal II to argue the case for Knud's sanctity. The pope consented and stipulated that Knud (now re-named Canutus) should be included in the catalogue of the blessed. Then in a solemn ceremony on April 19th 1100/1101, attended by "all the bishops of Denmark and many priests", Bishop Hubald of Odense carried out the official canonisation by translating Knud's relics to a new reliquary.⁴⁹²

It is thus possible to divide the emergence of the cult of Knud IV into two stages. In the first stage the ecclesiastical community of Odense elevated in 1095 the king's corporal relics. The second stage begins with the ascension of Erik *ejegod* to the throne and his subsequent patronage of

⁴⁸⁹ "Cuius tam vitæ quam miraculorum virtutem, privatim Othoniensibus venerandam, publica etiam religio consecravit." Saxo Grammaticus, Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia. Books X-XVI. The text of the first edition with translation and commentary in three volumes by Eric Christiansen. Vol. I: Books X, XI, XII and XIII. British Archaeological Report (International Series) 84 (1980), 88-89.

⁴⁹⁰ King, "The Cathedral priory of Odense", 2-3.

⁴⁹¹ For the English context to this see Knowles, D., The Monastic Order in England. A History of its Development From the Times of St. Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 940-1216 (Second Edition: Cambridge 1963), 163-164. On St. Wigstan and Evesham see Hayward, P. A., The Idea of Innocent Martyrdom in England ca. 750 - 1100 (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Cambridge 1994), 182-201.

⁴⁹² Vitæ Sanctorum Danorum, 132-134. On his pilgrimage to Rome in 1098 King Erik had probably argued the case of Knud's sanctity before Pope Urban II.

the cult. It is the second phase rather than the first one which has mainly preoccupied scholars.

It is generally assumed that King Erik promoted the cult of Knud IV in order to add lustre and legitimacy to the Danish royal dynasty.⁴⁹³ Carsteen Breengaard has on the other hand pointed out that this interpretation assumes that Erik's motivations were similar to those which lay behind King Valdemar's promotion of the cult of his father, Knud Lavard, later in the century (see below).⁴⁹⁴ Breengaard is here ignoring a vital point for whereas Valdemar sought papal approval for the canonisation of his father in order to add legitimacy to his own rule and his particular scion of the royal dynasty, Erik *ejegod* appears to have done the same in order to bestow lustre on the Danish royal authority in a more general sense. Erik's succession to the throne, unlike that of Valdemar's, was peaceful and no serious internal opposition to his rule emerged during his reign. That Erik considered his standing in the kingdom secure is shown by his pilgrimages to Rome in 1098 and later to the Holy Land during which he died in 1103. Just as Erik's efforts were instrumental in establishing the first Scandinavian archbishopric, that of Lund (in 1103/1104), and hence bringing Denmark nearer to the rest of Christian Europe in matters ecclesiastical, thus the papally sanctioned canonisation of King Knud could not but enhance the standing of the Danish kings in the eyes of the outside world. Seen from this perspective the importance of the cult of King Knud IV was more on the wider European stage than it was within the arena of Danish dynastic politics. Surely the fact that Erik *ejegod* went out of his way to seek papal approval for the cult, a decidedly rare step to take in this period, lends weight to this interpretation.

⁴⁹³ Riis, T., Les institutions politiques centrales du Danemark 1100-1332. Odense University Studies in History and Social Sciences vol. 46 (Odense 1977), 202-203. Hoffmann, *Die heiligen Könige*, 139-145.

⁴⁹⁴ Breengaard, *Muren omkring*, 229-230.

Erik *ejegod* exploited to this end a cult which had emerged independent of royal involvement. In this respect we see a parallel with the cults of St. Ólafr and St. Magnús which were both established by ecclesiastics rather than kinsmen of the saints. It was not Earl Rögnvaldr but Bishop Vilhjálmr, in defiance of Earl Páll, who canonised Magnús Erlendsson. The sanctity of St. Ólafr was formally recognised by Bishop Grímkell and King Sven, not King Magnús *góði* or King Haraldr *harðráði*. Similarly, King Erik only began supporting the cult in the wake of its establishment by the local community in Odense. In all three cases it was only when the political circumstances became more favourable that the secular authorities became actively involved.

For reasons that are not entirely clear the cult of St. Knud remained essentially local in nature and there is no evidence that the saint was seen in the twelfth century as the eternal ruler of Danish kingdom as St. Ólafr was in Norway. Indeed the cult was largely confined to the island of Fyn and no miracle collection survives.⁴⁹⁵ Moreover it is striking that the cathedral priory in Odense was the single ecclesiastical foundation or church dedicated to St. Knud in Denmark during the middle ages. This is particularly surprising when one considers that in the first half of the twelfth century the Odense community was in the forefront of spreading Benedictine monasticism to Zealand.⁴⁹⁶

Thus the cult of King Knud was initially established to serve the ecclesiastical community of Odense and only promoted at a later stage by a Danish king in order to enhance his status on the European scene. There is no doubt that the ecclesiastics present at the papally approved canonisation

⁴⁹⁵ Nyberg, T. S., "St. Knud and St. Knud's Church", Hagiography and Medieval Literature. A Symposium. A Symposium Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium for the Study of Vernacular Literature in the Middle Ages, held at Odense University 17-18 November 1980. Ed. by Hans-Bekker Nielsen et al. (Odense 1981), 101-102.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

of 1100/1101 were more than willing participants. The event both strengthened Christian kingship in Denmark and confirmed the holiness of a patron of an ecclesiastical community operating in a relatively newly converted society. However, in the course of the twelfth century matters became less clear-cut; the authority and ambition of the Church began to grow while the office of kingship became a prize fought over by the descendants of St. Knud IV and his brothers.

Knud Lavard. From 1074 to 1134 Denmark was ruled by the sons of King Sven Estridsson: Harald *hen* (1074-1080), Knud (1080-1086), Olaf (1086-1095), Erik *ejegod* (1095-1103) and Niels (1104-1134). Changes of regency went surprisingly smoothly in this period considering that there was no fixed rule of succession. However matters became more complicated as the next generation of the ruling house came of age. In this respect the murder in 1131 of Erik *ejegod's* son, Knud Lavard, by Magnus, the son of King Niels, can be seen as the cataclysmic event which sparked the dynastic strife which only came to an end in 1157 when Valdemar I became sole ruler. Following the murder of Knud Lavard his brother, Erik *emune*, had himself declared king and in the battle of Fotevig (1134) defeated and killed Magnus and shortly afterwards King Niels himself.

The so-called In translacione sancti Kanuti, which forms a part of the Ordinale composed or compiled on the occasion of Knud's papally approved canonisation in 1170, stresses the important role played by his son, King Valdemar I (1154/57-1182), in the establishment of Knud's cult. It tells that not long after Knud's remains had been buried at a church in Ringsted, many wonders occurred there that testified to his sanctity.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁷ "Membris tandem tanti martyris in basilica Marie matris et uirginis sepulchro commendatis uirtutem sepulti benignitas diuina in sepultam manifestauit." Vitae Sanctorum Danorum, 201.

From the start, we are told, hostile forces worked against the recognition of the duke's saintly status. Thus two priests of the church tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to stop the miraculous occurrences at the site by throwing broth made from an unclean animal on his resting place.⁴⁹⁸

Fifteen years pass and in the reign of King Erik *lam* (1137-1146) an attempt is made to have Knud's sanctity officially recognised. In 1146 Valdemar, the son of Knud Lavard, and Sven (son of Erik *ejegod* and brother of Knud) plan to exhume Knud's earthly remains and have them translated to a reliquary "in order, after their hearts desire, to honour Valdemar's father and Sven's nephew's memory."⁴⁹⁹ However, Archbishop Eskil of Lund strongly opposes this project on the ground that it infringes on the right of the papacy to approve of new saints and forbids any further steps to be taken in relation to Knud Lavard. Valdemar and Sven, however, ignore Eskil's admonition, elevate Knud's bones and place them in a shrine.

A conspicuous feature of In translacione sancti Kanuti is the emphasis placed on ecclesiastical opposition to the cult. The hero of the work is Valdemar who from the 1140s onwards is presented as a stubborn promoter of Knud Lavard's sanctity in the face of clerical hostility and objections. The two priests attempt to suppress the cult by somewhat primitive means while Eskil refuses to officially recognise Knud's on the grounds of ecclesiastical principle. In passing it is worth noting that the archbishop's stance is interesting in relation to local attitudes to papal interference in the creation of new saints' cults. If In translacione is to be taken literally on this matter, Eskil's attitude represents a surprisingly early case of local support for a papal monopoly in this field. Although the

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 201.

⁴⁹⁹ "Inde inito consilio Waldemarus patris et Sveno patrui secundum opinionem suam honori consulentes eius reliquias de tumulo in feretrum transferre disposuerunt." Ibid., 202.

papacy had been extending its role in the process of canonisation since the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073-85), in the 1140s the tradition had not yet developed where it was considered uncanonical to proclaim a new saint without papal approval. This only happened in the reign of popes Alexander III (1159-1181) and Innocent III (1198-1216).⁵⁰⁰

However In translacione sancti Kanuti is a highly selective account. From other sources we know that King Erik *emune* (1134-1137) took steps to promote the sanctity of his brother. In a charter dated 1135 the king granted privileges to a new Benedictine monastery at Ringsted, located near the church where Knud was buried.⁵⁰¹ The monks assembled at this foundation were in all likelihood recruited from Odense and it appears that Erik's intention was to establish a monastic community which would promote the cult of Knud Lavard. Certainly the first hagiographic work on Knud, written by the Englishman Robert of Ely around the same time, formed a part of this initiative. Although Robert's work has only fragmentarily survived, it is possible to establish that it consisted of the three hagiographic traditional sections *vita*, *passio* and *miracula* and from one fragment we know that it was dedicated to King Erik *emune*.⁵⁰²

The assassination of Erik *emune* in 1137 put a halt to the development of Knud's cult. Indeed if we are to believe In translacione his body had not even been exhumed in 1146. Here of course one must consider that it was the purpose of In translacione to enhance the role of Valdemar in relation to the cult of his father and one way of achieving this aim was to emphasise the primitive state of the cult prior to his intervention.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ Kemp, E. W., "Pope Alexander III and the Canonization of the Saints", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 27 (1945), 13-28. Idem., Canonization and Authority in the Western Church (Oxford 1948), 82-107. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 22-32.

⁵⁰¹ Diplomatarium Danicum. I række, bind II (1053-1169). Ed. by Lauritz Weibull (København 1963), no. 65.

⁵⁰² The surviving fragments (some of them preserved in other works) in *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 234-41. On the textual problems relating to this work see Gertz's preface, *ibid.*, 183-188 and Gad, *Legenden*, 162-163.

⁵⁰³ In light of Sven's betrayal in 1157 it is somewhat surprising that the work tells that he joined forces with Valdemar in order to have Knud enshrined in 1146. To my

When Valdemar assumed sole rulership in 1157 he immediately began to promote the cult of his father. Thus in the same year he supplied resources to gild Knud's reliquary.⁵⁰⁴ However, the papal schism which followed the death of Adrian IV in 1159 delayed any plans which Valdemar may have had for a formal canonisation. The king, as vassal of the emperor, recognised Frederick I's candidate, Victor IV, whereas Archbishop Eskil of Lund opted for Alexander III. Consequently the archbishop went into exile in 1161. During the early 1160s Valdemar sought to shake off his dependence on the emperor and bring Archbishop Eskil back into the fold. In 1166 Valdemar recognised Pope Alexander III and in the following year Eskil returned to Denmark. In 1169 a delegation from the Danish king, headed by Archbishop Stephan of Uppsala, sought papal permission for the canonisation of Knud Lavard and in November of the same year Pope Alexander III issued a bull confirming Knud's sanctity. Knud Lavard was canonised at a solemn meeting of secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries at Ringsted on 25 June 1170. On the same occasion Archbishop Eskil crowned Valdemar's young son and namesake.⁵⁰⁵

Thus what we are dealing with is a cult which from the start served a clear propaganda purpose in the complicated dynastic politics of the Danish kingdom from the 1130s onwards. Unlike what we have encountered in relation to the cults of St. Magnús of Orkney, St. Ólafr of Norway and St. Knud of Odense there is no evidence that Knud Lavard's

knowledge no commentator has offered an explanation of his curious inclusion in the *Ordinale*. However, one can perhaps interpret it as a deliberate ploy to enhance the status of Valdemar as Knud Lavard's favourite. Both believed in Knud's sanctity but at the battle of Grathehed in 1157 he decided in favour of Valdemar. Thus through a sort of trial by battle Valdemar's divine right to rulership was confirmed. That Valdemar himself saw the battle in this light is perhaps suggested by a letter of privileges, issued shortly after his victory in 1157, where he claims God had been on his side in the inter-dynastic conflict. *Diplomatarium Danicum*, no. 120.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 126.

⁵⁰⁵ On this see Hansen, J. Q., "Regnum et Sacerdotium: Forholdet mellem stat og kirke i Danmark 1157-1170", *Middelalderstudier tilegnede Aksel E. Christiansen*. Red. av Tage E. Christiansen et al. (København 1966), 56-75.

sanctity enjoyed ecclesiastical support until, that is, Archbishop Eskil became involved in late 1160s. Although the Benedictine monastery at Ringsted was the centre of Knud's cult in the reign of Erik *emune*, this only came about as a result of royal initiative. In matter of fact there is no evidence that the monks promoted the sanctity of Knud after Erik's death.

It is this peculiar feature of the cult which explains why nearly four decades lapsed between Knud's death and a formal recognition of his saintly status. The establishment of the archbishopric of Lund in 1103/1104 was of crucial importance in this respect for now the Danish kings had to confront an ecclesiastical authority which was able to act, in certain cases at least, according to its own interests. The reason why Knud Lavard was not canonised until 1170 is simple: there was little incentive for the Church to support the cult until circumstances made it expedient for Archbishop Eskil to do so following his return from exile. We can only speculate what motives lay behind Eskil's objection to the *translatio* of 1146. According to one school of thought the archbishop was unwilling to sanctify a member of the Erik *emune*-line and thus openly involve himself in dynastic politics.⁵⁰⁶ Carsten Breengaard on the other hand is inclined to take Eskil's excuse at face value, i.e. that this champion of ecclesiastical independence was genuinely concerned about papal monopoly in relation to new saints' cults.⁵⁰⁷ The two options are of course not mutually exclusive but in the context of this study the reasons for Eskil's objections are of secondary importance. What is of primary significance is that the Church did not back the cult of Knud Lavard until it served its purpose to support his canonisation.

In the end, however, the cult of Knud Lavard did serve as a point of contact in the relationship between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*. The fact that it was Pope Alexander III who approved of the canonisation of the saint

⁵⁰⁶ Koch, *Den danske kirkes historie*, 145.

⁵⁰⁷ Breengaard, *Muren omkring*, 243-244.

represented in a sense a vindication of Archbishop Eskil's stance during his quarrel with King Valdemar. Moreover, it was certainly in the interest of the Church to regulate the succession to the throne and thus avoid a repeat of the political turmoil which had plagued Danish society between 1134 and 1157. The sanctification of Knud Lavard at Ringsted in 1170 bestowed an aura of legitimacy on the coronation of Valdemar's oldest son on the same occasion; the concept of primogeniture had taken root.

If the canonisation of Knud Lavard in 1170 cemented the relationship between King and Church, albeit only temporarily, it also highlighted the relative strength of the two authorities at that particular point in time. About seven years earlier, at the coronation of Magnús Erlingsson, Archbishop Eysteinn of Nidaros had used his role as a guardian of St. Ólaf's relics to enhance the standing of the Norwegian Church in relation to the royal authority. In contrast, Archbishop Eskil's part at the Ringsted meeting was limited to bestowing divine legitimation on the new king and carrying out the appropriate procedure of canonisation. The different roles played by the two archbishops is but a reflection of the fact that in 1170 Valdemar was in a much stronger position of power than that of Magnús Erlingsson in 1163/64, as indeed the subsequent fates of the two kings would bear out.

Moreover in the course of the twelfth century the Norwegian Church had appropriated, or rather re-appropriated, the cult of King Ólafr and when it came to the coronation of Magnús Erlingsson, the archbishop of Nidaros was able to present himself as the guardian of his shrine. In contrast, the cult of Knud Lavard had been a dynastic undertaking from the beginning.

3.3. St. Erik of Sweden

Compared to the other Scandinavian princely martyrs in our period, the sources relating to King Erik Jedvardson are extremely scarce. From what little evidence we have it can be said that King Erik, whose power-base lay in the province of Uppsala, came to the throne around the year 1150.⁵⁰⁸ Erik's claim to kingship appears to have rested on his marriage to the grand-daughter of Ingi (d. ca. 1110), the last ruler of the Steinkell dynasty in the maleline. In 1160, he was killed in battle against Magnus Henriksson, a Danish pretender to the throne, who was related to the competing Sverker dynasty through his maternalline. Magnus appears to have made an alliance with Karl, the son of King Sverker whose murder (ca. 1150) had opened Erik's way to the throne. Following Erik's death the alliance between the two broke up and Karl Sverkerson defeated Magnus in 1161. However, in April of 1167 the son of Erik, Knut, appeared on the scene and deposed Magnus. Until ca. 1194 Knut Eriksson reigned as a king over both Östgöterland and Västergötland, the two most important provinces of medieval Sweden.

If the sources for the reign of St. Erik are in short supply, the same holds true regarding the evidence for the emergence of his cult. The earliest source on this matter is found in a calendar from the church of Vallentuna in the Uppland region, dating from ca. 1198, in which the saintly status of the king is recognised.⁵⁰⁹ Then the Icelandic *Sverris saga*, from ca. 1220 (at least this part of the saga), informs us that St. Erik's

⁵⁰⁸ It is to a certain extent misleading to speak of Erik as king of Sweden as his authority was largely confined to Västergötland. See Sawyer, P., *The Making of Sweden*. *Occasional Papers on Medieval Topics* 3 (Gothenburg 1989), 27-28.

⁵⁰⁹ *Liber ecclesiae Vallentunensis*. Ed. by Toni Schmid (Stockholm 1945), 45.

relics were enshrined in Uppsala Cathedral.⁵¹⁰ These are the two only “concrete” sources for the cult of King in Erik around the turn of the twelfth century.

Additional, albeit more circumstantial, evidence relating to the earliest stage of the cult has been put forward. A single coin, dating from the reign of Knut Eriksson, has been interpreted as a proof that the king had promoted the cult of his father. The coin shows a beardless king, holding a church in one hand and a lily-sceptre in the other, and the inscription on the coin reads **IVA**.⁵¹¹ There is a case to be made that the word refers to the three main attributes of King Erik’s reign as presented in his Vita: the saint’s patronage of the Church, his just rulership (**IVA** being an anagram of **VIA**, referring to *Via Regens*, an expression which appears in the Vita), and his crusade to Finland – the lily-sceptre allegedly being a Christian symbol that, among other things, was associated with crusading. According to this hypothesis the coin proves that Knut Eriksson was upholding the sanctity of his father in the last quarter of the twelfth century and, moreover, gives added support to the long-held belief that a prototype of the existing Vita had been written in the second half of the twelfth century.⁵¹²

The paucity of the evidence makes it difficult to assess the importance of the cult in this period; opinions on this matter are indeed sharply divided. Thus J. E. Cross assumes that St. Erik was little more than “a minor local saint in the region from where the Vallentuna-calendar

⁵¹⁰ “Eiricr hvilir i scrini i Sviþioðu at Uppsolum.” *Sverris saga*, 107.

⁵¹¹ Sjöberg, R., “Via regia incedens. Ett bidrag till frågan om Erikslegendens ålder”, *Fornvännen* 78 (1983), 252-260.

⁵¹² See ch. 1.3.

originated",⁵¹³ whereas E. Carlsson argues that by the end of the twelfth century Erik had become one of the most important saints in Sweden.⁵¹⁴

All the same the reference in Sverris saga on its own proves that King Erik's corporal remains had been elevated and enshrined in Uppsala Cathedral sometime between his death in 1160 and the writing of the saga. Accordingly it is tempting to place the emergence of his cult within the context of the establishment of the archbishopric in Uppsala in 1164. In 1152 a papal legate, Nicholas Breakspear (later to become Pope Adrian IV), oversaw the establishment of the archbishopric of Nidaros. In 1153 he travelled to Sweden in order to complete the dividing of the archbishopric of Lund into three parts. For reasons that are not entirely clear nothing came of his endeavours. In 1164, however, the five dioceses of Sweden were finally placed under the authority of the newly founded Swedish archbishopric with a base in Uppsala.

When were King Erik's relics translated into the cathedral at Uppsala? According to the Vita he was killed on the 18th of May 1160; the feast of Christ's ascension we are told.⁵¹⁵ However considering that this particular feast fell on the 5th of May in that year and that the calendar of Vallentuna mentions May 18th as Erik's feastday, it is logical to assume that the Vita is here referring to the day of his translation rather than the day of his death. This leaves three possible dates between 1160 and 1198 for the translation to have taken place: 1167, 1178 and 1189. Tore Nyberg has argued that the earliest one, i.e. May of 1167, is the likeliest date, for earlier that year Knut Erikson defeated Karl Sverkerson in a battle on

⁵¹³ Cross, *St. Eric of Sweden*, 307. Cross finds it likely that the calendar originated in the Mälar-district.

⁵¹⁴ Carlsson, *Translacio archiepiscoporum*, 109.

⁵¹⁵ *Scriptores rerum Svecicarum* I, 265.

Vikingsö. It is tempting to conclude that Knut had the remains of his father translated to Uppsala to celebrate this victory.⁵¹⁶

Although Uppsala had been a bishopric through the twelfth century and a centre of missionary work before that⁵¹⁷ it was by no means an automatic choice for the new archbishopric in a way that Nidaros had been in Norway on account of St. Ólaf's cult. Indeed in pagan times (Old) Uppsala had been a centre of paganism in the region. However, having decided on Uppsala it must have been of some importance for Stephan, its first archbishop – an Englishman⁵¹⁸ and a former monk of the Cistercian house of Alvastra – to enhance its status by promoting the cult of a native saint. As earlier emphasised, the acquisition or creation of indigenous saints' cults appears to have been a priority for bishoprics and archbishoprics in this period. Following the example of St. Ólaf's cult in Nidaros the promotion of a native saint was a logical step for Archbishop Stephan to make. As such the cult represent a unifying symbol in a country where the Christian religion had made unequal impact in various parts of the country.⁵¹⁹ Stephen's involvement in the establishment of St. Erik's cult may in turn explain why he was chosen to spearhead the delegation sent to Rome in 1169 which argued the case for Knud Lavard's canonisation.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁶ Nyberg, T. S., "Eskil av Lund och Erik den helige", Historia och samhälle. Studier tillägnade Jerker Rosen (Malmö 1975), 12-18.

⁵¹⁷ Westman, K. B., Den svenska kyrkans utveckling från S:T Bernhards tidevärv til Innocents III:s (Stockholm 1915), 15-17.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁵¹⁹ This aspect of the cult has been mentioned in relation to the more Christian Götaland and less Christian Svealand. Tunberg, S., "Erik den helige, Sveriges helgonkung. Några synpunkter", Fornvännen 36 (1941), 277-278.

⁵²⁰ Anderson, I., "Till 800-årsjubileet av ärkebiskop Stefans invigning", Historisk tidskrift (svensk) 26 (1964), 402-410. My interpretation is different from Westman's who argues that Stephan opposed the canonisation of Erik. Westman, Den svenska kyrkans, 172-173, 222-223. Westman of course wrote before Tore Nyberg's contribution relating to the date of Erik's translation had appeared.

It appears that a colony of Benedictine monks from England was in place in Uppsala in the last quarter of the twelfth century. The monks would have served (presumably in a cathedral priory) the shrine of St. Erik in a similar way as they did in Odense for St. Knud IV and in Ringsted for St. Knud Lavard.⁵²¹ Indeed the English influence detectable in the Vallentuna calendar indicates that it was compiled by monks of the Benedictine order.⁵²²

Admittedly the evidence is slight. Still there is, I believe, a sufficient ground to conclude that the Archbishop of Uppsala and King Knud Eriksson in tandem promoted the cult of King Erik Jedvardson. Indeed it is difficult to envisage any other authority in Sweden taking the initiative in this matter at this particular point in time. For Knud the sanctification of his father was naturally a potent way to consolidate his claim to the throne. But for Stephan and his successors the cult was arguably of greater importance. The image of St. Erik as a ruler who supported the Church and conducted himself as a *rex iustus* was an ideal model to hold up to future kings in a relatively recently converted society. The cult of St. Erik Jedvardson thus represents another example of the interests of the temporal and the spiritual authorities coming together in promotion of a princely martyr cult.

⁵²¹ Gallén, J., "Den engelska munkarna i Uppsala — ett katedral kloster på 1100-talet", Historisk tidskrift för Finland 61 (1976), 1-21. Further on the possible relevance of the monastery for the cult see Nyberg, T. S., "Les royautés scandinaves entre sainteté et sacralité", La Royauté sacrée dans le monde chrétien. Colloque de Royaumont, mars 1989. Ed. by A. Boureau & C. Sergio (Paris 1992), 66.

⁵²² Gallén, "De engelska munkarna", 10-14.

3.4. Conclusion

In his study of the royal cults of Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England Erik Hoffmann has emphasised the political function of the princely martyrs in the Nordic lands. In his evaluation the cults served the needs and aims of the secular authority. Most notably the sanctification of a murdered or killed ruler by a member of his own dynasty was a potent way of legitimising rulership in a society where Christian kingship was only beginning to have roots. Hoffmann's conclusion is valid but only to a degree. Here I have argued that we should not underestimate the stake that the spiritual authority had in both creating and maintaining saints' cults of this nature. In a sense their history is best examined from the perspective of interaction between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*.

In the case of Orkney we have seen how the cult was first promoted by Bishop Vilhjálmr and only at a later date taken up by Earl Rögnvaldr. A similar pattern can be observed in relation to the cults of St. Ólafr, St. Knud of Odense and to a degree St. Erik of Sweden. However, the pattern is only of a general nature for the motives the churchmen had for promoting the cults varied from case to case. In Orkney the bishop used the cult to distance his office from its traditional association with one particular branch of the ruling dynasty. Although in Norway Bishop Grímkell was undoubtedly responding to popular pressure when he canonised King Ólafr, he may also have seen the cult as an important focal point for religious observance in a recently converted country. It was only when a bishop took up a permanent residence in Nidaros that the Church began to appropriate the cult for its own purpose. The ecclesiastics of Odense translated the corporeal remains of Knud IV in order to secure a

heavenly royal patron for their community and to uphold the ideals of Christian kingship. A cult centred around the king and his loyal retainers served as a potent expression of the sacred nature of kingship and the illegality of regicide. In Sweden the most plausible scenario is that Stephan promoted the sanctity of St. Erik in order to enhance the standing of the newly founded archbishopric of Uppsala. The cult of Knud Lavard is the exception because from the start it was a purely political undertaking which the Church had little incentive to support. Only with changing political and ecclesiastical circumstances did Archbishop Eskil deem it appropriate to join forces with King Valdemar and have the murdered duke canonised.

Although the ecclesiastics in Orkney, Norway, Denmark and Sweden upheld the princely martyr cults for varying reasons, there is nevertheless a common thread which runs through the cases discussed here. In eleventh- and twelfth-century Scandinavia the Church was undergoing a formative stage where it relied heavily on the patronage of the secular authority while at the same time it was striving to establish a separate identity. In the same period the secular authority was also being transformed in line with the institutionalised monarchies of the more advanced parts of Christian Europe where the ruler held his office by the grace of God. Thus the cults of the princely martyrs served the interests of both authorities during a formative period in their development.

Part 4

The Princely Martyr Cults and Scandianvian Tradition.

4.1. The "Pagan Hypothesis"

In recent decades scholars have mainly concentrated on the political side to the royal martyr cults, i.e. their promotion by the secular and the ecclesiastical authorities. This is the approach adopted, for instance, by Susan Ridyard, Alan Thacker and David Rollason in relation to the Anglo-Saxon cults and by Carsten Breengaard, Eric Hoffmann and T. S. Nyberg regarding the Scandinavian scene.⁵²³ From a variety of perspectives these scholars have highlighted the diverse roles which cults of this kind played in medieval society. Particular emphasis has been placed on how the princely cults were promoted in order to bestow divine sanction on particular dynasties or separate branches of ruling houses. It has also been pointed out that the cults had the potential to enhance regional and national identity.⁵²⁴ Moreover it has been stressed that the literature on the royal saints was an ideal platform for ecclesiastics from where they could

⁵²³ Ridyard, "The Royal Saints" ; Thacker, A., "Kings, Saints and Monasteries in Pre-Viking Mercia, Midland History 10 (1985), 1-25 ; Rollason, Saints and Relics ; idem., "Relic-cults as an Instrument of Royal Policy c. 900 - c. 1050", Anglo-Saxon England 15 (1986), 91-103 ; idem., "The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints" ; Breengaard, Muren om Israels hus ; Hoffmann, Die heiligen Könige ; Nyberg, Les royautés scandinaves. See also Gorski, K., "Le roi-saint: Un problem d'idéologie féodale", Annales. Économies - Sociétés - Civilisations 24 nr. 2 (1969), 371-377.

⁵²⁴ Graus, "St. Wenzel" ; Gorski, K., "La naissance des états et le "roi-saint"", L'Europe au IXe au XIe siècles. Ed. by T. Manteuffel & A. Gieysztor (Warsaw 1968), 425-432.

provide "not just a model but a yardstick of kingly conduct and performance in office."⁵²⁵

If secular and ecclesiastical patronage was of pivotal importance in the establishment of the princely cults, the third factor, the role of the general population, is difficult to side-step altogether. However, this particular aspect constitutes a problem of some magnitude for although the sources may allow the historian to reconstruct, however inadequately, the involvement of *regnum* and *sacerdotium* in the establishment of such cults, they are at best vague when it comes to the participation of the population at large in the same process. Accordingly it is not a matter of surprise that some scholars have tended to downplay the importance of this aspect and even ignore it altogether.⁵²⁶

Miracle accounts aside, the participation of ordinary people in the emergence of the princely cults is noted on occasion in the Nordic sources. Thus we are told that the people of Orkney spoke amongst themselves that Earl Magnús was a saint and according to Snorri the inhabitants of the Trøndelag region were the first to believe in King Ólaf's sanctity. Similarly the clergy of Odense are said to have elevated the corporal relics of the Danish king in response to and amidst popular belief in the sanctity of Knud IV. Naturally, claims of this sort must to be taken with a degree of caution for men of letters were certainly aware that the presence of a popular dimension was essential in the emergence of a respectable cult.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵ Nelson, J., "Royal Saints and Early Medieval Kingship", *Sanctity and Secularity. The Church and the World*. Ed. by David Baker. *Studies in Church History* 10 (Oxford 1973), 44.

⁵²⁶ For instance, speaking of the Mercian princely cults, Alan Thacker confidently states that there "is no evidence that they stemmed from a royal or clerical response to popular devotion." Thacker, "Kings and Saints", 20.

⁵²⁷ "The hagiographic texts depict the typical medieval story of a "popular" cult emerging from the grass roots. In this model the saint's body lies unknown and neglected; it is safeguarded by God until it is found, having been revealed by miraculous signs; it is then buried with appropriate honors and, suitably enshrined, attracts the veneration of believers; miracles happen to "people", who then report them to the authorities; initially disbelieving they are awe-struck, but ultimately praise God and officially recognise the saint's holiness and standing with God. Of course, events

Still, it is noteworthy that in the case of the most blatantly “manufactured” dynastic cult, that of St. Knud Lavard, the enthusiasm of ordinary people is conspicuously absent.

The veneration of the princely martyrs represents only one side to the immensely popular phenomenon of martyrdom in the medieval period. Indeed André Vauchez’s has claimed that the model of the holy sufferer, “remained the archetype of sainthood in the popular mind.”⁵²⁸ From the first centuries of Christianity the simple fact that someone came to a violent end was a potential seed from which a martyr-cult could emerge.

An example of this appears in Sulpicius Severus’ fourth-century *Life of St. Martin of Tours* which tells that during one of the saint’s frequent pastoral excursions into the countryside, he came across people who considered a certain place holy because a martyr had laid down his life there. Inquiring into the case St. Martin discovered that the object of the veneration was a brigand who had been executed for his crimes. As was Martin’s wont he delivered the people from their error.⁵²⁹ About eight centuries later an Icelandic gave an expression to the idea that any Christian could atone for his sins by suffering a violent and undeserved death. The thirteenth-century *Sólarljóð* (“Sun-Poem”) tells of a man with an evil past who invites a traveller into his house and supplies him with board and lodging. However the guest betrays the trust shown to him and murders the host. On account of his ill deserved death the host is cleared of his past misdemeanours and he is escorted to heaven by angels.⁵³⁰ This miniature *exemplum* illustrates well how a violent death within a Christian

indeed may have unfolded in just this way, but even if we are sceptical, there is no way of getting “behind” the sources.” *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus’*, xxviii. On the “reluctant bishop” *topos* see footnote nr. 291.

⁵²⁸ Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 172-173.

⁵²⁹ Sulpicius Severus, *Vie de saint Martin*. Vol. I, ed. by J. Fontaine (Paris 1968), iv, 3, 277.

⁵³⁰ Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning A 1, 628-629.

setting could be associated with rewards in the after-life. The sense of communal guilt over the death of an innocent individual is also an aspect noteworthy in this context. According to the thirteenth-century Dominican friar Stephan of Bourbon, a cult had sprung up in the diocese of Lyon around a dog who had saved a child from a serpent but was subsequently killed due to a misunderstanding.⁵³¹ Similarly in the Danish town of Roskilde, a certain Margarethe (or Margrét) (d. 1176) was venerated after it was found out that she had been killed by her husband who had made it look as though she had taken her own life.⁵³²

Speculations along these lines are unavoidably vague and inconclusive for the modern historian has few means to establish why martyrdom carried with it such a strong emotive appeal in medieval times. Still it is clear that there was a distinct tendency in this period to associate violent death, even within a wholly secular context, with martyrdom and hence sanctity.

Not satisfied with observations on the general appeal of martyrdom, some commentators have attempted to explain the prominence of royal martyr-cults in Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England in terms of lingering pagan sentiments associated with Germanic and Scandinavian rulership. For instance, discussing the popular roots of St. Magnús' cult, W. P. L. Thomson states that the "king-saints of Scandinavia and the earl-saints of Orkney embody older, pre-Christian concepts of sacral kingship, when the king as descendant and successor of the Gods exercised a

⁵³¹ See the study of the cult by Schmitt, J. C., The Holy Greyhound. Guinefort, healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century. Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 6. Transl. by Martin Thom (Cambridge 1983). See also the brilliant article by Rubin, M., "Chosing Death? Experiences of Martyrdom in Late Medieval Europe", Martyrs and Martyrologies. Ed. by Diana Wood. Studies in Church History 30 (London 1993), 162-164. Vauchez, Sainthood, 146-157.

⁵³² Scriptores minores historicae Danicae medii aevi. Vol. I-II, ed. by M. CL. Gertz (Copenhagen 1917-1918), vol. II, 56. Gad, T., "Margarethe", Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformasjonstid. Vol. 11 (1966), 351-352.

supreme priestly function.⁵³³ Thomson, moreover, sees a particular correspondence between the martyrdom of Earl Magnús and the Norse myth of Baldur's death, the god who was killed by no fault of his own as a result of evil scheming. Here we seem to encounter a variation of outdated Frazerian notions where Baldr incorporates the spirit of fertility and is subjected to a ritual sacrifice for the benefit of his subjects and dynastic successors.⁵³⁴ In one sense, however, the response of both gods and men to the killing of Baldr, as described in Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda, captures well the sentiments associated with an innocent figure who comes to a violent and unjust end.⁵³⁵ In passing it can be noted that it was the same author who told how the people of Trøndelag were stricken by second thoughts over their part in the killing of St. Ólafr.⁵³⁶

Thomson's premise for his interpretation of the emotive appeal of Magnús' cult – that pagan sentiments facilitated the emergence of the cult of the princely martyrs – is not an original one. Undoubtedly the most influential study in this respect is Karl Hauck's lengthy article "Geblütsheiligkeit", published in 1950.⁵³⁷ Although the essence of Hauck's thesis may not have been wholly new at the time, he was the first to adopt a comparative approach in order to establish a link between pagan attitudes and the phenomenon of royal sanctity. Hauck, who included in his study cults of rulers from the early middle ages into the early modern period, proceeded from the assumption that Germanic kingship was

⁵³³ Thomson, *History of Orkney*, 66. The question whether the description of Baldur's death itself was influenced by the passion of Christ is not addressed. See also the somewhat superficial observations in Brunsden, G. M., "Politics and Local Traditions within the Cult of Saint Magnus of Orkney", Northern Studies 32 (1997), 134-136.

⁵³⁴ See Lindow, J., Murder and Vengeance among the Gods. Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology. Folklore Fellows' Communications no. 262. Academica Scientiarum Fennica (Helsinki 1997), 30-31.

⁵³⁵ Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning. Ed. by Anthony Faulkes (Oxford 1982), 46.

⁵³⁶ *Heimskringla* II, 402-403.

⁵³⁷ Hauck, K., "Geblütsheiligkeit", Liber Floridus: Festschrift für Paul Lehmann (St. Ottilien 1950), 187-240.

inherently sacral; certain dynasties, on account of their social status, were seen as being divine. Members of these dynasties were considered, and in turn considered themselves, to be in possession of “king’s luck” (“*Königsheil*”) which secured them and their followers victory in battle, fertility of their dominions and the general well being of their subjects. With the coming of Christianity the sacral status of the king (or prince) did not undergo a fundamental transformation but was rather directed into acceptable channels by the Church. The veneration of royal saints (and not only martyrs) was thus in essence a Christian manifestation of pagan belief in the sacral nature of kingship.

The core of Hauck’s thesis was adapted to the English scene in William Chaney’s Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England (1972). Chaney’s primary objective was to demonstrate the profound influence which Germanic paganism had exerted on Anglo-Saxon kingship, even after Christianity had taken roots. Having adopted this stance it is not surprising that he emphasised the link between the alleged sacral nature of the kings of the heathen era and the cults of the princely martyrs that appeared in Anglo-Saxon England from the seventh century onwards.⁵³⁸ Chaney pointed out that the surviving regnal lists from the period trace the ancestry of prominent Anglo-Saxon dynasties, that of Mercia, Berenicia and East Anglia, back to the Germanic god Wotan. Members of these dynasties were thus believed to be of divine nature which in turn, argued Chaney, accounts for the prominence of royal cults in pre-Conquest England. In other words, the sanctity of the killed rulers had less to do with any Christian virtues they were seen to possess – fighting pagans, ascetic life-style or just rulership – and more to do with their blood line and social status. Cultic veneration of royal figures such as Oswald of Northumbria,

⁵³⁸ Chaney, W. A., The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England (Manchester 1970). See the critical observations of Robert Brentano, “William Chaney, The Cult of Kinship in Anglo-Saxon England [Review]”, Speculum 47 (1972), 754-755.

Edmund of East Anglia and Edward the Martyr was a manifestation of pagan beliefs which had survived, albeit in a transmuted form, the conversion to Christianity.

Chaney's conclusions were elaborated on in Erich Hoffmann's Die heiligen Könige.⁵³⁹ Hoffmann argued that the Anglo-Saxon and the Scandinavian people, still strongly attached to a pre-Christian world view, interpreted the slaying of their rulers, whether killed in battle or executed, as sacrifices in the heathen style to Wotan/Óðinn. The correspondence between this popular perception and the Christian concept of martyrdom, as promoted by men of the Church, resulted in syncretism which facilitated the emergence of the cults of the princely martyrs. Hoffmann also pointed out that in pagan times royal dynasties had, apparently, legitimised their authority by claiming descent from the pagan gods. With the adoption of Christianity this link was severed but in its place the saintly king was presented as "*stammvater*", the founding father, of the dynasty.⁵⁴⁰

Scholars who have adopted more conventional approaches to the study of royal sanctity have not been wholly untouched by the "pagan hypothesis" (in its broadest sense). Thus David Rollason in his Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England concedes that the proliferation of royal cults could reflect the "church's need to make allowance for the strength of English paganism in the period of the conversion and to assimilate some elements of that religion into English Christianity."⁵⁴¹ And possibly "the people venerated the royal saints as the pagan priest-kings had been venerated and, as many had died violently, a parallel was seen with the

⁵³⁹ Hoffmann, Die heiligen Könige, 46-58.

⁵⁴⁰ The search for pre-Christian influence in relation to the emergence of princely cults has not been confined to the Germanic lands or the cult of Wotan/Óðinn. Ideas of similar nature have been promulgated in relation to St. Wenceslas and St. Stephan, the patron saints of Bohemia and Hungary respectively. See the studies referred to by Klaniczay, "The Paradoxes of Royal Sainthood".

⁵⁴¹ Rollason, Saints and Relics, 126.

pagan kings sacrificed to Gods.”⁵⁴² Other students of royal sanctity have adopted a more sceptical stance towards the “pagan hypothesis”. In particular, Frantisek Graus in his Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich Merovinger (1964) made an impassioned attack against the assumption that there had been a link between the perceived sacrality of the Germanic kings and the emergence of royal sainthood in the Merovingian period.⁵⁴³ In his view the saintly kings and queens were not venerated because of the inherent sacrality they may have been seen to possess but rather as a result of their virtuous (often monastic) lifestyle and patronage of the Church. Similar observations have been made by Janet L. Nelson and Susan J. Ridyard who both argue that the “pagan hypothesis”, in particular as presented by William Chaney, oversimplifies the problem as it does not take on board the changes in royal ideology which followed the coming of Christianity.⁵⁴⁴ In the opinion of the latter the Church did far more than simply adopt the traditions of pre-Christian society in matters relating to the image of kingship: “Its concern was rather to mould the rulership which it inherited in accordance with its own societal needs — to create a new model of useful rulership.”⁵⁴⁵ Sanctity did not flow in the blood of royal dynasties and kings were not automatically elevated to the level of sainthood simply on account of their social (or religious) standing; they had to earn that status by the virtue of their behaviour. The criteria for the inclusion in this exalted club were set by the Church which developed for that purpose the ideal of the just ruler, *rex iustus*, a defender of both Church and faith.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 127.

⁵⁴³ Graus, *Volk, Herrscher*, 314-323.

⁵⁴⁴ Nelson, “Royal Saints and Early Medieval Kingship”, 29-44 . Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, 74-78. See the comments by Chaney, “Review: Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*”, *Speculum* 66 (1991), 684-686.

⁵⁴⁵ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints*, 78.

If one proceeds from the assumption that Germanic and Scandinavian kingship retained a profound sacral dimension into the Christian era one is still faced with the task of establishing a credible link between this state of affairs and the emergence of the princely martyr-cults. "Sacral kingship" is an abstract term which, if it means anything, refers to the belief that the ruler stood in a supernatural relationship with the divine and was perceived as an intermediary between his people and the divine.⁵⁴⁶ It hardly needs emphasising that this is precisely the essence of saints' cults in general; from their exalted place the saints act as intercessors between God and men. Viewed from this perspective there is little left to explain and any distinctions between pagan and Christian sentiments become irrelevant; just as people before had called upon the pagan gods in their hour of need they now looked to the Christian saints, royal or otherwise, for help.

Problems arise, however, when an attempt is made to establish the pagan origin of the royal cults by reading the relevant hagiographic corpus through the prism of pagan myths and legends. The sources were written in a Christian environment, most often by ecclesiastics, in order to promote the sanctity of a particular secular ruler. Whatever pagan notions were behind the popular veneration of the martyred princes, the literature on them is thoroughly Christian in nature. Accordingly, an attempt to establish a pagan dimension to these cults by scrutinising the Lives of the saints, invites a highly selective form of argumentation where any feature of the text which vaguely resembles pre-Christian customs or traditions is presented as a proof of the pagan dimension of the same cult. In other words, sources which are inherently alien to the concept of pagan origin are examined in order to support preconceived assumptions about the emergence of the princely cults.

⁵⁴⁶ On the problem of defining this term see, Mc Turk, R. W., "Sacral Kingship in Ancient Scandinavia: A Review of Some Recent Writings", *Saga-Book* 19: 2-3 (1975-1976), 139-169. Idem., "Sacral Kingship Revisited", *Saga-Book* 24: 1 (1994), 18-32.

For instance, William Chaney sees the wolf who finds and guards the severed head of King Edmund in Abbo of Fleury's ninth-century *passio* within the context of beliefs associated with Wotan and the alleged tradition that this particular animal was the guardian spirit of the royal house of East Anglia.⁵⁴⁷ He ignores, however, that this particular scene bears a striking resemblance to an incident in the well known Life of St. Mary of Egypt in *Vitae Patrum*.⁵⁴⁸ Similarly, in Anglo-Saxon hagiography the fertility of the kingdom is frequently linked to a martyr's sanctity.⁵⁴⁹ Chaney also argues that the cults of the princely martyrs in Anglo-Saxon England were dependent on the pagan belief that a sacrificial immolation of the king would guarantee miraculous bounty.⁵⁵⁰ Here he fails to take into consideration that there was a Christian tradition which associated bad kingship with natural disasters and good kingship with bounty of nature and general well being. The most influential work in this respect was the seventh-century Irish text *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*, attributed to an author usually referred to as Pseudo-Cyprian,⁵⁵¹ a work known in Anglo-Saxon England as early as the second half of the eight century.⁵⁵² Indeed in Aelnoth of Canterbury's *Gesta Swenomagni*, bad harvest and pestilence follows the killing of the *rex iustus* King Knud and the subsequent

⁵⁴⁷ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, 82.

⁵⁴⁸ Gransden, A., "Legends and Traditions Concerning the Origins of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds", *Legends, Traditions and History in Medieval England* (London 1992), 87.

⁵⁴⁹ See for instance the *passio* of St. Edward. *Edward King and Martyr*, 3.

⁵⁵⁰ Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship*, 77-85. Hoffmann further develops this idea in relation to Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian martyrs. He has however been criticised for failing to acknowledge that some of the motifs he interprets as indicating pagan influence appear in Lives of confessor saints. See Mathé, R. M., *Studien zum früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Königtum. Eine problemgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Königtum, Adel und Herrscherethik* (place of publ. not indicated, 1978), 66.

⁵⁵¹ *Pseudo-Cyprianus, De XII Abusivis Saeculi*. Ed. by S. Hellmann. *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 34 (Berlin 1909), 50-55.

⁵⁵² Meens, R., "Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible; Sins, Kings and the well-being of the Realm", *Early Medieval History* 7 (1998), 354.

assumption to the throne of Olaf, his unpopular brother.⁵⁵³ Aelnoth's emphasis on the contrast between the state of Denmark in the reign of the two kings must be placed within this Christian learned tradition about the cosmic significance of good and bad kingship. Although it can be debated whether Aelnoth was directly influenced by Pseudo-Cyprian in this respect he was certainly familiar with a similar tradition.⁵⁵⁴

Edward S. Reisman has argued that the Norse paganism of the Varangians in Rus' was an important factor in the emergence of the cult of Boris and Gleb.⁵⁵⁵ In an early passion on the Kievan saints it is told that the pierced body of Gleb was thrown between two tree-trunks.⁵⁵⁶ Reisman interpretes this as "not an incidental statement of fact but rather can be identified with a sacrificial hanging such as that of the royal victims in the Odinic sacrifice...".⁵⁵⁷ Not only does Reismann overlook the most obvious explanation for this narrative detail, that it was customary among the Slavs to bury the dead in hollowed out tree trunks,⁵⁵⁸ but he also makes the brave leap of associating Óðinn's (Wotan's) self-immolation on the gallows, as presented in Old-Norse sources, with the martyrdom of a Christian prince as described in hagiographic literature. Although un-acknowledged by Reisman a similar connection between the self-sacrifice of the German god of war and poetry and princely martyrdom had been made by Erich Hoffmann five years earlier.⁵⁵⁹ Hoffmann, moreover, argued that the

⁵⁵³ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 130-132.

⁵⁵⁴ That Aelnoth had been directly influenced by Pseudo-Cyprian was argued by Curt Weibull, *Saxo, Kritiska undersökningar*, 58-75. Disputed by Carsten Breengaard, *Muren om Israels hus*, 128-130.

⁵⁵⁵ Reisman, E. S., "The Cult of Boris and Gleb: Remnant of a Varangian Tradition", *Russian Review* 37 (1978), 141-157.

⁵⁵⁶ *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, 193.

⁵⁵⁷ Reismann, "The Cult of Boris and Gleb", 150.

⁵⁵⁸ *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, 242 (note 49).

⁵⁵⁹ Hoffmann, *Die heiligen Könige*, 46-58. The parallels between Christ's martyrdom on the cross, pierced with a lance, and the self-immolation of the Wotan/Odinn, pierced by a spear, had not escaped the attention of scholars working in the field of the conversion of the Germanic people. See for instance Gerstein, M. R., "Germanic Warg:

populace were familiar with the notion of martyrdom of kings through the pagan concept of the Odinic sacrifice, where a ruler is ritually killed as an offering to the god of war and poetry. Leaving aside the fact that the sources for such sacrifices are largely derived from thirteenth-century Icelandic Legendary sagas, we are dealing with "parallels" which can only be drawn when the literary context in which they appear is left by the way-side.

The problem with discussing the origins of the princely martyr cults⁵⁶⁰ in these terms is obvious. As one Old-Rus' scholar has pointed out the "pagan hypothesis" may help to

The Outlaw as Werwolf", Myth in Indo-European Antiquity. Ed. by Gerald James Larson (Berkley/Los Angeles/London 1974), 140-145.

⁵⁶⁰ There is little basis for excluding the earls of Orkney from the discussion on sacral rulership in Scandinavia. It is important not to interpret the title, *jarl* (i.e. earl), through the eyes of late medieval historiographers. There is indeed a philological ground for assuming that the term *jarl* is an older formation than *konungr*, i.e. king. Bøe, A., "Jarl", Kulturhistorisk leksikon för nordisk middelalder fra vikingstid til reformationstid. Vol. 7, 559-564. In the scaldic poem Háleygjatal composed in honour of Hákon of Hlaðir around 985 the ancestry of the earl is traced to Sæmingr, the son of the god Óðinn, who mated with the giantess Skaði. Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning A I, 60-68. See Ström, F., "Poetry as an Instrument of Propaganda. Jarl Hákon and his Poets", Speculum Norroenum. Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre. Ed. by Ursula Dronke et al. (Odense 1981), 440-459. In the prologue to O.s. the ultimate ancestor of the Orkney earls is a certain King Fornjótr who has clearly been euhemerised from a giant. Ross, M. C., "Snorri Sturluson's use of the Norse origin-legend of the sons of Fornjótr in his Edda", Arkiv för nordisk filologi 98 (1983), 47-66. Claus Krag has argued that the supernatural ancestry of the earls is a learned construct of the thirteenth century. Krag, K., "Element-guddommen – mytologi eller skolelærdom", The Sixth International Saga Conference 28.7. 1985, Workshop Papers II, 613-628. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen on the other hand came to the conclusion that "we can say that the oldest part of its [i.e. the prologue's] genealogy has its roots in pre-Christian mythology and cannot be dismissed as merely being a learned speculation." Sørensen, P. M., "The Sea, the Flame and the Wind. The Legendary Ancestors of the the Earls of Orkney", The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic. Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Eleventh Viking Congress, Thurso and Kirkwall 22 August – 1 September 1989. Ed. by Colleen E. Batey et al. (Edinburgh 1993), 215. Both Krag and Sørensen fail to point out that there appears to be an allusion to the mythological ancestry of the Orkney earls in Arnór Þórðarson's Porfinnsdrápa (ca. 1065). Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning A I, 348. On the role of giants in the supernatural ancestry of Nordic see Steinsland, G., Det hellige og norrøn kongedologi. En analyse av hierogami myten i Skírnismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal og Hyndluljóð (Larvik 1991), 214-227. The only other example I know of where rulers are said to be descended exclusively from giants appears in the High-German Heldenbuch: "Ist auch zu wissen das rysen allwegen waren keiser, künig, herczogen grafen, vnd herren, dienstleüt ritter, vnd knecht, und waren alle edel leüt." Das deutsche

... explain the prominence of these cults in northern Europe, but does not contribute to the interpretation of the actual texts, which describe political murders in terms of Christian martyrdom. The ideology remains in large part conventional. The Lives of Wenceslas and Magnus, and the early eulogies in their honour, do not develop themes that distinguish their cult from that of other saints: there is the same stress on the saint as an edifying example of Christ-like virtue and heavenly intercessor able to help the individual in need.⁵⁶¹

Another point to make is that although pagan notions regarding the nature of the office of kingship may have survived into the Christian era, this did not necessarily result in the appearance of princely saints' cults. A revealing case is Ireland where the evidence for sacral kingship surviving into Christian times is just as strong (and arguably stronger) than it is in relation to Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England.⁵⁶² Still there is not a single example from the medieval period of an Irish king (martyred or otherwise) being venerated as a saint. Indeed men of letters from the two regions of Europe where princely cults were most prominent, England and Scandinavia, commented on the absence of native martyrs in Ireland, royal or otherwise. This was done by Gerald of Wales in his *Topographia Hibernica*⁵⁶³ and his words were taken up in the thirteenth-century Norwegian *Konungs skuggsjá* (*King's Mirror*): "bloodthirsty though they [i.e. the Irish] be, they have never slain any of the saints who are so

Heldenbuch nach dem Muthmasslich ältesten Drucke. Ed. by Adelbert von Keller. *Bibliothek des Literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart* 87 (Stuttgart 1867), 1-2.

⁵⁶¹ Price, "Boris and Gleb", 109-110.

⁵⁶² Maier, B., "Sacral Kingship in Pre-Christian Ireland", *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 41 (1989), 12-32. Aitchison, W. B., "Kingship, Society, and Sacrality: Rank, Power and Ideology in Early Medieval Ireland", *Traditio* 49, 45-75. See also the observations of Wormald, P., "Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship: Some further thoughts", *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*. Ed. by Paul E. Szarmach. *Studies in Medieval Culture* XX (Kalamazoo 1986), 151-158.

⁵⁶³ *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*. Vol V: ed. by J. F. Dimock. *Topographia Hibernica et Expugnatio Hibernica*. Ed. by James F Dimock. *Opera*: vol V. *Rolls Series* (London 1869), 174.

numerous in the land; the holy men who have dwelt there have died in sick bed."⁵⁶⁴

That the very concept that a native king could be exalted to the level of sainthood was alien to the Irish is neatly expressed in the preface to the ninth-century Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee where the splendour of the early martyrs is contrasted with the ephemeral fame of earthly rulers. Whereas the graves of the Christian martyrs are justly honoured no-one knows or cares where Nero and Pilate are buried. He goes on to contrast the posthumous powers of the famous King Donnachad and Bran of the Barrow with that of St. MaelRuáin (d. 792):

Donnchad the wrathful, ruddy, chosen or victorious
Bran of the Barrow, visiting their tombs takes not from me
the weariness of weakness.

MaelRuáin after his pious service, the great sun on
Meath's south plain, at his grave with purity is healed the
sigh of every heart.⁵⁶⁵

Although Donchad and Bran were pagan we are left in no doubt that the sanctity and Irish kingship do not go together:

Though haughty are earthly kings in robes that are
brightest, they will perish after abundance, each goes
before another.⁵⁶⁶

There is sufficient evidence to conclude that well into the early modern period Scandinavian rulers were seen to possess supernatural powers denied to lesser mortals.⁵⁶⁷ A general belief of this sort (which some may wish to call pagan) may well have contributed to the appeal of the Nordic princely cults, particularly in the cases of popular saints such as

⁵⁶⁴ "en sva drapgiarner sãm þeir ero oc sva marger sãm hælger ero iþeira lannde þa hafa þeir ængan dræpit af þeim oc aller þeir hælger mænn sãm þar ero þa hafa aller sot dauðer orðet." Konungs skuggsjá. Speculum Regale. Ed. by Jón Helgason (København 1920), 51.

⁵⁶⁵ Félire Óengusso Céli Dé. The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee. Ed. by Whitley Stokes (London 1905), 26.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁶⁷ See for instance Gunnes, E. "Divine Kingship: A Note", Temenos 10 (1974), 149-158.

Ólafr and Magnús. However, as I have stressed in the second and the third parts of this study, the fundamental reasons for the emergence of the princely cults must be sought in the political and ecclesiastical situation in the Nordic lands in our period.

Again Ireland provides a useful point of contrast. Although scholars may differ in their opinion about the role played by the Irish kings in the conversion of the island, one can safely say that their importance was significantly less in that process than that of their Nordic counterparts.⁵⁶⁸ Moreover after the adoption of Christianity the Church did not rely on secular patronage to the same extent as was the case in Scandinavia. To simplify a complicated issue, it is clear that the Irish Church adapted itself remarkably quickly to the existing social structure. In the words of Richard Fletcher, monasticism in Ireland “made its appeal largely because it proved capable of accommodating itself to the structures of kinship and clientage.”⁵⁶⁹ Powerful families endowed monasteries with land which in turn became family possessions in perpetuity. The abbots were often of royal stock and, in a sense, presided over their domain in a similar way as their secular kinsmen. The result was a sharp division between the secular and the ecclesiastical authorities; neither had much need for the other.

In contrast the Scandinavian Church was from the beginning in a sense an “alien” institution which had to accommodate and make concessions in order to establish its authority. In the process of converting the Nordic people to Christianity and creating an effective ecclesiastical structure, the Church was heavily dependant on the patronage and the protection of the secular arm. A case in point is the conspicuous absence of monastic houses in the eleventh century. It was mainly in the power of the

⁵⁶⁸ Stancliffe, C. E., “Kings and Conversion: Some Comparisons between the Roman Mission to England and Patrick’s to Ireland”, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 14 (1980), 59-95.

⁵⁶⁹ Richard Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe. From Paganism to Christianity 371-1386 AD* (London 1995), 91.

kings to donate land for such foundations and in this period they were unwilling, or perhaps unable, to do so.⁵⁷⁰ The rulers in turn relied on the spiritual authority to bestow legitimacy on their own power and bring cohesion to their dominions through the homogenous effect of Christianity. It is this symbiosis between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* which explains the willingness of clerical communities and individual ecclesiastics to bestow saintly status on secular leaders.

4.2. The Princely Saints and the Living

The case can be made that there were certain elements in Norse mentality and traditions that struck a chord with the basic underlying assumption behind the princely saints' cults; that a deceased ruler could be of beneficial influence for the living. Particularly noteworthy in this respect is the ubiquitous tradition in the Old-Norse sources of the princely saint as overlord of a specific dominion as well as a guardian to his successors. An appropriate starting point for an examination of this tradition – an examination which in the context of this study can only be suggestive rather than exhaustive – is the following passage in O.s.:

Nu er þat mitt ræð, at leita þangat traustz. er nogt er til, at sa unni ydr rikis, er æ at rettu; enn þat er hinn helgi Magnus iarl, modurbrodir ydvarr. Vil ek, at þu heitir æ hann, at hann unni ydr frændleifdar þinnar ok sinnar erfðar, at þu latir gera steinmusteri i Orkneyium i Kirkiuvøgi, er þu fær þat riki, þat er ecki se annat dyrdligra i því landi, ok latir Magnusi iarli helga, frænda þinum; ok leggir þar fœc til, svo at sœ stadr mætti eflaz, ok yrði þangat komit hans helgum domi ok byskupsstolinum með.⁵⁷¹

Now, here's my advice: look for support where men will say the true owner of the realm granted it you, and that's the holy Earl Magnus, your uncle. I want you to make a vow to him, that should he grant

⁵⁷⁰ Abrams, L., "Kings and Bishops and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandian Kingdoms", *Church and People in Britan and Scandinavia*. Ed. by Ingmar Brohed. *Bibliotheca Historico-Ecclesiastica Lundensis* 36 (Lund 1996), 15-29.

⁵⁷¹ O.s., 176.

you your family inheritance and his own legacy, and should you come to power, then you'll build a stone minster at Kirkwall more magnificent than any in Orkney, that you'll have it dedicated to your uncle the holy Earl Magnus and provide it with all the funds it will need to flourish. In addition, his holy relics and the episcopal seat must be moved there.⁵⁷²

Kolr Kalason addressed these words to his son on the eve of Rögnvald's second expedition to the Northern Isles in 1137. As mentioned it was the success of this undertaking which brought Rögnvaldr to power and, arguably, secured the future of St. Magnús' cult. Although one can question whether Kolr actually spoke these words on this occasion (or others to the same effect) the sentiments behind them are still worth exploring.

The Orkney saint is presented as the ultimate ruler of the earldom and as such it is within his authority to grant it to the one he deems worthy. Also integral to the passage is the concept of gift exchange; Rögnvaldr should recognise the supreme status of Magnús and vow to build a church in his honour if the saint will aid him to power. As noted, a similar notion of reciprocity between an aspiring ruler and a princely saint appears in Heimskringla which tells that King Haraldr *gilli* promised in 1134 to build a church and dedicate it to Ólafr Haraldsson on the condition that the saint made him victorious against his co-ruler, King Magnús Sigurðarson.⁵⁷³

One can thus read two distinct but still related strands of ideas into Kolr Kalason's speech. Firstly that Magnús is the ultimate lord of the earldom and secondly that it is in the saint's power to allow Rögnvaldr, his nephew, to rule over it in his name.

The association of the princely saints with a specific dominion is common in the Old-Norse sources, especially where St. Ólafr of Norway is concerned. Although it was not unknown for saints to perform miracles outside their realm,⁵⁷⁴ their supernatural authority generally extended to the territory over which they had ruled. In other words, the princely saints

⁵⁷² The Orkneyinga saga, 130.

⁵⁷³ Heimskringla III, 286.

⁵⁷⁴ E.g. the healing miracle which Magnús performs in Norway. M.s.l., 381-383.

“performed the same function after death that they had in life – the protection and care of their subjects and lands ... [and] they were able to remain princes after death for all time.”⁵⁷⁵

Similar ideas also appear in hagiography on confessor saints,⁵⁷⁶ for instance, in a Life of Bishop Guðmundur Arason written by Arngrímur Brandsson around the middle of the fourteenth century. In Arngrím's version of Rannveigarleiðsla (the Vision of Rannveig), the sole indigenous vision from medieval Iceland, we are told that an adulterous women by the name of Rannveig had experienced a vision (in November 1198) which she later narrated to Guðmundr Arason, then a priest but later bishop of Hólar (1203-1237) and posthumously a popular saint (albeit never canonised). Rannveig reported that she had suddenly fallen into a trance in which she was escorted by demons through a desert landscape. At a point when Rannveig was on the verge of being dragged into a boiling cauldron she had the presence of mind to call on St. Ólafr, St. Magnús and St. Hallvard, the “most venerated saints of that time.” At the very same instance a great light appeared over her head and the demons dispersed. The source of the light was the three Scandinavian princely martyrs who first introduced themselves and then proceeded to show her the glories of heaven. When they enter a splendid palace St. Ólafr leads her into a magnificent room and addresses her in the following manner:

...sér þú herbergi þetta, svá signat ok sæmiligt, er jafnan stendr án flekk ok fölnan ok með sama ríkdómi ok ólíðandi gleði? Sjá er eignarjörð ok óðal Guðmundar Arasonar, er fá mun um síðir eigi lægra sess en Thoma í Kantia, ok svo sem vér fullting veitum Noregi ok Orkneyjum, svo mun hann hjálpa Ísland með sínum bænum.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁵ Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People*, 13-14. Referring to the princely martyrs of Rus'.

⁵⁷⁶ Moore, R. I., “Between Sanctity and Superstition: Saints and their Miracles in the Age of Revolution”, The Works of Jacques Le Goff and the Challenges of Medieval History. Ed. by Miri Rubin (U. K. 1997), 60-61.

⁵⁷⁷ Biskupa sögur. Vol. II, ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon & Jón Sigurðsson (København 1878), 10-11.

...see you this room, blessed and honourable, that always stands without fading or being tarnished and with the same authority and everlasting joy? This is the ancestral land and patrimony of Guðmundr Arason, who will soon not be placed lower than Thomas of Canterbury, and as we aid Norway and Orkney, thus he will help Iceland with his prayers.⁵⁷⁸

The ancestral land allotted to Guðmundr Arason is Iceland just as Norway has been assigned to Ólafr and Hallvard and Orkney to Magnús.⁵⁷⁹

Still, the tradition that the princely saints in heaven guarded the dominion which they had ruled over in their earthly life, appears to have been particularly deep-rooted in the Nordic lands. Certainly its frequent manifestation in non-hagiographic works points in that direction. A note can be made of a passage (discussed in a different context earlier in this study) in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, written by Sturla Þórðarson in 1263/64 at the instigation of King Hákon IV of Norway. The saga tells that when King Alexander II of Scotland was preparing a conquest of Hebrides (at that point under Norwegian rule) in 1249 he dreamt a dream:

... honum þotti koma at ser .iij. menn. þotti honum einn vera með konungligum skrudu sa var miok ohryligr riodr i andliti ok helldr digr medalmaðr vexti. annar maðr syndiz honum granvaxinn ok dreingiligr ok allra manna fridazstr ok tiguligazstr. enn þridi var myklu mestr vexti ok allra þeira ofryniglastr. sa var miok framsnoðinn. sa varp ordum a konunginn ok spurdi ef hann ætladi til Sudreyia. hann þottiz suara at þat var vist at hann ætladi undir sig at leggja eyiarnar. draummadrinn bað hann atr snua. kuad honum eigi annat hlyda skylldu. Konungr sagði drauminn ok fystu flestir at hann skyllði aftr huerfa enn konungr villði þat eigi. ok litlu sipar tok Alexandr konungr sott ok andadiz. ... Sudreyingar segia at þessir menn er konungi synduz i suefni væri hinn heilagi Ólafr kongunr or Noregi ok inn heilagi Magnus jarl af Orkneyium ok enn helgi Kolumba.⁵⁸⁰

...he thought that three men came to him. He thought that one wore royal apparel; this man was very frowning and red-faced and stout in figure. The second man seemed to him tall, and slender, and youthful;

⁵⁷⁸ My translation.

⁵⁷⁹ This vision was probably first recorded in the so-called *Prestssaga* of Bishop Guðmundr Arason, written in the first half of the thirteenth century. On the imagery in this passage see Hallberg, "Imagery in Old-Norse Prose", 130.

⁵⁸⁰ Flateyjarbók vol. II, 178.

the fairest of men, and nobly dressed. The third was by far the largest in figure, and the most frowning, of them all. He was very bald in front. He spoke to the king and asked whether he intended to go plundering in the Hebrides. He thought he answered that such was certain. The dream-man bade him turn back, and said to him that they would not hear of anything else. ... The king told his dream; and men begged him to turn back, but he would not do that. And a short time after he fell ill and died ... The Hebrideans say that these men who appeared to the king in his sleep must have been St Olaf, king of Norway; and St Magnús Earl of Orkney; and St Columba.⁵⁸¹

The appearance of the three saints to King Alexander brings home the wrongfulness of his cause. In tandem the heavenly patrons of the parties involved – representing Norway, the earldom of Orkney and the kingdom of Scotland – admonish the Scottish king to confine himself within the realm allotted to him by Columba and refrain from attempting to extend his authority to lands which lie within the sphere of influence of the two Nordic saints.

At the other end of the spectrum we have Earl Haraldr *ungi* whose attempt to gain power in Orkney ended with his death in battle against Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson in 1197/98 (see ch. 5.3.). He was buried in Caithness and people are said to have venerated him as a saint. The saga also adds that numerous miracles were performed by this popular leader “as a reminder that Harald wished to go to Orkney and join his kinsmen [and saints], Earl Magnús and Earl Rognvald.” Just as his lordship did not extend to the heartland of the Orkney earldom during his life-time (unlike that of St. Magnús and St. Rögnvaldr), his supernatural powers were confined to the peripheral region after his death.

⁵⁸¹ Hakonar saga, It is noteworthy here that (at least) the kernel of this story – i.e. Alexander’s refusal to heed Columba’s warning – was not the invention of Sturla Þórðarson for in Mathew Paris’ (d. 1259) *Chronica Majora* we are told that King Alexander acted unjustly when he moved against a local ruler, a certain Ewen of Lord. Then Mathew adds “unde offensam incurrit Dei et sancti Columkille qui in partibus illis jacet et honoratur, et multorum nobilium.” In this ill fated attempt to disinherit an innocent man the king died. *Mathæi Parisiensis. Monachi Sancti Albani. Chronica Majora*. Vol.V: : A. D. 1248 to A. D. 1259, ed. by H. R. Luard. *Rolls Series* (London 1880), 88-89. In both Matthew’s chronicle and *Hákonar saga* the emphasis is on Alexander’s unjust behaviour; the king exceeds his authority when he undertakes the military expedition to the Western Isles. For the context of this episode see Cowan, E. J., “Norwegian Sunset – Scottish Dawn: Hakon IV and Alexander III”, *Scotland in the Reign of Alexander III 1249-1286*. Ed. by N. H. Reid (Edinburgh 1990), 103-132. On St. Columba as the patron saint of Scotland see Clanchy T. O., “Columba, Adomnán and the Cult of the Saints in Scotland”, *The Innes Review* 48 (1997), 1-26.

The second strand of Kol's speech – the close relationship of the saint with his chosen successor – emerges from several incidents in the Old-Norse corpus, mainly involving St. Ólafr of Norway. Heimskringla, Fagrskinna and Ágrip tell that the night before the battle of Hlýrskógrheiði (1043) the Norwegian saint appeared in a dream to King Magnús *góði*, his son and heir. Ólafr encourages Magnús to stand firm and promises to help him in the coming battle against the pagan Wends.⁵⁸² The tradition that Ólafr aided Magnús to victory on this particular occasion is not unique to the Kings' saga for it appears in the hagiographic poem Geisli from the middle of the twelfth century.⁵⁸³ A similar scene is found in Knýtlinga saga where King Valdemar has a vision of his father, St. Knud Lavard, before the decisive battle of Grathehed in 1157 where he assures his son that God (and himself) will come to his aid.⁵⁸⁴ Just as Rögnvald's success over Earl Páll was integral to the promotion of St. Magnús' cult, thus King Valdemar's victory in battle against King Sven Eriksson proved decisive for the future of Knud Lavard's cult.

Snorri tells that Ólafr helped his brother, Harald *harðráði*, to escape from captivity in Byzantium and hence clear the way for his return to Norway.⁵⁸⁵ Fagrskinna, Heimskringla and Morkinskinna report that St. Ólafr advised his brother against embarking on the military expedition against King Harold in 1066. In a dream Ólafr declares that he will not aid or protect Haraldr during his undertaking; the king must depend on his own luck. It is needless to recount how his expedition ended.⁵⁸⁶ Norway is St. Ólaf's patrimony and he is unwilling or unable to apply his supernatural authority to a reckless invasion of a foreign dominion. In

⁵⁸² Heimskringla III, 43 ; Fagrskinna, 210; Ágrip, 220-221.

⁵⁸³ Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning A I, 464-465.

⁵⁸⁴ Knýtlinga Saga, 292. In Adomnan's Life of Columba the saint appears to King Oswald in a dream and promises him aid and victory the night before an important battle against an heathen army. Adomnan's Life of Columba. Ed. with transl. and notes by A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (New York 1961) I, i., 200-201.

⁵⁸⁵ Heimskringla III, 85-86.

⁵⁸⁶ Fagrskinna, 228 ; Heimskringla III, 178 ; Morkinskinna, 267.

Morkinskinna King Sigurðr *Jórsalafari* (1103-1133) dreams that he and his two brothers and co-regents sit on a single bench in Christchurch in Oslo. St. Ólafr approaches the three kings and leads away two of them, Ólafr (1103-1116) and Eysteinn (1103-1122), while leaving Sigurðr behind. Eysteinn interprets this dream as foretelling that Sigurðr will outlive his co-regents which he subsequently does.⁵⁸⁷ The role of St. Ólafr in Sverris saga, composed in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, is also conspicuous. A pivotal event in the saga takes place shortly after Sverrir is told of his “real” parentage, i.e. that he is the son of King Sigurðr Haraldsson. At that point Ólafr appears to Sverrir in a dream and promises to aid him in the struggle against the reigning king of Norway, Magnús Erlingsson.⁵⁸⁸ It is this vision which finally convinces Sverrir of his rightful claim to the throne.

In Heimskringla King Ólafr Tryggvason appears in a dream to Ólafr Haraldsson himself and presents him with the options of staying at the court of Grand-Prince Jaroslav or returning to Norway and reclaiming his rightful inheritance.⁵⁸⁹ God has chosen Ólafr Tryggvason to bring Christianity to Norway who in turn invests his namesake with the honour of becoming the eternal lord of the kingdom. In this context the close association between the kings of the *Ynglingar* dynasty and dream-visions is worthy of note.⁵⁹⁰ In Fagrskinna (taken up by Snorri in Heimskringla) we read that Hálfðán *svarti*, allegedly the first king of the dynasty (early ninth-century), was unable to dream. When he was finally cured of this affliction he has a vision which prefigures (in a highly symbolic manner) the glory of his descendants, particularly that of St. Ólafr.⁵⁹¹ A mention

⁵⁸⁷ Morkinskinna, 358-359.

⁵⁸⁸ Sverris saga, 4-5.

⁵⁸⁹ Heimskringla II, 340-341.

⁵⁹⁰ This was noted by Chadwick, N., “Dreams in Early Medieval Europe”, Celtic Studies. Essays in Memory of Angus Matheson (London 1968), 43.

⁵⁹¹ Fagrskinna, 4-5 ; Heimskringla I, 90-91.

can also be made of a passage in the fragmentarily preserved De vita et miracula of Knud Lavard by Robert of Ely. The parents of the future martyr initially plan to name him Hugo but then St. Knud of Odense, his grandfather, intervenes. The martyr appears in a vision to a certain Aslac (i.e. Áslákr) and tells him that the child should rather be named after himself: “*quia ipse sublimabit Rincstadium, sicut ego Othoniam.*”⁵⁹² Again we see a princely saint guiding a descendant or a successor on the right course.

In short the personal relationship between rulers, especially the Norwegian kings, and their saintly predecessors, is clearly attested in the Nordic source, invariably through dreams and visions.

This brings us to the problem of whether scenes of this nature are purely literary construction of the saga authors or whether they reflect a genuine tradition. Certainly their appearance in contemporary or near contemporary works such as Sverris saga points to the latter option. In this work the supernatural link between Sverrir and St. Ólafr is clearly played up for propaganda purposes, that is to show that Sverri's claim to kingship was supported and hallowed by the “eternal king of Norway”. Considering that “even the most primitive propaganda has to correspond to intimately-linked conceptions and motivations if it is to be effective”,⁵⁹³ there must have been a genuine belief in the phenomenon under discussion. If that was not the case, its prominence in a blatantly propagandistic work like Sverris saga is difficult to account for.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹² Vitae Sanctorum Danorum, 234.

⁵⁹³ Wolfram, H., “*Origo et Religio*. Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts”, Early Medieval Europe 3 (1994), 38. Wolfram is here writing about the belief in the divine origin of people and tribes in early medieval Europe.

⁵⁹⁴ This, of course, does not mean that Icelandic authors did not elaborate on this theme or make up scenes of this sort for dramatic effect. For instance, in the fifteenth-century Hrafns þáttur Guðrúnarsonar King Magnús góði is on his way to fight King Sven Estridsson of Denmark when he hears that an Icelander who had slain one of his men is in his presence. The king plans to have him prosecuted but, through the invocation of Sighvatr Þórðarson, the Icelandic court-poet of St. Ólafr and now that of Magnús, the saint appears to his son in a dream and orders him to leave the Icelander in peace and

A variation on the same theme – that a deceased ruler was able to influence the career of a chosen successor and bestow legitimacy on his rule – appears in the well-known episode of Ólafr *Geirstaðaálfr*, preserved in six variant versions of both Norwegian and Icelandic origin dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth century. All six derive from a lost proto-type almost certainly composed in Norway as early as the second half of twelfth-century.⁵⁹⁵ Ólafr Guðrøðarson (nicknamed *Geirstaðaálfr*), who in the ninth century had supposedly been a king over the region of Vestfold, appears in dream to a certain Hrani and commands him to break into his burial-mound, kill the figure he finds therein (none other than himself in fact), and retrieve from him a sword, a silver ring and a leather-belt. Hrani should then bring these items to Ásta, the daughter of Guðbrandr *kúla*, who is labouring in childbirth. With the belt strapped around her waist Ásta will deliver a boy whom Hrani should present with the sword. Hrani does as he is told and the child born is none other than Ólafr Haraldsson, future king and martyr. Although the episode, as preserved, is clearly a carefully structured piece of work consciously crafted by the author, there is no reason to doubt that it is based on traditional elements.⁵⁹⁶

Moreover, as Anne Heinrichs has convincingly shown, the *raison d'être* of Ólafs þátrr Geirstaðaálfs is the transmission of legitimacy from

promises him instead a victory over the Danes. Subsequently, some men see St. Ólafr fighting alongside Magnús' men and the victory is attributed to his father's intercession. *Vatnsdæla saga – Hallfreðar saga – Kormáks saga – Hrómundar þátrr halta – Hrafnar þátrr Guðrúnarsonar*. Einar Ól. Sveinsson gaf út. *Íslensk fornrit VIII* (Reykjavík 1939), 328-333. This late account is clearly an elaboration on a passage found in Snorri's *Heimskringla* in which King Magnús tells his men before a battle against Sven Estridsson that St. Ólafr will be on their side and secure victory. *Heimskringla III*, 47.

⁵⁹⁵ Heinrichs, A., *Der Ólafs Þátrr Geirstaðaálfs. Eine Variantenstudie* (Heidelberg 1989), 112-136. The oldest variant appears in the so-called *Legendary saga* of St. Ólafr, a Norwegian work from around 1200. *Ólafs saga hins helga*, 30-36.

⁵⁹⁶ Krag, C., "Rane Kongefostre og Olav Geirstadalv. Om utviklingen av to sagaskikkelser", *Historisk tidsskrift* 78 (norsk), 21-47.

the dead to the living where authority is symbolised by a sword.⁵⁹⁷ In this respect Ólafs þáttir Geirstaðaálfs bears a notable similarity to the so-called Visio Karoli Magni, written in the 860s or 870s by an unknown clergyman living in or around Mainz, which tells how Charlemagne was approached, just before he was falling asleep, by a figure carrying a sword.⁵⁹⁸ The emperor asked the unknown person about his identity and was told, "Receive this sword sent from God to protect yourself, and read and remember what is written on it because it will be fulfilled in time." Four, apparently nonsensical, words were written on the blade of the sword which Charlemagne himself interpreted next morning as containing a prophecy regarding the rule of his ancestors.

Like Ólafs þáttir Geirstaðaálfs the Visio Karoli is a subtle piece of literary construction relevant to the political circumstances in which it was composed. However, as Patrick Geary has argued, the Visio Karoli is based on a Germanic tradition which centres around transmission of authority from one generation to the next where the sword figures as a symbolic token of legitimacy.⁵⁹⁹ This term "Germanic" is perhaps

⁵⁹⁷ Heinrichs, *Der Ólafs þáttir Geirstaðaálfs*, 104-112. Røthe comes to a similar conclusion albeit by applying a more theoretical approach "The Birth of St. Ólafr and the Change of Religion in Norway", The 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim 3.-9. August 1997. Sagas and the Norwegian Experience. Pre-prints (Trondheim 1997), 573-582.

⁵⁹⁸ The vision is edited by Geary, P. J., "Germanic Tradition and Royal Ideology in the Ninth Century: The 'Visio Karoli Magni'", Frühmittelalterliche Studien 21 (1987), 293-294. The translation is taken from this article, *ibid.*, 275. A comparison of the relationship between living and dead ruler in the Old-Norse corpus and the Carolingian sources shows that in the former the ancestor invariably contacts his successor personally. In the Carolingian sources, on the other hand, the message is usually conveyed through the medium of an ecclesiastic. This clearly reflects "an attempt to introduce the Church as mediator between the living and dead." Geary, "Germanic Tradition", 291-292. In the Visio Raduini, for instance, the Virgin Mary appears to a monk of Rheims and informs him that Christ had handed the empire of the Franks over to St. Remigius and for that reason the saint had the right to choose who should rule over them. In this vision St. Remigius, who had baptised Clovis, is presented as the lord of the Frankish empire as a whole. Visio Raduini. Ed. O. Holder-Egger. Neues Archiv 11 (1886), 262-263. On visions in the Carolingian period in general see Dutton, P. E., The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire (Nebraska 1994).

⁵⁹⁹ Geary observes that this tradition often involves mound-breaking and he points out examples from Old-Norse literature, most notably from the thirteenth-century Hervarar

superfluous in this context; the tradition was deep-rooted in the milieu of the warrior-aristocracy of medieval Europe. For instance, according to a chronicle account written in the 1290s the Earl Warren, when asked by King Edward I to show a warrant for his lands, produced a rusty sword and claimed with this very weapon his ancestors had conquered his holdings in the Norman conquest. From his stand-point no further proof was needed.⁶⁰⁰

As the kings (and would-be kings) in twelfth-century Norway justified their claim to rulership by referring back to Ólafr Haraldsson, the authority of the “eternal king of Norway” himself had to be traced back to the pagan era. An important concept in this respect is the inalienable right of the family to the *óðal*, the ancestral land, that is handed down from generation to generation. In the ninth stanza of Þórarinn *loftunga*’s *Glælognskviða* the poet advises King Sven Álfífuson to appeal to St. Ólafr that he should allow (“*unna*”) him to rule Norway. The realm is the *óðal* of the saint and consequently Sven is in a sense an impostor. This explains the almost pleading tone in which the poet tells Sven to approach Ólafr. King Sven is not a relative of the saint and hence he must personally receive the realm from his hands.

That the notion of Norway as an *óðal* of Ólafr was already in place in the second half of the eleventh century is attested to in skaldic poetry. In *Ólafs drápa* by Steinn Herdísarson (ca. 1070) the poet confidently asserts that Ólafr will not “allow”, “*unna*”, King Sven Estridsson of Denmark to rule over his *óðal*.⁶⁰¹ The saint and his grand-son, King Ólafr *kyrri*, will ensure that the land will be held by a member of the Norwegian royal

saga ok Heiðreks. A mention of *Ólafs þáttir Geirstaðálfs* would have further strengthened his argument.

⁶⁰⁰ Clanchy, M. T., *From Memory to Written Record. England 1066-1307* (second ed. 1993), 35-43. As Clanchy points out, although the veracity of this story can be doubted the tradition behind it is undoubtedly genuine.

⁶⁰¹ Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning A, 411.

dynasty. Again we see the word “*unna*” used in relation to St. Ólafr and the claim of a Danish king to Norway; on this occasion, however, in a negative context. It is interesting to note that in Kol’s speech cited at the beginning of this chapter he advises his son to build a magnificent church so that Magnús “*unni ydr frændleifdar þinnar ok sinnar erfdar... .*” Yet another instance of the verb “*unna*” appearing in the context of the living looking for the blessing of the dead in relation to rulership over the ancestral land.⁶⁰²

The belief that Ólafr was the rightful owner of Norway was given a more concrete expression in the so-called *privilegebrev*, issued shortly after the coronation of Magnús Erlingsson in 1163/64, in which the young king acknowledges the ultimate over lordship of St. Ólafr and presents himself as his substitute ruler on earth (see ch. 3.1.). Scholars have sought to place King Magnús’ oath within a wider European context. In particular, a parallel has been drawn between this act and that of rulers in the eleventh and twelfth century who placed their realms under the over lordship of St. Peter and the papacy.⁶⁰³ In 1059 the Norman war-lord Robert Guiscard recognised God and St. Peter as the ultimate liege-lords in respect of his lands in southern Italy. About a decade later King Sancho Ramirez of Navarre and Aragon came on a pilgrimage to Rome and on that occasion delivered his kingdom into the power of God and St. Peter. In 1139 Duke Alfons I of Portugal took an oath of vassalage to a papal legate and four decades later Pope Alexander III bestowed on him the title of king.⁶⁰⁴ The

⁶⁰² The idea that an illustrious ancestor was in the position to guide a living person from beyond, particularly on matters relating to the ancestral land, was not confined to kings and saints. In Sturla Þórðarson’s *Íslendinga saga*, completed around the middle of the thirteenth century, we are told that in 1202 Snorri Sturluson was considering the possibility of leaving his ancestral farm Borg for Reykholt. A man on his farm and a relative dreams that a mutual ancestor of his and Snorri’s, none other than the legendary Egill Skallagrímsson, warns him not to leave the homestead. *Sturlunga saga* I-II. Ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon (Oxford 1878), I, 211.

⁶⁰³ Koht, “Norge eit len av St. Olav”, 81-109.

⁶⁰⁴ See Robinson, I. S., *The Papacy 1073-1198. Continuity and Innovation*. *Cambridge Medieval Textbooks* (Cambridge 1990), 302-304 ; 369-372.

recognition of St. Peter as ultimate overlord of their realms neutralised any claims of suzerainty from foreign rulers. Similarly Magnús' recognition of St Ólafr as his only liege-lord can be seen as rebuttal of any claims which the kings of Denmark made to southern Norway in this period.

It has also been pointed that the form of the *privilegiebrev* may have had a foreign model. Around the middle of the twelfth century a letter was forged in the monastery of St. Denis near Paris which stated that Charlemagne had placed his empire under the suzerainty of St. Dionysius and granted the monastery of St. Denis extensive privileges. A comparison of the style and content of the two documents reveals that the *privilegiebrev* was influenced by the St. Denis letter.⁶⁰⁵

Interesting and relevant as these European parallels are they do not diminish the unique features of the relationship between the Norwegian kings and St. Ólafr. For the first part there is a considerable difference between the act of recognising the over lordship of a saintly predecessor on the one hand and submitting the land to St. Peter and the Holy See on the other hand. Norway is, to my best knowledge, a unique case in this respect. Moreover, whereas the acts of King Sancho, Robert Guiscard and Alphons I represented a complete novelty in their respective realms, the attitudes expressed in the *privilegiebrev* of 1163/1164 can be traced to the second half of the eleventh century. King Magnús' acknowledgement of St. Ólaf's over lordship was thus a formal recognition – inspired by specific political circumstances – of an older, and I would argue a deep rooted, tradition.

There is a case for concluding that princely saints were seen to have similar relations to the rulers in the other Nordic dominions where the concept of *óðal* was deep-rooted, Orkney and Sweden.⁶⁰⁶ Kali's speech

⁶⁰⁵ Schreiner, J., "De første kongekroninger i Norden", *Historisk tidskrift* (norsk) 34 (1946-1948), 518-534. For a discussion of this see Tobiassen, "Tronfølge og Privilegiebrev", 183-219.

⁶⁰⁶ Robberstad, K., "Odalsrett (Noreg, Vesthavsøyene)", *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid*. Vol. 12, 494-499.

quoted here indicates that the notion of Orkney as an *óðal* of St. Magnús was in place and in passing it is interesting to observe that according to O.s. Rögnvaldr Kali made the farmers of the earldom purchase their *óðal* possessions once and for all in order to finance the building of St. Magnús Cathedral.⁶⁰⁷

By the fifteenth century the idea of St. Erik as the eternal king of Sweden had become firmly entrenched. Thus when the Swedes revolted against the king of the Kalmar-union in the 1430s their leader, Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson, received his power directly from St. Erik Jedvardson.⁶⁰⁸ However the concept of St. Erik as the ultimate overlord of the realm was much older.⁶⁰⁹ Numismatic evidence indicates that the idea was in place as early as the first half of the thirteenth century. It seems that a rebellious aristocratic faction, the so-called *Folkungarna*, issued coins during three different insurrections: 1229, 1247-1251 in Svealand and 1278-1280 in Västergötland. In 1229 or shortly afterwards Knut, the grand-son of St. Erik, led the *Folkungarna* against the reigning king, Erik Eriksson. On this occasion Knut had a coin struck on which he presents himself as *vicarius*, a viceroy, to St. Erik. The same was done by Filip Knutsson, another descendant of the saint and a leader of the *Folkungarna*, during the insurrection of 1278-1280. The underlying idea was that the Swedish crown could only be held with the consent of St. Erik, *rex perpetuus* of the realm.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁷ O.s., 190. For an interpretation of this event see Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, 201-202.

⁶⁰⁸ Carlsson, G., "Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson", *Svensk biografiskt leksikon*. Vol. XIII (Stockholm 1950), 236. Engelbrekt was murdered in 1436 and was subsequently venerated as a saint. Engelbrekt became a martyr for the liberty of Sweden and as such his cult bears more than a passing resemblance to the cult of Earl Simon de Montfort in late thirteenth-century England. Carlsson, G., "Engelbrekt som helgon", *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift* 21 (1920-21), 236-243.

⁶⁰⁹ Thordemann, B., "Nordens helgonkungar", *Finska Vetenskaps societetens Årsskrift* 23 (1960), 16-19.

⁶¹⁰ See Thordemann, B., "Rex Upsalie", *Numismatiska Meddelanden* 30 (1965), 83-91. Sjöberg, R., "Rex Upsalie och vicarius – Erik den helige och hans ställföreträdere.

In the context of the cults of St. Ólafr, St. Magnús and St. Erik the sentiments explored here may throw a light on the question (seldom asked) how the cult of a saintly kinsman could help to legitimise the authority of an earthly ruler. From the stand-point of the Church there was certainly no theological basis for the notion that simply being a relative of a saint (son, half-brother or nephew) made anyones claim to rulership stronger. Indeed nowhere in the literature on the Scandinavian princely saints is this view upheld.

However from the point of Nordic attitudes towards proving and establishing authority over a specific dominion, the importance of a saintly ancestor or kinsman should not be underestimated. To name but one example, in a law-amendment (*retterbod*) issued in 1316 by King Hákon Magnússon of Norway relating to the selling of ancestral land, it is stipulated that ownership of the *óðal* should be traced to *haugs ok til heiðni* (literally: to burial mound and to pagan times), that is as far back as possible in time.⁶¹¹ The actual physical presence of an ancestor in the form of a burial mound provided a valuable proof that the land had been held by the same family for generations. I would argue that in Orkney, Norway and Sweden similar sentiments, albeit on a grander scale, were associated with the cults of the princely saints; a saintly kinsman provided a fixed point of reference, hallowed by divine will, from which the living were able to claim authority from the past.

Något om Erikskulten och de äkta folkungarnas uppror på 1200-talet", *Fornvännen* 80 (1986), 1-13.

⁶¹¹ *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*. Vol. III, ed. by R. Keyser & P. A. Munch (Christiania 1849), 120-121.

One reason behind Odd's composition of the saga was clearly his wish to present Ólafr Tryggvason as a saintly figure. The work is structured in a similar way to the apostolic stories (*postulasögur*) which had been translated into the Old-Norse vernacular in the course of the twelfth century. Ólaf's life is seen as an unceasing journey which has as its primary object the bringing of Christianity to the pagan people of the North. As St. Stephan of Hungary was referred to as the apostle of Hungary, thus Oddr designates Ólafr as the "Apostle of the North".⁶²⁰

In his prologue Oddr tells that although the king did not perform miracles after his death we should be in no doubt about his sanctity:

Allom er þat kvnict. at eptir lifit sken iartegnom. en helge O. konungr. en inn fregsti O. konungr Try. s. var monnum ecke kvnr i iartegna gerð eptir lifit. þo trvrm ver hann dyrligan mann ok agetan oc guðz vin. þotti hann ollum olíkr i atgervi meðan hann lifðe. þott eptir lifit veri þat eigi berat hverr krapta maðr hann var. oc ecke skolom vær forvitnaz gvðz leynda lvti.⁶²¹

Every one knows that after his life St. Ólafr shone with many miracles but the illustrious Ólafr Tryggvason was not known to have performed miracles after his death. Nevertheless we believe him to be a glorious man and a good friend of God. While he lived he was different in bearing from every one else although after his life it was not revealed of what power he possessed and we should not be curious about God's hidden plan.⁶²²

The Dutch scholar Jan de Vries went so far as to assume that Oddr composed his saga of Ólafr Tryggvason in order to obtain papal approval for canonisation of the king. The Icelandic people and the Church alike were in need of a saint which they could identify with and who could serve as a counterweight to St. Ólafr Haraldsson whose cult, it goes without saying, was intimately linked with the Norwegian royal authority. The

år", *Kongsmenn og krossmenn. Festskrift til Grethe Authén Blom*. Red. av Steinar Supphellen. *Det kongelige norske videnskabers selskab, skrifter nr. 1* (Trondheim 1992), 21-39, esp., 22-31.

⁶²⁰ Sverrir Tómasson, *Formálar Íslenskra sagnaritara*, 261-279.

⁶²¹ *Saga Olafs Tryggvasonar*, 1.

⁶²² My translation.

obvious choice was the king who had played a pivotal role in the conversion of the country.⁶²³ The establishment of the cults of bishops Þorlákur Þórhallsson and Jón Ögmundarson at the end of the twelfth century suggests that ecclesiastics were scanning the horizon for saints who would be able to strengthen the identity of the Icelandic Church and, at the same time, serve the religious needs of the community.

Oddr must certainly have been acutely aware of the inherent problem involved in promoting Ólafr Tryggvason as a saint. Most notably, the absence of posthumous miracles made Ólafr Tryggvason a somewhat weak magnet for an emergent cult.⁶²⁴ The contrast with the cult of Bishop Þorlákr, whose miraculous powers were as potent as his life was unexciting, is a case in point. In any event Oddr's end product was not an orthodox hagiographic dossier containing a Life and miracles but rather a kind of semi-hagiographic work intended to enhance the reputation of the first missionary king of Norway whose memory had been overshadowed by the cult of Ólafr Haraldsson. Only by stressing the saintly qualities of his missionary forerunner could this be achieved.

No cultic evidence suggests that Ólafr was venerated as a saint in Iceland⁶²⁵ and this presumably accounts for the hesitant, almost apologetic, tone adopted by Oddr when he touches upon the king's saintly status.⁶²⁶

⁶²³ de Vries, J., *Altnordische Litteraturgeschichte*. Vol. II (Berlin 1942, reprinted 1967), 174-75.

⁶²⁴ Pointed out by Anne Holtmark, "Sankt Olavs liv og mirakler", 15.

⁶²⁵ Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, 10.

⁶²⁶ For example in the following passage: "En þessi Ólafr T. .s. síðan er hann let ríkt í þeim hinum micla bardaga er hann barðiz a Orminum langa. þa er hann brot numinn frá oss. sua at eigi ma þat glot vita iarðligir menn. huers heilagleiks hann er. Oc eigi er þat synt með hueriom tacnum oc iartegnum hann er. en engi ivar þat at hann er af guði sendr Gerði guð hann oc forkunnlegra aðrum konungum oc dasamlegan i allum farsæligum lutum Oc þui er þat allum oss nauðsynlect at lova nafn drottins Iesu Cristz firir þenna mann. er hann gaf sua mikinn matt oc atgerfi a þa leið sem ver lofum guð af hinum helga Ólafí konungi." *Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar*, 157. Dietrich Hofmann has argued that another work allegedly composed by Oddr, *Yngvars saga víðfórla*, is intended partly as an apology for a saint without any posthumous miracles. Hoffmann, D., "Die Yngvars saga víðfórla und Oddr munkr inn fróði", *Speculum Norroenum*. *Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*. Ed. by Ursula Dronke et al.

Odd's ambiguous attitude on this matter may explain why another monk of Pingeyrar monastery, Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1218/1219), composed (in Latin) a new, and what may have been a more elaborate and a more distinctly hagiographic, account of Ólaf's life. Unfortunately Gunnlaug's work is lost, apart from translated sections which were incorporated into the so-called Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta, a compilation of existing material relating to the life of the king from the early fourteenth century.

Thus, what we appear to be dealing with in the Icelandic context is an effort by the monks of Pingeyrar monastery to cast an aura of saintliness over the ruler who had been responsible, albeit indirectly, for the conversion of their country. Although there was apparently no cultic veneration of Ólafr, both Oddr Snorrason and Gunnlaugr Leifsson believed in and upheld his sanctity. One has to assume that around the turn of the thirteenth century the two were not the only Icelandic ecclesiastics to hold this view.

Around the same time that Oddr and Gunnlaugr were writing their biographies of Ólafr Tryggvason the Norwegian author of Historia Norwegiae – a work which traces the history of the country up until the arrival of Ólafr Haraldsson on the scene in 1015 – expressed similar sentiments regarding the saintly status of the missionary king.⁶²⁷ Most notably he calls Ólafr *beatus*:

(Odense 1981), 188-222. As pointed out by Margaret Cormack there are examples from the Middle Ages of saints' Lives without posthumous miracles, for instance Rimbert's *vita* of Ansgar. Cormack, M., "Saints' Lives and Icelandic Literature in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century", Saints and Sagas: A Symposium. Ed. by Hans-Bekker Nielsen & Birte Carlé (Odense 1991). 27.

⁶²⁷ The exact dating of Historia Norwegiae is uncertain. See Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Om de norske kongers sagaer. Avhandlinger utgitt av det norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo 1936. II. Hist.- filos. klasse, no 2 (Oslo 1936), 20-29. The work is only preserved in one manuscript from around the middle of the fifteenth century discovered by P. A. Munch in 1849. The present scholarly consensus is that the work could have been written as early as the 1170s and as late as 1220. Anderson, T. M., "Kings' Sagas", Old Norse-Icelandic Literature. A Critical Guide. Ed. by Carol J. Clover & John Lindow. Islandica XLV (Ithaca & London 1985), 201.

Postquam vero *beatus Olavus* per salutarem detrae excelsi mutationem gratiam baptismi cum maxima parte exercitus sui assecutus est, ad Norwegiam transfretavit, habens secum Johannem episcoporum et Thangbrandum presbyterum, quem ad Glaciales misit praedicare.⁶²⁸

Post haec filiis Haconis comitis regnum totius Norwegiae a Swinone tiuguskeg conceditur; qui xiiii annis eidem regno comites praesidebant et sanctam dei ecclesiam, quam *beatus Olavus* egregie plantaverat, Johannes rigaverat, isti fere eradicaverunt.⁶²⁹

In two other passages the language takes on a somewhat hagiographic tinge :

Verum enimvero curam gerens conditor creaturae suae, hunc tyrannum tam remotum tamque indomitum per viscera misericordiae suae mirabiliter visitavit, visitando illuminavit, *ut quos eo tenuis umbra mortis operuerat, stola claritatis aeternae indueret.*⁶³⁰

Sed dum justa Saelandiam iter ageret, *ut ovis a lupis*, ita iste ab inimicis insidiatus praevenitur.⁶³¹

Judging from the Old-Norse sources *beatus* (*sæll*) and *sanctus* (*heilagr*) were interchangeable in this period, as indeed they were in medieval Europe, although the latter term may have, on occasions, carried more formal connotations.⁶³²

⁶²⁸ Monumenta Historica Norvegiae, 115. My italics.

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 119. My italics.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 114. My italics.

⁶³¹ Ibid., 117. My italics.

⁶³² See the various uses of equivalent terms in Old-Norse literature collected by Johan Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*. Vol. III (Kristiania 1886), 639. In the Lives of St. Þorlákr Þórhallsson the terms *sæll* or *heilagr* are used interchangeably while Bishop Guðmundr Arason is usually called *sæll*. On the European custom on this see Kemp, Canonization and Authority, 97-98, 116 ; Vauchez, Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages, 85-103. A weaker form of saintly attribute used in medieval Iceland is the words "Guðs vinr", i.e. "friend of God". This phrase appears in Odd's work but, usually with other more suggestive adjectives: "... þo trum ver hann ver hann dyrlegan mann og agetan oc guðz vin..." ["... nevertheless we believe him to be a glorious man and good friend of God"]. Saga Olaf Tryggvasonar, 1 (my translation). The *beatus* cognomen in *Historia Norvegiae* has been used, not very convincingly, to support the hypothesis that the work was composed in the early 1160s as the author would not have dared to call Ólafr Tryggvason *beatus* after St. Ólafr became "officially" *rex perpetuus Norvegiae* in 1163/4. Hanssen, J. TH., "Omkring Historia Norvegiae", *Avhandlingar utgitt av det norske Videnskabs-Akademi i Oslo* 1949 II. *Hist.-filos. klasse*, no. 2 (Oslo 1949), 27-28.

The Norwegian Theodoricus monachus, in his Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium (ca. 1170), emphasises the pivotal role played by Ólafr Tryggvason in the conversion of Norway and his involvement in Christianising Greenland, Orkney and Iceland. As Arne Odd Johnsen has pointed out, Theodoricus places the king beside his saintly namesake in the history of Norway.⁶³³ The former laid the foundation on which the latter built. Both kings are presented as champions of Christianity and ideal rulers in their relations to the Church. It is no co-incidence that Theodoricus – like the author of the Historia Norwegiae – stresses the religious impact Ólaf's reign had on these peripheral regions for it is precisely this tradition which supported the claim of the Norwegian archbishopric to be the mother Church of Iceland, the Faroe Islands and the earldom of Orkney. In short, it was in the interest of the Norwegian Church to uphold the memory of Ólafr Tryggvason.⁶³⁴

Although Ólafr Tryggvason does not fit the bill of a princely martyr his case deserves to be mentioned in this study for it shows how sanctity could be associated with a secular figure in the absence of an organised cult or, as it appears, popular veneration. As the first missionary king of

⁶³³ Monumenta Historica Norvegiae, 13-21. See also Johnsen, A. O., "Om Theodoricus og hans Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium", Avhandlingar utgitt av det norske Videnskabs-Akademi i Oslo II. Hist.-filos Klasse 1939, no. 3 (Oslo 1939), 69-70.

⁶³⁴ Lars Lönnroth has argued that in the second half of the twelfth century a patriotic faction emerged in the Trøndelag region of Norway that upheld the memory of Ólafr Tryggvason. This faction, which came to be known as the *Birkibeinar* and finally assumed power under the leadership of Sverrir Sigurðarson, were against the growing influence of the international Church. Lönnroth argues that the missionary king became a rallying point for this cause as well as a counterweight to the cult of St. Ólafr. Moreover Lönnroth places the interest of the Icelandic monks at Þingeyrar within the same context of strife between the "national church" (Ólafr Tryggvason) and the "universal Church" (St. Ólafr). Lönnroth, L., "Studier i Olaf Tryggvasons saga", Samlingen 84 (1963), 54-94, esp., 79-94. Lönnroth's intriguing hypothesis has, as far as I can see, little or no basis in the sources. Nevertheless the notion that there was a cult of some sorts of Ólafr Tryggvason in the region of Trøndelag has been accepted unquestionably by some scholars. E.g., Sawyer, P., "Ethelred II, Ólaf Tryggvason, and the Conversion of Norway", Scandinavian Studies 59 (1987), 302.

Norway he was, in the opinion of at least some Norwegian and Icelandic men of the letters, worthy of saintly status.

It is this emphasis on Ólafr the evangeliser which may help to explain why his potential as a martyr is not played up. Rather he is cast in the mould of St. Vladimir of Rus' (955-1015) and St. Stephan of Hungary (ca. 975-1038) whose claim to sanctity rested on their role as the first rulers to champion Christianity in their respective realms. It is no coincidence that Nordic and Russian commentators resorted to similar biblical references in relation to these pivotal rulers and their immediate successors. In the words of Oddr Snorrason:

Sua ær at virþa sem Ólafr konungr hinn fyrri æfnaði oc setti grunduollinn cristninnar með sinu starfi. En hinn síðari Ólafr reisti ueggi Oc Ólafr T. .s. setti uin garðinn En hinn helgi Ólafr pryddi hann oc aucaði með miclum avexti.⁶³⁵

Behold how the first Ólafr with his own effort, laid and enriched the foundations of Christianity. But the latter Ólafr [i.e. St. Ólafr Haraldsson] built walls and Ólafr Tryggvason planted the vine-yard which the saintly Ólafr enlarged and enriched with great dividends.⁶³⁶

And as the Russian Primary Chronicle puts it "his father [i.e. Jaroslav's] Vladimir ploughed and harrowed the soil when he enlightened Rus through baptism, while this prince sowed the hearts of the faithful with the written word, and we in turn reap the harvest... "⁶³⁷

Another Nordic king noted for his support for Church and Christianity was King Erik *emune* of Denmark, murdered by his own courtier at a local assembly in 1137.⁶³⁸ Eight years later a new cathedral in Lund was

⁶³⁵ Saga Olafs Tryggvasonar, 156.

⁶³⁶ My translation.

⁶³⁷ The Russian Primary Chronicle. The Laurentian Text. Tr. and ed. by S. H. Cross & O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor. The Medieval Academy of American Publications (Cambridge, Mass. 1953), 137.

⁶³⁸ On Erik *emune* in Liber daticus see Breengaard, Muren omkring, 39-44. Breengaard was the first to notice the martyr-like aspect of the king's death in this work and my interpretation owes much to his analysis.

consecrated and on that occasion (or thereabouts) a new *necrologium*, a calendar to commemorate the dead, was introduced. In this work, Liber daticus, the text relating to King Erik, partly defective, goes thus:

Rex Ericus danorum gloriosus [...] occisus est [...] tenens regnum cum summa sui principatus potentia [...] a proprio satellite lancea perfossus. temporalis uite cursum consummauit.⁶³⁹

Liber daticus is based on an older *necrologium*, Memoriale fratrum (from 1123) where Erik is also called “*gloriosus*” but no description is given of his assassination. There can be little doubt that the reference to his murder in Liber daticus is intended to evoke the martyrdom of St. Knud of Odense, particularly as recounted in the Tabula Othiniensis, the earliest account of his martyrdom, where the king is said to have been pierced with a lance at the point of his death.⁶⁴⁰ Indeed the single sentence dedicated to King Erik *emune* in the Liber daticus captures the essence of the hagiographic schema that one associates with princely martyrs: the betrayal and killing of a just ruler.

No other medieval source presents the assassination of the king in terms of martyrdom, not even Saxo Grammaticus who otherwise portrays him as a *rex iustus*. In fact in Sven Aggesen’s Brevis historia regum Dacie⁶⁴¹ and the Chronicon Roskildense his murder is seen as a just retribution for his tyrannical reign and overbearing manner. The latter work tells that just as God was guiding the stone which slew Goliath he was in the assassin’s spear that killed King Erik.⁶⁴²

⁶³⁹ Libri Memoriales Capituli Lundensis. Lunds Domkapitales Gavebøger. Ed. by C. Weeke (Copenhagen 1884-89), 239-240. Although this text is from a version of Liber daticus copied ca. 1270 there is no reason to believe that it does not accurately reflect the original state of the text (which is badly defective). See Breengaard, Muren omkring, 39-44.

⁶⁴⁰ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 60-62. Which in turn evokes the piercing of Christ on the cross.

⁶⁴¹ *Scriptores minores*, 137.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 31.

For Archbishop Eskil and the clergy of Lund Cathedral on the other hand King Erik *emune*, a benefactor and a generous patron of the Church,⁶⁴³ died a martyr-like death and the day of his murder was to be celebrated with appropriate honours. No steps, however, were taken to have him canonised. In 1145 the King Erik *lam* was on throne and the question who would succeed him was still to be answered. Accordingly, any move in the direction of having the sanctity of Erik *emune* officially recognised, carried with it political implications for it could easily have been interpreted as support for his son, Knud, at the expense of other potential claimants.

To Oddr Snorrason and the author of Historia Norwegiae King Ólafr Tryggvason was worthy of saintly status for his efforts to bring Christianity to Iceland and Norway. For the clergy of Lund the assassination of Erik *ejegod* echoed the martyrdom of Knud of Odense, the first royal patron of Lund Cathedral. In both cases we see an aura of sanctity conferred upon secular rulers by men of letters in the absence of organised cults or even popular enthusiasm. In these two examples we are clearly faced with an educated, clerical and cautious attitude towards bestowing sanctity on princely figures. Odd's apologetic tone has been noted and even the author of Historia Norwegiae, who at least calls Ólafr Tryggvason *beatus*, refrains from elaborating on the issue. Similarly in the Liber daticus Erik *emune* is allotted a sort of semi-saintly status.⁶⁴⁴

This is in contrast to other instances where leaders of political factions, pretenders and royal figures are associated with sainthood in the twelfth-century Nordic lands, the background to which was the struggle between opposing branches, or factions, within the ruling dynasties. In

⁶⁴³ Danmarks historie, 287-288.

⁶⁴⁴ The fact that Archbishop Eskil did not canonise King Erik *emune* squares well with his cautious attitude towards the cult of Knud Lavard during the reign of King Erik *lam* (1137-1146), see ch. 3.2.

Orkney we have the Páll-and the Erlend-line and in Denmark the death of King Niels in 1134 triggered off a conflict between his direct descendants and the line of Erik *emune* that only ended in 1157 with the coming to the throne of Valdemar I. In Norway the appearance of Haraldr *gilli* on the scene and the death of King Sigurðr *Jórsalafari* in 1130 heralded the beginning of a civil war that effectively came to an end in the last decade of the twelfth century or when Sverrir Sigurðarson finally secured his grip on the throne. It is against this political background that the saintly reputation of the following secular leaders must be placed.

5.3. The Earldom of Orkney: Earl Haraldr *ungi*

Haraldr Maddaðarson succeeded to the earldom of Orkney in 1138 at the age of five and for the next twenty years he shared it with Rögnvaldr Kali. As a consequence of Rögnvald's murder in 1158/59 (see ch. 2.4.), Haraldr became sole ruler of the earldom, a position he maintained until his death in 1206.⁶⁴⁵ With Haraldr Maddaðarson the Páll-line of the dynasty had again assumed a dominant position in Orkney.

A serious threat to Harald's ruler came in 1197/98 when Haraldr *ungi*, a grand-son of Rögnvaldr Kali, made a determined effort to claim his stake in the earldom. According to O.s., Haraldr *ungi* had earlier visited King Magnús Erlingsson of Norway and received from him the title of earl along with half of the earldom.⁶⁴⁶ His next step was to have the king of Scotland, William the Lion, grant him the half of Caithness which had been in possession of Rögnvaldr.⁶⁴⁷ All this came to nothing as Haraldr Maddaðarson refused to share the earldom with his younger name-sake.

O.s. describes how Haraldr *ungi* assembled an army and, near Wick in Caithness, confronted the earl. In the ensuing battle the army of Haraldr *ungi* was defeated and he himself killed. The saga then adds:

Var þá þegar um nottina set lios mikit, þar er blodit hafdi níðr komit. Þeir kalla iarlínn sannhelgann, ok er þar nu kirkia sem hann fell, ok er hann þar iardadr a nesinu. Ok geraz utöluligar iarteinir fyrir hans verdleik veittar af gudi, ok vitrar þat iafnan, at hann villdi yfir til Orkneyia til Magnus iarls ok Rognvalldz iarlz frænda sinna.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁵ On Haraldr Maddaðarson see Topping, P., "Harald Maddadson, Earl of Orkney and Caithness, 1139-1206", *The Scottish Historical Review* 62 (1983), 105-120. Thomson, History of Orkney, 68-79. Crawford, B. E., "The Earldom of Caithness and the Kingdom of Scotland, 1150-1266", *Northern Scotland* 2 (1976-7), 97-117.

⁶⁴⁶ O.s., 322. Roger of Howden (writing around 1200) states that King Sverrir acknowledged Haraldr as earl of Orkney. *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houedene*. Vol. IV, ed. by W. Stubbs, *Rolls Series* (London 1871), 11.

⁶⁴⁷ O.s., 322.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 324.

that same night a great light could be seen where his blood had been spilt. People in Caithness think him a true saint and a church stands where he was killed. He was buried there on the headland, and as a result of his virtues, great miracles have been performed by God as a reminder that Haraldr wished to go to Orkney and join his kinsmen, Earl Magnus and Earl Rognvald.⁶⁴⁹

This is the single reference relating to Harald's saintly reputation; not even the church mentioned has been identified. Still this one passage shows beyond doubt that following his death Haraldr *ungi* became the object of cultic veneration.

It is unlikely that a work of hagiography influenced O.s. description of Harald's death and posthumous reputation. Most notably, there is little trace of the narrative features (see ch. 1.3.) one associates with martyrdom of secular figures in the saga's rendering of his death. In point of fact the focus is on the last stand of Harald's two brave retainers rather than his own conduct.⁶⁵⁰ The whole episode on Haraldr *ungi* is in all probability based on oral tradition from Caithness. Important in this respect is Michael Chesnut's persuasive conclusion⁶⁵¹ to his study of the last four chapters of O.s. (in which the story of Haraldr *ungi* appears) that they form a...

coherent and consciously selective account of an unsuccessful attempt on the part of King William the Lion to impose his dominion over the north-east corner of the Scottish mainland. The events are seen through the eyes of that element in the population of Caithness which had committed the political misjudgement of backing the Scottish crown and its ecclesiastical representatives. These representatives were obviously responsible for formulating the two pious interpolations concerning Haraldr *ungi* and Bishop John.

A tentative answer to the question why a failed pretender to the Orkney earldom became the object of local veneration in Caithness

⁶⁴⁹ The Orkneyinga saga, 344-345..

⁶⁵⁰ In this respect the description is similar to the account of King Knud's martyrdom in *Knyttlinga saga* where the spotlight is firmly on Knud's brother, Benedict, and his heroic defence. Danakonunga sqgur, 184-196.

⁶⁵¹ Chesnutt, M., "Haralds saga Maddaðarsonar", *Speculum Norroenum. Norse Studies in Memory of Gabrielle Turville-Petre*. Ed. by Ursula Dronke et al. (Odense 1981), 55.

emerges when the political situation in the region in the last quarter of the twelfth century is examined.

The geographical position of the cult is not difficult to account for. From O.s. we know that support for Haraldr *ungi* came from the people of Caithness and it served as an area of recruitment for his military undertakings. It is also worth noting that Haraldr *ungi* had in all likelihood inherited the lands which his father, Eiríkr *stagbrellr*, had held in Caithness.⁶⁵² Haraldr Maddaðarson's uneasy relationship with the Scottish Church in this period should also be noted.⁶⁵³ An important feature of King William's expansion into Northern Scotland – a process which Haraldr strenuously resisted during his reign – involved the promotion of bishops to strategically important places. King David had founded a bishopric in Caithness ca. 1147 but prior to that the authority of the Orkney bishop in the region appears to have been undisputed. In the reign of King William the Lion Scottish bishops began to make their presence felt in Northern Scotland. In 1187, for instance, he chose a certain John to the bishopric of Caithness. This ecclesiastic expansion northwards undermined the authority of the earls of Orkney and there is evidence that Earl Haraldr made an effort to oppose this process. The climax to Harald's acrimonious dealings with the Scottish Church came in 1201 when one of his men tortured and maimed Bishop John of Caithness for his dealings with the Scottish king.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵² Crawford, "The Earldom of Caithness", 108-109.

⁶⁵³ Crawford, B. E., "Norse Earls and Scottish Bishops in Caithness: A Clash of Cultures", The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic. Select Papers from the Eleventh Viking Congress, Thurso and Kirkwall, 22 August — 1 September 1989. Ed. by Colleen E. Batey et al. (Edinburgh 1989), 129-148. Idem., "Peter's Pence in Scotland", The Scottish Tradition. Essays in Honour of Ronald Gordon Cant. Ed. by G. W. S. Barrow (Edinburgh 1974), 19-21.

⁶⁵⁴ The fact that as late as the nineteenth century the people of Caithness referred to Haraldr Maddaðarson as the "wicked earl" suggests how deep rooted the hostility towards the earl was in this region. Calder, J. T., Sketch of the Civil and Traditional History of Caithness from the Tenth Century (Wick 1887, originally published in 1864), 75. I found this reference in Thomson, History of Orkney, 74 (who gives an incorrect page number).

To a degree at least the political and ecclesiastical situation in Caithness helps to illuminate the saintly reputation of Haraldr *ungi*. For those ecclesiastics who were hostile to Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson it would certainly have been expedient to emphasise the sanctity of his namesake and rival.⁶⁵⁵ A cult of Haraldr, even a localised one, would have added legitimacy to their own agenda as well as justified their past efforts. Certainly the fact that a church was build at the site of his death (and perhaps dedicated to him) suggests that men of the Church were involved. Moreover, the saga's claim that "that Haraldr wished to go to Orkney and join his kinsmen, Earl Magnus and Earl Rognvald" may indicate that people associated his posthumous saintly reputation with the interest of the Erlendr-line of the Orkney ruling dynasty.

5.4. Denmark: King Knud Magnusson

Inter-dynastic rivalry also forms the background to the "cult" of King Knud Magnusson. From 1154 Knud had ruled in a triumvirate with Sven and Valdemar Knudsson. However, at a meeting of the three kings in Roskilde in 1157 Knud was murdered on the orders of King Sven Eriksson. Sven's plan to eliminate both his co-rulers on this occasion backfired as Valdemar eluded his grasp. Shortly afterwards Sven was defeated and killed by Valdemar's army at the battle of Grathehed.

The Icelandic *Knýtlinga saga*, composed around the middle of the thirteenth century, states that following Knud's murder the Danes considered him a saint.⁶⁵⁶ However, the other main sources for the

⁶⁵⁵ Although Haraldr Maddaðarson re-asserted his rule over Caithness following the death of Haraldr *ungi*, his authority in the region was far from secure. Thus shortly after the battle of Wick King William the Lion recruited Rögnvaldr Guðrøðarson, the king of Man, to subdue Caithness. O.s., 324-325.

⁶⁵⁶ Danakonuga sögur, 288.

Roskilde meeting, the Gesta Danorum, The Roskilde Chronicle, Ordinale of Knud Lavard and Helmold's Chronicle of the Slavs, tell nothing of Knud's saintly reputation. Only Sven Aggesen in his Brevis historia Regum Dacie, written in the last decade of the twelfth century, presents the killing of Knud in terms of martyrdom: "When the lights had been snuffed out, they slew Knud and crowned him with martyrdom."⁶⁵⁷ Although the Icelandic author of Knýlinga saga may have been familiar with Danish sources, Saxo's work and annals in particular, he was apparently not acquainted with Sven Aggesen's work.⁶⁵⁸ Accordingly the two statements relating to Knud's sanctity appear to be independent of each other.

In addition we find the following references in two Swedish annals from the first half of the thirteenth-century:

XCLVI. Obiit beatus Kanutus rex et martyr roskildensis. Sweno rex expulsus est.⁶⁵⁹

XCLVI. Obiit beatus Kanutus rex et martyr roskildensis.⁶⁶⁰

Swedish annals from this period are essentially up-dated versions of imported Danish annals.⁶⁶¹ Accordingly the possibility cannot be excluded that these references originate in Denmark. Still, considering that no

⁶⁵⁷ The Works of Sven Aggesen, Twelfth-Century Danish Historian. Translated with introduction and notes by Eric Christiansen (London 1992), 72. "Extinctis uero luminaribus Kanutum martyro coronantes interemerunt." Scriptores minores historiae danicae medii ævi. Ed. M. CL. Gertz. Vol. I (København 1917), 137. It is possible that a trace of a medieval belief in Knud's sanctity can be found in a Danish historical ballad – preserved in a manuscript from the seventeenth century but "composed" at a much earlier date – where the king is nicknamed "Knud lille" which, as one scholar has pointed out, could be a corrupt form of an earlier epitaph relating to his saintliness, that is "helle" (the holy) or "hille". Danmarks Gamle Folkeviser. Udgivet af Svend Grundtvig. Vol. III: Historiske viser (Copenhagen 1862), 118. Niels Ahnlund made this suggestion in a footnote to his article, "Til frågan om den äldsta Erikskulten i Sverige", Historisk tidskrift (svensk) 68 (1948), 300.

⁶⁵⁸ Bjarni Guðnason, "Aldur og uppruni Knúts sögu helga", Minjar og Menntir. Afmælisrit helgað Kristjáni Eldjárn 6 Desember 1976. Ritstjóri Guðni Kolbeinnsson (Reykjavík 1976), 55-78. Danakonunga sögur, cxiii-clxxix.

⁶⁵⁹ Scriptores rerum Sveciarum I., 23.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁶¹ Svensk historia I, 105-106.

mention is made of Knud's saintly status in Danish annals, a Swedish origin for the two references is more likely.

The acknowledgement of Knud's sanctity in Swedish annals must be placed within the context of the notable family ties the king had with that country. Knud's grand-father was King Ingi Steinkellsson of Sweden (ca. 1080 – ca. 1110) and ca. 1130 his father, Magnus Nielsson, had himself been elected to the Swedish kingship.⁶⁶² Moreover, after the death of Magnus in 1133, Knud's Polish mother, Rykisa, had married King Sverker of Sweden (ca. 1133 – ca. 1156).⁶⁶³ It has been suggested that members of the Sverker dynasty, who by the 1160s had been ousted by the Erik-dynasty – upheld the sanctity of Knud Magnusson in opposition to St. Erik Jedvardson.⁶⁶⁴ This hypothesis would be all but proven if it could be shown that Knud is the venerated king referred to by Pope Alexander III in a letter addressed to (in all likelihood) King Knut Eriksson of Sweden (issued ca. 1170).⁶⁶⁵

A close reading of Saxo's work and Knýtlinga saga reveals traces, slight in the former and marked in the latter, "of an alternative version of events, a sort of secular *passio*...", which focused on Knud Magnusson and was probably moulded by those who considered him a martyr.⁶⁶⁶ Moreover it is not impossible that the author of Knýtlinga saga was familiar with a now lost work on Knud Magnusson.⁶⁶⁷

Anne Kristiansen has made the case that this hypothetical lost work (a biography or a *vita*) on Knud was written in the 1180's in order to promote his sanctity and bolster the claim of the Niels-line to the Danish throne.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶² Saxo Grammaticus ... Vol. I, XIII, v, 129.

⁶⁶³ Sawyer, *The Making of Sweden*, 36-38.

⁶⁶⁴ See Westman, *Erik den Helige och hans tid*, 80.

⁶⁶⁵ This was first suggested by Ahnlund, "Til frågan om den äldsta Erikskulten", 305-311. On Alexander's letter see Jönsson, A: "St. Eric of Sweden – The Drunken Saint?", Analecta Bollandiana 109 (1991), 331-346.

⁶⁶⁶ Saxo Grammaticus ... Vol. III, 767.

⁶⁶⁷ Malmros, R., "Blodgildet i Roskilde i historiografisk belyst. Knytlingesagas forhold til det tolvte århundredes danske historieskrivning", Scandia 45 (1979), 42-66.

⁶⁶⁸ Kristiansen, A., "Knud Magnussens Krønike", Historisk tidskrift (dansk) 12 (1968-69), 430-450.

In this context the political aspiration of Knud's son, Valdemar (1158-1236), who became bishop of Schleswig in the early 1180s, is worthy of attention. In 1191 Bishop Valdemar fell out with his namesake, the king, for reasons that are not entirely clear. Valdemar Knudsson then fled the country, declared himself king, and mustered an army in both Sweden and Norway. In 1192 the Danish royal forces crushed the rebellion and Bishop Valdemar was taken into custody, thus terminating his aspirations for the throne.⁶⁶⁹ Before this turn of events, however, it was clearly in his interest to uphold the sanctity of his father as a counterweight to the cult of King Valdemar's father, St. Knud Lavard. One can only guess that the parallels between the fate of the two, betrayed and killed by their own cousins, did not go unnoticed by contemporaries.

The political situation in Denmark was not conducive to a cult of Knud Magnusson being formally recognised. Since Valdemar's victory over Sven *grathe* in 1157, Knud's branch of the royal family, the Niels-line, had effectively been out of contention for the throne.⁶⁷⁰ In order to further the cult the support of the Church was essential and although Eskil had been favourable to Knud,⁶⁷¹ the archbishop was unable, or more likely unwilling, to take any steps to recognise Knud's sanctity as he eventually did in the case of Knud Lavard. In brief, neither Church or Crown were willing to give support to a cult of King Knud Magnusson.

Nevertheless it is noteworthy that in the closing decades of the twelfth century a member of the Niels-line did become the object of an organised cult.⁶⁷² In 1180 Niels, the son of Knud Magnusson, died of natural causes

⁶⁶⁹ Olrik, H. (C. A. Christensen), "Valdemar (Knudsen)", Dansk biografisk leksikon. Vol. 25, 41-44. It has been suggested that Valdemar himself was responsible for writing a Life of his father. Christiansen, A. E., "Knud (III) Magnussen", Dansk biografisk leksikon. Vol. 8, 60.

⁶⁷⁰ Fenger, O., Danmarks historie 1050-1250. Gyldendals og Politikens Danmarkshistorie bind 4 (Copenhagen 1989), 141.

⁶⁷¹ Koch, H., Den danske kirkes historie. Band I: Den ældre middelalder indtil 1241 (Copenhagen 1950), 175.

⁶⁷² It has been argued that there may have been to begin with a political dimension to the cult of Niels. Like the case of Knud Magnusson it was obviously in the interest of Bishop Valdemar to promote the sanctity of his uncle. However that may be the cult was soon "de-politicised". See Paludan, H., "Skt. Clemens og hellig Niels. Fromhedsliv

and was buried in a little chapel in the town of Århus. Not long afterwards work commenced on a cathedral at the same site. Niels was first and foremost the local saint of Århus and indeed eastern Jylland where a number of churches were dedicated to him. In the middle of the thirteenth century the Århus clergy made an unsuccessful attempt to have Niels canonised by the papacy and a century later *De vita et miraculis B. Nicholai Arusiensis* was composed in his honour.⁶⁷³ In this respect the cult of Niels can be compared to that of Earl Rögnvaldr of Orkney: the sanctity of both was promoted by ecclesiastics in order to add lustre to a particular religious centre; the newly founded cathedrals of Århus and Kirkwall. Again we see a cult of a native prince or a member of the ruling house appropriated by an aspiring bishopric.

5.5. Norway: King Haraldr *gilli*, King Eysteinn Haraldsson, Sigurðr *slembir* and Þorleifr *breiðskeggr*

Following the death of Sigurðr Magnússon *Jórsalafari* in 1130 the Norwegian kingdom was divided between his son, Magnús, and the upstart Haraldr *gilli*.⁶⁷⁴ Sometime in the 1120s the latter had come from Ireland to the court of King Sigurðr and, in a trial by fire, “proven” that he was the son of King Magnús *berfættr*. In return for recognising his royal ancestry Haraldr vowed not to make a claim to the throne while Magnús lived. Haraldr *gilli* broke this agreement and for three years he and Magnús Sigurðarson co-ruled the kingdom. However the relationship between the two soon turned sour and in 1134 they fought a battle at Fyrilev where

og politik i Århus stift omkring 1190”, *Kongemakt og samfund i middelalderen. Festskrift til Erik Ulsig på 60-årsagen 13.2.* Ed. by Paul Enemark et al. *Arusia-historiske skrifter* 6 (1988), 41-53.

⁶⁷³ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 398-406.

⁶⁷⁴ For a general outline of this period see Helle, *Norge blir en stat*, 20-48.

Sigurðarson co-ruled the kingdom. However the relationship between the two soon turned sour and in 1134 they fought a battle at Fyrilev where Magnús came out victorious. Haraldr fled to Denmark where he was well received by king Erik *emune* who supplied him with the necessary provisions for a return to Norway. Then in the beginning of the year 1135 Haraldr and his followers ambushed and mutilated King Magnús in the town of Bergen.

Haraldr was not to enjoy sole rulership in Norway for long. The following year another pretender, Sigurðr *slembir*, appeared on the scene and killed Haraldr. Although Sigurðr was able to have himself elected to kingship his attempt to secure the throne proved in vain for prominent men of the realm rallied around King Harald's two sons. The two-year old Ingi was elected to kingship by the people of Viken and the four-year old Sigurðr was chosen by the people of Trøndelag. In the context of this study it is the reason given in Heimskringla for this relatively smooth succession which captures the eye:

Ok snorisk undir þá bræðr nálíga allr lýðr ok allra helzt fyrir þess sakar, at faðir þeira var kallaðr heilagur, ok var þeim svá land svarit, at undir engan mann annan skyldi ganga, meðan nokkur þeira lifði sona Haralds konungs.⁶⁷⁵

Afterwards the whole nation almost submitted to the brothers and principally because their father was considered holy; and the country took the oath to them, that the kingly power should not go to any other man as long as any of King Harald's sons was alive.⁶⁷⁶

As in the case of his Orcadian namesake only a single reference attests to Harald *gilli*'s saintly reputation. It should be noted, however, that Haraldr is another candidate for being the royal "martyr" mentioned in Alexander III's letter mentioned earlier.⁶⁷⁷ According to Heimskringla

⁶⁷⁵ Heimskringla, 303. This is not mentioned in the other main source for these events, Fagrskinna, 345.

⁶⁷⁶ Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla, 341.

⁶⁷⁷ This is suggested by Natanael Beckman, Ur vår äldsta bok (Stockholm 1912), 42. On various hypotheses relating to the identity of the murdered king referred to in this

Haraldr died after a feast in the presence of his concubine⁶⁷⁸ or in a similar situation as the false saint referred to in the papal letter.⁶⁷⁹

Although Haraldr was succeeded by his sons no attempt was made to have his sanctity officially recognised. Heimskringla and Fagrskinna simply state that he was buried in the older Christ Church in Bergen.⁶⁸⁰ The short lived flirtation of Haraldr with saintliness could be explained by the great prestige of the cult of St. Ólafr, i.e. that there simply was no room for other royal saints in Norway in this period. This is not altogether a satisfactory argument for if the very notion of Harald's sanctity could surface in Norway in the mid 1130s, surely an official recognition of some sort, particularly with his three sons occupying the throne, was on the cards.

One aspect that may be of some relevance here is the somewhat uneasy relationship between the Norwegian kings and the Church in the 1130s and the 1140s.⁶⁸¹ For instance, the Icelandic sources tell that in 1135 Haraldr *gilli* had Bishop Reinald of Stavanger hanged when he refused to hand over treasure which the king suspected the bishop to have in his possession.⁶⁸² This and other instances indicate that the rapport between Crown and Church was less than ideal in this politically uncertain period,⁶⁸³ and if one assumes that the establishment of a princely cult called for close co-operation between the two authorities, the short lived saintly reputation of King Haraldr *gilli* is hardly a matter of surprise.

passage see Jönsson, "St. Eric of Sweden", 331. Haraldr was step-father and father-in-law to Magnus Henriksson, Erik's killer.

⁶⁷⁸ Fagrskinna, 343-344 ; Heimskringla III, 249.

⁶⁷⁹ The passage relating to the drunken saint is quoted in full in Jönsson, St. Eric of Sweden., 333

⁶⁸⁰ Fagrskinna, 341 ; Heimskringla II, 302.

⁶⁸¹ See Johnsen, A. O., Om pave Eugenius III's vernebrev for Munkeliv kloster av 7. januar 1146. Avhandlinger utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo II. Hist.-Filos. Klasse. Ny serie, no. 7 (Oslo 1965), 47-48.

⁶⁸² Fagrskinna, 341. Heimskringla III, 288-289.

⁶⁸³ Johnsen, Om pave Eugenius III's vernebrev, 37.

Another, and probably more important, reason for Harald's brief association with saintliness is of a more straightforward nature. For those who wanted the sons of Haraldr on the throne any cause that would rally support for Ingi and Sigurðr was welcomed. In the precarious circumstances that followed Harald's death his saintly reputation could only help to legitimise the succession of his sons.⁶⁸⁴ After the election of the brothers to kingship in 1137, and the subsequent consolidation of their authority, there was little incentive to bolster their father's saintly status. Once in power the kings of Norway were prone to rely on St. Ólafr for aid and protection.

As noted Haraldr *gilli* was killed by the pretender Sigurðr Magnússon *slembir* (d. 1139) whose colourful story is told in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and the compilations *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna*.⁶⁸⁵ The most detailed account is found in the first named work, more precisely in *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla*. The saga narrates that Magnús was raised up in Norway by a certain priest and a daughter of a local nobleman from the region of Trøndelag. The young Sigurðr is informed by his mother that his biological father is none other than King Magnús *berfættur* of Norway (d. 1103). Hearing this news Sigurðr (who had by that time taken the order of deacon) leaves his homeland and embarks on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. On his return he visits Scotland and attends the court of King David I. From there Sigurðr travels to Orkney and joins the retinue of Haraldr Hákonarson and, according to O.s., assisted the Orkney earl in killing a certain Porkell Sumarliðason. As a punishment for

⁶⁸⁴ There is a certain parallel here with the situation after the death of Edward the Confessor. It has been argued a belief in his sanctity emerged in circles which opposed Harold Godwinson, see John, E., *Edward the Confessor*, 174.

⁶⁸⁵ *Heimskringla* III, 297-320 ; *Morkinskinna*, 405-438 ; *Fagrskinna*, 341-351.

this deed Sigurðr is outlawed from the earldom at the instigation of Earl Harald's co-ruler and successor, Earl Páll.⁶⁸⁶

When Sigurðr reveals to Haraldr *gilli* that he is of royal blood the king ignores his claim and confronts him with the killing of Þorkell. In response to this turn of events Sigurðr and his followers murder King Haraldr in the summer of 1135.⁶⁸⁷ In order to add legitimacy to his undertaking and rally more people to his cause, Sigurðr brings on to the political stage the dethroned king of Norway, Magnús *blindi*, from his enforced exile in Denmark. As Erik *emune* had earlier helped Haraldr *gilli* overthrow the same Magnús, the Danish king now backs Sigurðr against the sons of Haraldr, King Ingi and King Sigurðr. When this plan is thwarted Magnús harries the coast of Norway (with Danish assistance) for a number of years until he, along with his Danish allies, is defeated in battle in November of 1139 by the combined army of Ingi and Sigurðr. The Old-Norse sources inform us that before his death Sigurðr withstood gruesome tortures with utmost courage and fortitude. The following is told of Sigurð's burial:

En vinir Sigurðar fóru síðan eptir líkinu ór Danmörku sunnan með skip ok færðu til Álaborgar ok grófu at Maríukirkju þar í býnum. Svá sagði Eiríki Ketill prófastr, er varðveitti Maríukirkju, at Sigurðr væri þar grafinn.⁶⁸⁸

But Sigurð's friends then went south from Denmark to fetch the corpse there and brought it to Ålborg and buried it at St. Mary's Church in that town. Priest Erik Ketill who keeps St. Mary's Church tells that Sigurðr was buried there.⁶⁸⁹

The transportation of Sigurð's earthly remains to Denmark reflects his close relationship with the Danish kings; in fact Ålborg had been a base for Sigurðr in the winter of 1137.

⁶⁸⁶ O.s., 123-125.

⁶⁸⁷ Heimskringla III, 301-302.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 320.

⁶⁸⁹ My translation.

Snorri Sturluson informs us that the principal source for his description of these events is a now lost work entitled Hryggjarstykki by the Iclander Eiríkr Oddsson.⁶⁹⁰ Eirík's work also appears to have been the main source used by the authors of Morkinskinna and Fagurskinna for Sigurð's career. A detailed study of the remnants of Hryggjarstykki was made by Bjarni Guðnason in a monograph entitled Fyrsta sagan (i.e. the "First saga") which, as the name implies, emphasises the significance of the work within the context of the earliest stage of Icelandic Kings' saga writing.⁶⁹¹ Bjarni argues that Hryggjarstykki was written ca. 1150 and not around 1170 as most scholars had assumed up to that point and, moreover, that in its original form the work was a biography of Sigurðr Magnússon rather than a general history of the Norwegian kings in the first half of the twelfth century.

Eiríkr Oddsson was not the only medieval authority on Sigurðr *slembir*. In book fourteen of Saxo Grammaticus' Gesta Danorum Sigurð's death is narrated in a style that would not be out place in a *passio*.⁶⁹² Saxo could here be following Icelandic sources⁶⁹³ although it is also possible that he was relying on a tradition circulating among the former followers of the pretender and preserved by the clergy of St. Mary's in Ålborg.⁶⁹⁴

Bjarni Guðnason argues that Eiríkr was influenced by hagiography when he wrote the biography of Sigurðr, more specifically by Master

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 319-320.

⁶⁹¹ Bjarni Guðnason, Fyrsta sagan. Studia Islandica 37 (Reykjavík 1978).

⁶⁹² Thus Sigurðr makes a public confession, receives his tortures as a penance and reads aloud from the psalter while they are performed on him. Saxo Grammaticus... Vol. II, IV, xxix, 468.

⁶⁹³ Bjarni Guðnason, Fyrsta sagan, 54-60.

⁶⁹⁴ Saxo Grammaticus, Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia. Books X-XVI. The text of the first edition with translation and commentary in three volumes by Eric Christiansen. Vol. III: Introduction and commentary and general index. British Archaeological Review (International Series) 118 (ii) (1981), 808-809.

Robert's Life of St. Magnús.⁶⁹⁵ He writes: "A number of aspects highlighted in this investigation suggest that Eiríkr Oddsson knew and used the Vita of St. Magnús when he told about Sigurður's passio."⁶⁹⁶ Following the scholarly consensus of the time Bjarni Guðnason assumed that the Latin Life of Magnús had been written ca. 1137 and could thus have been known to Eiríkr when he wrote Hryggjarstykki about a decade or so later.

Although Bjarni's hypothesis is weakened by the lack of a clear textual correspondence between Hryggjarstykki and the Magnús corpus,⁶⁹⁷ the two works share some general characteristics when it comes to the executions of the two main protagonists. Most notably, both face their death in a martyr-like fashion. Sigurð's request for the attendance of a priest is denied and he undergoes torture with calmness of mind, singing the psalms, and finally dies with a prayer on his lips.⁶⁹⁸ Indeed both Sigurðr and Magnús pray for the souls of their enemies. However these features, as Bjarni himself acknowledges, are hardly peculiar to the Life of St. Magnús. Sigurð's stoicism and otherworldly response in face of cruel death bears the hallmark of a type of death-scene, well known in Old-Norse literature, where manliness and martyr-like behaviour distinguishes the last hour of the hero's life.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., 104-110. This theory is also mentioned by Knirk, J. E., "Konungasögur", Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia. Ed. by Philip Pulsiano et al. (New York & London 1993), 363.

⁶⁹⁶ "Ýmis atriði, sem dregin eru fram í þessari rannsókn, benda til þess, at Eiríkr Oddson hafi þekkt og stuðst við Vita hins sæla Magnúss, þegar hann sagði frá þíningu Sigurðar." Bjarni Guðnason, *Fyrsta Sagan*, 105. My translation.

⁶⁹⁷ There is a certain textual correspondence between passages in Morkinskinna and in O.s. relating to the pilgrimage of Sigurðr and Hákon to Jerusalem: "Oc eptir þetta for S. vt ilond byriapi ferþ sina til Roms. oc allt for hann vt til Iorsala lanz oc Iordanar. oc sotti helga doma þa sem palmarom er titt." Morkinskinna, 407-408. "þeiri ferþ for hann [i.e. Hákon] ut til Iorsala, sotti þangat helga doma ok laugapiz i anni Iordan, sva sem siþr er palmara." O.s., 121. In any case, the passage in O.s. refers to Hákon Pálsson not Magnús and, although it appears in M.s.l., it probably stems from the original version of O.s. rather than Robert's Vita. My translation.

⁶⁹⁸ Heimskringla, 319-20 ; Morkinskinna, 437

⁶⁹⁹ Cormack, "Saints and Sinners".

A scene from Guðmundar saga dýra, composed ca. 1220 and later incorporated into the Sturlunga saga compilation, represents a case in point. The saga is a detailed and somewhat disorganised account of disputes, mostly involving the local chieftain Guðmundr dýri, which took place in Northern Iceland between ca. 1184 and 1217. In a scene which describes the execution of Guðmund's supporters in the year 1198 we encounter some of the elements which distinguish the martyrdom of St. Magnús of Orkney.⁷⁰⁰ Four men – Hákon Þórðarson and three brothers, the so-called Arnþrúðarsynir – are trapped inside a farmstead which the attackers have set ablaze. Hákon asks for and is granted a safe conduct ("grið") from the burning house. When outside he eschews the possibility of seeking safe-haven in a church nearby on the grounds that he has already been granted *grið* by his attackers. The parallels to the conduct of Magnús in O.s. are noteworthy: the Orkney earl leaves the sanctuary of the church and thus puts his faith in the good-will of Hákon Pálsson. When two of the Arnþrúðarsynir prepare for their execution they "washed their hands and combed their hair, as though they were going to a feast."⁷⁰¹ As noted Magnús behaved before his execution as though he was "going to a wedding... ." Magnús offered Hákon Pálsson three choices instead of having him killed: Firstly, to go on a pilgrimage to Rome and never return. Secondly, to be mutilated and imprisoned in Scotland. Thirdly, to be blinded and placed in a dark cell. Hákon Þórðarson has two requests declined before his execution. Firstly, to have a leg and hand amputated and then go on a pilgrimage to Rome (sic). Secondly, that he be thrust through with a spear rather than hacked to death with a sword – in obvious imitation of princely martyrdom (see ch. 5.2.). On Egilsay Hákon's retainer refuses to carry out the execution. In Guðmundr saga dýra no one

⁷⁰⁰ Sturlunga saga I, 160-162.

⁷⁰¹ "þógu sér ok kembðu, ok bjoggusk sem til fagnaðar væri at fara." Ibid., 161.

volunteers (and one refuses) to execute Hákon Þórðarson. Moreover, Earl Magnús gives his tunic to the executioner while Hákon presents his sword to one of those present.

The echoes between the scene in Guðmundr saga dýra and St. Magnús' martyrdom are undeniable. The point to make is that Icelandic authors were inclined, on occasions, to describe the killing or execution of secular figures (even minor ones) in terms which evoked or resembled the martyrdom of established princely figures.⁷⁰²

⁷⁰² A notable example of this can be found in Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar, a biography of an Icelandic chieftain from Vestfirðir killed by a rival magnate in 1213, composed around the middle of the thirteenth century. Hrafn is portrayed as a just chieftain who treats those under his protection with generosity and fairness. Þorvaldr Snorrason, his adversary, is cast in the mould of the devil's henchman whose envy of the popular Hrafn is fuelled by slanderers. At the end of the saga Þorvaldr and his band of followers surprise Hrafn at his homestead and execute him. In both general setting and specific details the scene of Hrafn's death echoes the martyrdom of St. Magnús. As with the Orcadian saint, Hrafn prays shortly before his capture, receives *corpus domini* prior to the execution, and offers his adversary three choices to consider. The first offer is almost identical to the one Magnús presents to Hákon, to go on a pilgrimage to Rome and never return. As with Hákon on Egilsay, the first companion Þorvaldr asks to carry out the execution declines the invitation while the second one obeys his order. Finally, as in the Magnús corpus, green grass grows at the site of the execution where none had grown before. The parallels between the two works are no co-incidence for it has been shown that the author of Hrafn's saga was influenced by Master Robert's Life of St. Magnús and a biography of Thomas Becket, most likely that of Robert of Cricklade. Possibly the had author access to a manuscript that contained both Robert's work on the Canterbury saint and St. Magnús of Orkney. At the very least he saw it fitting to allude to these two twelfth-century martyrs in relation to his own story of the death of an Icelandic chieftain. Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar, xx-xxvi. (The possibility can not be ruled out that Magnús' martyrdom was only known to the author of Hrafn's saga from O.s. Foote, P., "Beyond All Reasonable Doubt", Eyvindarbók. Festskrift til Eyvind Field Halvorsen 4. mai 1992. Red. av F. Hødnebo (Oslo 1992), 63-70). Although there is no cultic evidence for the veneration of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson the attitude of his anonymous biographer can not be overlooked. He at least considered this chieftain from Vestfirðir worthy of saintly status and with that sentiment as a guiding light he composed Hrafn's saga. It is more than possible that the saga's portrayal of this regional chieftain expresses the attitude of those people who had been under Hrafn's patronage. In any case it is hard to disassociate the composition of the saga from the on-going civil strife in thirteenth-century Iceland. The peaceful, wise and just chieftain is upheld as a model ruler in an age notably lacking in these qualities. In this light Hrafn's semi-saintly status and innocent martyrdom at the hands of an aggressive and overbearing adversary can be seen as a response to the general political climate at the time he was writing the saga. The idealised portrayal of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson in the separate saga could hardly have failed to have a topical resonance in a period when the personal ambitions and clan rivalry were undermining the foundations of the Icelandic Commonwealth. Within this broader context the portrayal of Hrafn as a martyr becomes more comprehensible. A continental case of a secular leader being described in terms associated with sanctity in absence of a cult can be found in Dudo of Saint-Quentin's eleventh-century chronicle on tenth-century Normandy where Count William

Bjarni Guðnason's conclusion that the death-scene of Sigurðr *slembir* in Hryggjarstykki was influenced by Robert's Life of St. Magnús is not wholly convincing. Whereas in Guðmundar saga dýra we encounter elements that make the martyrdom of Magnús distinctive – the Church as a sanctuary, the proposals before the execution, the giving away of worldly possessions – the death-scene of Sigurðr *slembir*, as described in the Kings' sagas, represents a typical description of an heroic death tinged with hagiographic colours. It appears that the mere fact that a life of St. Magnús may have existed around the middle of the twelfth century has resulted in Robert's work being mentioned in this particular context.

Bjarni also argues that King Erik *emune* upheld the saintliness of the Norwegian pretender as a ploy to strengthen opposition against the sons of Haraldr *gilli*. Sigurðr was apparently supported in this undertaking by notable people in Denmark and, in addition, many Icelanders are known to have followed him. In brief, Eiríkur Oddsson, who clearly received some of his information from the supporters of Sigurðr, composed Hryggjarstykki to promote the sanctity of a fallen pretender.⁷⁰³

In further support of this hypothesis a mention can be made of the case of Ólafr *ógæfa* (ca. 1150-1173), another unsuccessful pretender to the Norwegian throne with Danish connections. Fagrskinna describes how in the late 1160s Ólafr, the grand-son of King Eysteinn Magnússon (d. 1128), spearheaded a revolt against King Magnús Erlingsson and his father Erlingr *skakki*. His uprising coincided with King Valdemar's effort to gain a foothold in southern Norway and it is highly plausible, albeit unprovable, that the Norwegian pretender and the Danish king co-ordinated

Longsword's death in battle is described in terms of martyrdom. De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum Sancti Quintini decano. Ed. by Jules Lair (Caen 1865), 179. On Dudo's reasons for describing Duke William in such terms see Jordan, V. B., "The Role of Kingship in tenth-century Normandy: the Hagiography of Dudo of Saint-Quentin", The Haskins Society Journal. Studies in Medieval History 3 (1991), 53-62.

⁷⁰³ Bjarni Guðnason, *Fyrsta sagan*, 110-125.

their moves in a campaign against Magnús and Erlingr. Although Ólafr attracted substantial following, his bid for the throne came to an end when he and his band were defeated in 1169. Ólafr himself survived the battle and fled to Denmark where he died of natural causes in 1173. Ólafr was buried in the episcopal town of Århus and subsequently, according to Fagrskinna and Heimskringla, the Danes considered him a saint: "*kalla Danir hann helgan*."⁷⁰⁴ It is worth noting that in the 1180s the ecclesiastics of Århus began to promote the cult of another figure of princely stock, Niels Knudsson (see ch. 5.4.).

Thus Ólafr followed in the footsteps of Sigurðr Magnússon: both were pretenders to the Norwegian throne and were (in all likelihood) supported in that ambition by the kings of Denmark. It is known that Ólafr *ógæfa* was considered a saint in Århus and it is more than possible that Sigurðr Magnússon enjoyed a similar reputation in Ålborg, another important ecclesiastical centre in Jylland.

In 1142 Eysteinn, the third son of Haraldr *gilli*, was brought to Norway from Scotland at the instigation of a group of powerful magnates. Eysteinn's right to kingship was recognised by the people of Trøndelag at the assembly of Eyrarþing and his claim to a third of the kingdom was accepted by his brothers.⁷⁰⁵ When the three brothers came of age, however, a power struggle ensued, the details of which need not detain us here. It suffices to say that Fagrskinna, Heimskringla and Morkinskinna tell that there was a rapid deterioration in the relationship between the brothers and in 1154/55 Eysteinn and Sigurðr joined forces in ousting the sickly Ingi from the triumvirate. However Ingi and his powerful supporter, Gregoríus Dagsson, were not taken by surprise and this round of inter-dynastic strife culminated in the killing of King Sigurðr in Bergen in 1156. Two years

⁷⁰⁴ Fagrskinna, 375 ; Heimskringla III, 410.

⁷⁰⁵ Heimskringla III, 321 ; Fagrskinna, 351 ; Morkinskinna, 440.

later the armies of Ingi and Eysteinn met in the Viken. The latter did not consider battle a feasible option and fled into the woods where Eysteinn was caught by a certain Símun *skálpr*, a supporter of King Ingi. Snorri Sturluson describes the execution in the following manner:

Konungr bað, at hann skyldi hlýða messu áðr [i.e. before he is executed], ok þat var. Síðan lagðisk hann niðr á grúfu og breiddi hendr frá sér út ok bað sik hoggva í kross á milli herðanna, kvað þá skyldu reyna, hvárt hann mundi þola járn eða eigi, sem þeir höfðu sagt lagsmenn Inga. Símun mælti við þann, er hoggva skyldi, bað hann til ráða, kvað konung hólzti lengi hafa kropit þar um lyng. Hann var þá hoggvinn ok þótti verða við þrúðliga. Lík hans var flutt til Fors, en fyrir sunnan kirkju undir brekkunni var lík hans náttsett. Eysteinn konungr var jarðaðr at Forskirkju, ok er leg hans á miðju kirkjugólfi ok breiddr yfir kógur, ok kalla menn hann helgan. Þar sem hann var hoggvinn ok blóð hans kom á jörð, spratt upp brunnr, en annarr þar undir brekkunni, sem lík hans var náttsett. Af hváru tveggja því vatni þykkjask margir menn bót hafa fengit. Þat er sagn Víkverja, at margar jarteinir yrði at leiði Eysteins konungs, áðr óvinir hans steypði á leiðit hundssöði.⁷⁰⁶

Then the king begged that he might hear mass before he died, which accordingly took place. Then Eystein laid himself down on his face on the grass, stretched out his hands on each side, and told them to cut the sign of the cross between his shoulders and see whether he could not bear steel as King Inge's followers had asserted of him. Simon told the man who had to put the king to death to do so immediately, for the king had been creeping about upon the grass long enough. He was accordingly slain, and he appears to have suffered manfully. His body was carried to For, and lay all night under the hill at the south side of the church. King Eystein was buried in Fors church, and his grave is in the middle of the church floor, where a fringed canopy is spread over it, and he is considered a saint. Where he was executed, and his blood ran upon the ground, sprang up a fountain, and another under the hill where his body lay all night. From both these waters many think they have received a cure of sickness and pain. It is reported by the Viken people that many miracles were wrought at King Eystein's grave, until his enemies poured upon it soup made of boiled dogs' flesh.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁶ Heimskringla III, 345. In his description of the execution Snorri appears to have followed *Fagrskinna* (or, alternatively, both were following a now lost source). *Fagrskinna*, 357. *Heimskringla* is on the other hand the only source which mentions Eysteinn's saintly reputation. At the end of the chapter which deals with Eysteinn's execution Snorri refers to a work composed on the orders of King Sverrir Sigurðarson: "Svá hefir Sverrir konungr rita látit." Heimskringla III, 346. It is not clear whether Snorri is here implying that the whole episode on the king's execution was taken from this work or only the information that King Ingi refused to intervene when he heard that his brother had been captured by Símun (although from the context the latter option appears more likely). Nothing is otherwise known about this work. Ibid., lxiii-lxiv.

⁷⁰⁷ Snorri Sturluson. Heimskringla, 372.

As with his father, Eysteinn's conduct during his life-time hardly qualified him for sainthood. In the saga sources he is not exactly portrayed as a medieval *rex iustus*: and a likely candidate for sainthood: "King Eystein was dark and dingy in complexion, of middle height, and a prudent man; but what deprived him of consideration and popularity with those under him were his avarice and narrowness."⁷⁰⁸ If Reginald of Durham is to be believed, Eysteinn's treatment of monasteries and relic-shrines on his Viking-style expedition to the British Isles does not easily square with his later reputation of sanctity.⁷⁰⁹ His reportedly harsh treatment of the people of Viken should also be noted.⁷¹⁰ Still this region appears to have been his main power-base and there, according to Snorri, a belief in his sanctity arose.⁷¹¹ Again we can only guess that the cult was promoted by Eysteinn's supporters and served as a focal point to hold that faction together after the fall of their leader. That his enemies felt threatened by his cult is indicated by their efforts to eradicate it.⁷¹² Indeed belief in Eysteinn's sanctity appears to have taken roots in folk-culture for as late as the nineteenth century a spring, located near the place of his execution, was known by the name of "*St. Østens kilde*", that is "St. Eysteinn's spring".⁷¹³ This, of course, accords well with the statement in

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 362. "Eysteinn konungr var svartr maðr ok dökkliðaðr, heldr hár meðalmaðr, vitr maðr ok skynsamr, en þat dró mest ríki undan honum, er hann var sínkr ok fégjarn." *Heimskringla* III, 331.

⁷⁰⁹ Reginald of Durham, *De admirandis virtutibus B. Cuthberti*. *Surtees Society* (London 1835), 65-66.

⁷¹⁰ *Heimskringla* III, 326.

⁷¹¹ Helle, Norge blir en stat, 33. It must however be emphasised that it is difficult to find any clear cut regional divisions in the civil-war in Norway, at least until the last quarter of the twelfth century. Bagge, S., "Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalderen" *Historisk tidsskrift* 65 (1986), 156-65. Eysteinn's execution – like that of Magnús, Knud Lavard and Knud Magnusson – could also have been presented as an act of betrayal by his supporters. Símun *skálpr* was married to a sister of King Eystein and had taken his side in the dispute with his brothers before he switched to King Ingi's camp. *Heimskringla* III, 332 ; 343. In Einar Skúlason's *Eysteinsdrápa*, composed shortly after Eysteinn's death, Símun's betrayal is emphasised. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* A I, 475.

⁷¹² As noted earlier (ch. 3.3.) a similar method was reportedly used to eradicate the cult of Knud Lavard. *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 201-202.

⁷¹³ Daae, L., *Norges helgener* (Christiania 1879), 192.

Heimskringla that two healing springs were associated with the locations where Eysteinn was killed and his body was kept the following night. Clearly Snorri Sturluson was recording a local tradition.

Following the death of King Magnús Erlingsson at the battle of Fimreiti in 1184, Sverrir Sigurðarson became the sole ruler of Norway. Still, his position was far from secure. From 1196 to his death in 1202 Sverrir was engaged in warfare against a faction which aimed at bringing the sons of Magnús Erlingsson to the throne, the so-called *Böglungar*. Prior to this there were less serious challenges to Sverri's rule. Only a year after King Magnús' death a certain Jón, the son of king Ingi Haraldsson, was elected to kingship by the people of the Viken region.⁷¹⁴ Jón and his army of followers (known under the name of *Kuflungar*) were defeated by Sverrir in 1188.⁷¹⁵ Of greater interest in the context of this study is another, somewhat obscure, pretender to the throne who is treated in a brief chapter in Sverris saga.⁷¹⁶ The saga tells that around 1190 a certain Þorleifr *breiðskeggr*, a former monk, came on the political scene and presented himself as the son of Eysteinn Haraldsson.

Þat sama sumar er iarll hafði andaz var floccr a Mœrcum austr. En firir þesom flocki var sa maðr er callaðr var Þorleifr breiðscegr oc væri son Eysteins konungs Haralds-sonar oc þat til iartegna at a meðal herða honom var eyre groit i cros...⁷¹⁷

The summer that Earl Eirik died, a band arose east in the Marches under a man named Thorleif Breidskegg; he was said to be a son of King Eysteinn Haraldsson, and as a sign he bore between his shoulders the scar of a wound healed in the form of a cross.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁴ Sverris Saga, 108.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid., 116-17.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., 121-122. According to the prologue of Sverris saga the first part of the work was written under the supervision of King Sverrir himself (probably between 1185 and 1188) by Karl Jónsson, a former abbot of Þingeyrar monastery in Iceland. Sverris saga, 1. There has been much scholarly debate about where this first part ends. Most scholars now believe that Abbot Karl is only responsible for the first thirty or forty chapters of the saga, i.e. up to the death of Earl Erlingr *skakki* in 1179. The rest was then written in the period between Sverrir's death in 1202 and around 1230. For an overview of this problem see Bagge S., From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed. Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar (Odense 1996), 15-19. The fundamental study of the work is still Holm-Olsen, L., Studier i Sverris saga (Oslo 1953).

⁷¹⁷ Sverris Saga, 121.

⁷¹⁸ Sverris saga transl. 143.

The saga also reports that Þorleifr was considered a wise man and “so moral that his life resembled a monk’s life, subject to the rules of his order, more than a layman’s.”⁷¹⁹ The next summer the people of the Mark region ambushed and killed Þorleifr along with most of his followers. *Sverris saga* then states that after this incident it was said that Þorleifr was holy. In a poem in the saga by a certain Blakkr this belief is refuted and mocked:

Björt kveða brenna kerti
Breiðskeggs yfir leiði.
Ljóss veitk, at mun missa
meir höfðingi þeira.
Vitumat vánir betri,
vér hugðum því brugðit
[þollr fékk illt með öllu
örþings, af görningum.] ⁷²⁰

O’er Breidskegg’s tomb now burn, they say,
Bright lights. Lightless rather is their leader.
Fairer hopes have failed than this, I feel. ⁷²¹

In this stanza we get a glimpse of those who upheld Þorleif’s sanctity: “Lightless rather is their leader./ Fairer hopes have failed than this, I feel.” The poet appears here to be denying the claims of Þorleif’s supporters that the killed pretender was a saint. In this respect his cult can be compared with that of Earl Haraldr *ungr* of Orkney. In both instances it appears that followers of failed political causes rallied around the saintly reputation of their leaders. A church was erected at the place where Haraldr died and it is known that in the sixteenth century “*Hellig Thorlofs Capel*”, i.e. “St. Þorleif’s chapel”, was located at Elverums in the Marker region.⁷²² No other saint by the same name has been identified and considering that the chapel was located in the region where Þorleifr was active, it is safe to assume that it was dedicated to him. Clearly we are here dealing with

⁷¹⁹ Ibid., 143. “oc þat at hann væri sva vel siðaðr at hans lif væri licara munca reglu en leic-manna.” *Sverris saga*, 121-122.

⁷²⁰ *Sverris saga*, 122.

⁷²¹ *The Saga of King Sverri of Norway*. Transl. by J. Sephton (London 1899), 144.

⁷²² Daae, *Norges helgener*, 193.

localised cults that appeared in the wake of military defeats of political factions and the killing of their leaders. Such cults could provide both a focal point for further struggle as well as justify past efforts; an obvious parallel from the English scene is the way supporters of the baronial revolt against Henry III approached the cult of their leader, Earl Simon de Montfort (d. 1265).⁷²³

Although there is not much more to be said on the political background to the cults of Eysteinn and Þorleifr, there are still aspects worth noting in relation to the manner in which the Old-Norse sources present their death and posthumous reputation

The tone of Eysteinn's execution-scene is a familiar one to readers of Old-Norse literature. Confronted with imminent death the main protagonist, in this case King Eysteinn Haraldsson, keeps his composure and, for good measure, taunts his executioner with a sharp remark. It hardly needs emphasising that the ability to leave this world manfully, preferably with some witty remark on the lips, was a particularly potent way of expressing manhood in medieval Norse society. In brief, Eysteinn conducts himself in a manner which befits a king and martyr.

The "royal" dimension to Eysteinn's conduct at his execution is borne out by his request to the execution to "*hoggva í kross á meðal herðanna*", "to cut the sign of the cross between his shoulders". In his study The Royal Touch Marc Bloch discusses the medieval belief that those rightly born to kingship had a mysterious birthmark upon their bodies as a proof of their status.⁷²⁴ The most common sign is the cross,

⁷²³ Maddicot, J. R., "Follower, Leader, Pilgrim, Saint: Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford at the Shrine of Simon de Montfort, 1273", English Historical Review 109 (1990), 641-653.

⁷²⁴ For the references in this paragraph see Marc Bloch, The Royal Touch. Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France. Translated by J. E. Anderson (London/Montreal 1978, originally published 1923), 142-146. In medieval sources the sign also appears on the back or between the shoulder-blades of non-royal figures. In such cases, however, it appears posthumously and as sign that the soul of the person in question is saved. This is the interpretation of Fulcher of Chartres regarding crusaders

usually found on the right shoulder of the person in question or, alternatively, between the shoulder-blades. According to one troubadour, Charles of Anjou is said to have born the cross on his body. Likewise, around the year 1260 a contemporary chronicler notes that people saw the cross between the shoulders of Frederick II's grandson and namesake. At the end of the fifteenth century the leading members of the Habsburg family all allegedly had this mark on their backs. The sign is usually associated with reigning kings or pretenders to the throne who were cut off from their rightful inheritance at birth but were nevertheless destined to regain it in the future. In short, Eysteinn's request, as reported in Fagrskinna and Heimskringla, represents a defiant statement about his right to rule as king.

The martyr-like aspect of the scene is underlined by the physical stance which Eysteinn assumes before Símun's retainer wields the axe: "[he] laid himself down on the face on the grass [and] stretched out his hands on each side." Eysteinn thus confronts his executioner with his body shaped in the sign of the cross. The Norwegian king was not the first to have (reportedly) made this gesture of *imitatio Christi* for it has been associated with martyrs from the earliest centuries of Christianity. For instance the apologist Eusebius of Caesarea, writing around A. D. 308, reports in his Ecclesiastical History of a certain youth who was caught up in the persecution of Christians in Palestine in the second half of the third century. He was

who drowned on the way to the Holy Land in 1097. Fulcher of Chartres, Historia Hierosolymitana. Recueil des Historiens des Croisades. Historiens Occidentaux, tome III (Paris 1865), I, viii, 330. Note, however, the more sceptical attitude of Guibert of Nogent towards the appearance of the marks on the crusaders' bodies. Gesta Dei per Francos. Recueil des Historiens des Croisades. Historiens Occidentaux, tome IV (Paris 1869), VII, xxxii, 251. Njáls saga, a late thirteenth-century Icelandic work, tells that Skarphéðinn Njáls son had two crosses etched into his torso, between his shoulder-blades and on his breast, after the burning of Bergþórshváll. Like Guibert of Nogent the author of the saga wants to make us believe that Skarphéðinn was himself responsible for imprinting them on his body. Brennu-Njáls saga. Einar Ól. Sveinsson gaf út. Íslensk Fornrit XII (Reykjavík 1954), 342-344.

...not twenty years of age, standing unbound and stretching his hands in the form of a Cross. ... while bears and leopards almost touched his flesh. And yet their mouths were restrained, I know not how, by a divine and incomprehensible power.⁷²⁵

According to Tabula Othinensis King Knud IV fell before the altar with his hands outstretched in the shape of a cross before he was killed.⁷²⁶ As reportedly did earl Waltheof of Northumbria who was executed in 1076 on the orders of William the Conqueror (and subsequently venerated as a saint). Fagrskinna tells that before his execution earl Waltheof gave his silver-tunic to his executioner and then spread himself on the ground in the shape of a cross. The saga states that the informant for this scene was a certain Iclander, Þorkell Þórðarson, a member of the earl's retinue.⁷²⁷ Although Ordericus Vitalis' description of Waltheof's execution differs in many important details from the Icelandic account, it is noteworthy that the earl is said to have "stretched out his arms" at the moment he faced the sword.⁷²⁸ In light of these two independent accounts of Waltheof's behaviour at his hour of death one is tempted to conclude that there was a strong tradition that the earl did strike this particular pose at his hour of death. It is also noteworthy that in the near-contemporary Sturlunga saga we are told about three thirteenth-century Icelanders who made an identical gesture before their execution.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁵ Eusebius, The Ecclesiastical History, vol. II. Loeb Classics. Transl. by J. E. L. Oulton (Cambridge Mass./ London 1932), 8. 7. 4, 273.

⁷²⁶ "ante aram manibus solo tenus expansis in modum crucis latere lanceatus." Vitae Sanctorum, 61.

⁷²⁷ Fagrskinna, 194-195.

⁷²⁸ "Illis autem permittentibus surrexit et flexis tantum genibus oculisque in cælum fixis et manibus tensis." The Ecclesiastical History of Ordericus Vitalis, Vol. II, Books III IV. Edited and translated with introduction and notes by Marjorie Chibnall. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford 1969), 323.

⁷²⁹ Sturlunga saga vol. I, 256 ; 265, vol. II 339-340. For these and other examples from Old-Norse literature see Fritzner, Ordbog, vol. II, 351-353. There is an obvious penitential side to this form of *imitatio Christi*. A note, for instance, can be made of the curious behaviour of Henry III of Germany at the funeral of his mother in 1043 where the emperor, according to a letter written by abbot Bern of Reichenau, threw off his purple and assumed the mourning habit of penitence. In the presence of all the people

There is naturally no way of verifying whether the execution of Eysteinn is accurately reported in Heimskringla and Fagrskinna. This, in one sense, is immaterial for we are not dealing here with a description derived from a work of hagiography. Rather I would suggest that the passage in Fagrskinna and (and Heimskringla) reflects an oral tradition in which the ideas revolving around kingship, heroic attitude, and Christian martyrdom come together at King Eysteinn's hour of death. As such the scene demonstrates a high level of awareness regarding the appropriate conduct of a secular person whose death was seen by some as martyrdom.

That a surprisingly sophisticated oral tradition on the deaths of Eysteinn and Þorleifr was in place is further supported by Sverris saga. As in the case of Haraldr *ungr* we are told that a light (from candles, see footnote nr. 453) was seen above the grave of Þorleifr *breiðskeggr* (a common hagiographic motif). In addition the saga tells that in order to prove that he was the son of Eysteinn, and thus of royal stock, Þorleifr drew attention to a scar, shaped in the form of a cross, located between his shoulder-blades. To my best knowledge no commentator has addressed the question how this corporal mark is supposed to prove anything relating to

Henry sank to the ground with his hands stretched out in the shape of a cross. On another occasion, before a battle against the Huns, the emperor set aside his mantle and regalia, dressed in penitential clothing and prostrated himself and assumed the cross-like shape. For a discussion of these two scenes see Schnith, K., "Recht und Friede: Zum Königedanken im Unkreis Heinrichs III", Historisches Jahrbuch 81 (1962), 22-57. For the ritual humiliation of royal figures in general see Koziol, G., Begging Pardon and Favour. Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France (Ithaca & New York 1992). This act of humiliation must be seen within the context of christological perceptions of the medieval ruler, most tellingly displayed in Ottonian iconography where attributes of the suffering Christ are frequently associated with the office of emperor. Deshman, R., "*Christus rex et magi reges*: Kingship and Christology in Ottonian and Anglo-Saxon Art", Frühmittelalterliche Studien 10 (1976), 367-406, esp. 381-390. A similar link is made between the secular ruler and the *passio* of Christ in the Ordo for the coronation of Roger II on Christmas day 1130 where the prospective king is required to throw himself before the altar in the shape of a cross. Reinhard, E., "The Ordo for the Coronation of King Roger II of Sicily: An Example of Dating from Internal Evidence", Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual, Ed. János M. Bak (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford 1990), 171.

Porleif's parentage; the author of Sverris saga for one did not feel any need to comment on this problem.

Clearly we encounter here another manifestation of the belief that a cross-shaped sign between the shoulder-blades represented a proof of royal pedigree. The tradition was not confined to historical figures for it also appears in popular medieval tales and later folklore.⁷³⁰ To note but one example, in the late medieval romance of Valentin und Namenlos ⁷³¹ Phila, the sister of the king of France, and newly married to the king of Hungary, gives birth to twin sons. At their birth, however, they are exposed by a wicked bishop and the king's mother who, spurred on by the prediction of an astronomer, both fear that the twins will be a threat to their own authority when they come of age. The infants survive and one, Valentin, is found in a box floating on the river and rescued by Clarina, Phila's sister, who instantly recognises that the child is of noble descent by the cross between its shoulders.⁷³² The years go by and finally Valentin meets his twin brother Namenlos and observes that both have identical marks on their body, a scar in the shape of the cross between the shoulder-blades.⁷³³ This discovery convinces them that they are closely related and together they set out to find their royal parents which, of course, they eventually do after various colourful adventures.

Porleifr *breiðskeggr* was certainly not a hero in a medieval romance and his life did not have a fairy-tale ending. However the parallels between his case and that of Valentin and Namenlos are clear. In both scenarios a scar in the shape of a cross between the shoulder-blades is upheld as evidence of royal descent. On the other hand, in the case of the Norwegian pretender, this corporal mark taps into a deep-rooted oral tradition relating

⁷³⁰ See the examples given in Dickson, A., Valentine and Orson. A Study in Late Medieval Romance (New York 1929), 49. In the standard motif-index of folkliterature and folklore the "cross between the shoulder blade as a proof of royal sanctity" is classified as H 71.5. Motif-Index of Folk-Literature. Revised and enlarged. Ed. by Stith Thompson. Vol. III: F-H (Copenhagen 1965), 380.

⁷³¹ Namnlös och Valentin, en medeltidsroman. (Namenlos und Valentin). Ed. by G. E. Klemming. Svenska fornskrift-sällskapet, samlingar, del III, häft 1 (Stockholm 1846).

⁷³² Namnlös och Valentin, lines 261-64.

⁷³³ Ibid., lines 1208-10.

to the death of his alleged father, King Eysteinn Haraldsson who, as noted, requested to have the sign slashed between his shoulder-blades at his execution. By divine design the death-mark of the father becomes the birth-mark of his son. Here, I would argue, we get a decidedly rare glimpse of a sort of "oral hagiography" which could sustain and enhance the saintly reputation of martyred secular leaders in the absence of official promotion of their cults.

5.6. Concluding Remarks

In addition to the canonised princely martyrs a number of secular leaders were associated with sanctity in the twelfth-century Scandinavian lands. At one end of the spectrum we have Ólafr Tryggvason, who was deemed worthy of saintly status by Icelandic and Norwegian men of letters as a result of his missionary efforts, and Erik *emune* who, as a patron of the Church, was held in particular esteem by the clergy of Lund Cathedral. At the other end we have figures such as King Eysteinn Haraldsson, King Knud Magnusson and Earl Haraldr *ungi* whose saintly reputation cannot be divorced from the dynastic politics of Norway, Denmark and Orkney.

Although the sources relating to these cases are scarce a common pattern can nevertheless be detected. King Knud Magnusson, Earl Haraldr *ungi*, King Haraldr *gilli*, King Eysteinn Haraldsson and Þorleifr *breiðskeggr* were all members, or claimed to be members, of particular branches of the ruling dynasties in their respective lands. Like the canonised princely saints, they were murdered or killed by rivals on the political stage. However in contrast to the official martyrs the descendants or kinsmen of these leaders did not assume power (King Haraldr *gilli* being the exception) and subsequently secure the future of their relatives' cults.

It is reasonable to assume that the sources at our disposal do not tell about all the secular leaders associated with sanctity in this period. For instance Sverris saga, the main source for the political history of Norway in the fourth quarter of the twelfth-century, is a partisan account written (at least partly) under the guidance of King Sverrir himself. Thus we only hear of Þorleif's saintly reputation because the author of the work felt a need to refute that belief and belittle those who upheld it. Still if we concentrate only on the twelfth century (and exclude Ólafr Tryggvason, Erik *emune* and Sigurðr *slembir*) no less than six rulers or pretenders were associated with sanctity in the Scandinavian dominions without their cult ever being officially recognised. Of these two were killed in battle (Earl Haraldr *ungi* and Þorleifr *breiðskeggr*), two were murdered (King Knud Magnusson, King Haraldr *gilli*), one executed (King Eysteinn Haraldsson) and one died of natural causes (Ólafr *ógæfa*). From this list and the examples of the official cults (St. Magnús, St. Knud Lavard, St. Erik and St. Rögnvaldr) it becomes clear that in the twelfth century sanctity of secular leaders was intimately linked with martyrdom.

As Peter Foote has observed, the unstable political situation in Norway from ca. 1130 onwards and Icelandic society in the thirteenth century created a fertile ground for religious sentiments to enter secular disputes and civil strifes.⁷³⁴ The same indeed holds true for Orkney and Denmark. Political factions and princely pretenders identified their own cause with divine will while associating that of their enemies with the devil and his sphere of influence.⁷³⁵ A clear expression of such a sentiment can be found in a grant of privileges where Valdemar I attributes his victory

⁷³⁴ Foote, P., "Secular Attitudes in Early Iceland", *Aurvandilstá. Norse Studies*. Ed. by Michael Barnes et al. *The Viking Collection. Studies in Northern Civilization* Vol. 2 (Odense 1984), 31-47. [Originally published in *Medieval Scandinavia* 7 (1974), 32-44].

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31-47.

over King Sven at the battle of Grathehed in 1157 to the fact that God had been on his side.⁷³⁶

In a turbulent age violent death was equated with martyrdom which in turn hallowed a particular political cause. The willingness of ecclesiastics to present the death of secular rulers in terms of martyrdom was undoubtedly an important factor here. If King Ólafr Haraldsson, King Knud of Odense and Earl Magnús – all killed within the context of political struggle – were martyrs then there was no reason why the same honour could not be granted to King Haraldr *gilli*, Earl Haraldr of Orkney and the pretender Þorleifr *breiðskeggr*. As we have seen ecclesiastics had, for varying reasons, promulgated the notion that, in exceptional circumstances, martyrdom of secular figures could take place within a Christian society. In the hagiographic literature the saintly status of the princely martyrs is in part justified by their support for Church and Christianity. In the case of the unofficial political cults, on the other hand, no such justifications were needed. Violent death was a sufficient criterion for a fallen leader to be associated with sanctity. What we are confronted with is the adoption of the idea of Christian martyrdom by the laity; martyrdom was embraced by the Norse people in this period to the extent that it effectively became the only criterion for sainthood. Indeed it is a fact seldom appreciated that before the fourth quarter of the twelfth century the Church in Scandinavia did not make an effort to have cults of native confessors officially recognised.⁷³⁷

It can be argued that the Nordic people were particularly susceptible to the notion of martyrdom as it accorded well with their ideas about

⁷³⁶ See footnote nr. 503.

⁷³⁷ There were, however, some local cults of foreign missionaries. On the cult of the German St. Theodgarus in the late eleventh- and early twelfth century, see *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 3–4. On such cults in Sweden see Schmid, T., “Eskil, Botvid och David. Tre Svenska helgon”, *Scandia* 5 (1932), 102–114.

heroic stance in the face of certain death.⁷³⁸ The description of Eysteinn's execution discussed above and the elevation of King Knud's retainers to sainthood by the clergy of Odense are cases in point (see ch. 3.2.). Moreover, considering that the earliest Christian literature to be translated in Scandinavia was the Lives of the early saints, many of them martyrs, one can perhaps begin to envisage how this merger of the saintly and the heroic came about.⁷³⁹

There are still more fundamental reasons why martyrdom of secular figures became the dominant form of sanctity in the Nordic lands in the period under discussion. In earlier chapters I have argued that the promotion of princely cults was one way for the Church (or ecclesiastical communities) to negotiate its position in a relatively recently converted society. There can be little doubt that men of the Church would have preferred to bestow sanctity on abbots and bishops rather than secular warlords. In the eleventh century and for the most of the twelfth century they did not, however, go down this route. The reason for this is simple: a successful promotion of a confessor-cult required a level of ecclesiastical development which simply had not been attained in this period. Only when the Church had divorced itself sufficiently "from its subordination under the monarchy and its heavy dependence on peasant society [and] become more firmly incorporated into the universal church under papal leadership"⁷⁴⁰ could it begin to promote the sanctity of members from its

⁷³⁸ See for instance Cormack, M., "Saints and Sinners. Reflections of Death in some Icelandic sagas", *Gripla* 39 (1994), 187-219. A fusion of this sort was of course not confined to the Scandinavian sphere. See Farnham, F., "Romanesque Design in the *Chanson de Roland*", *Romance Philology* 18 (1964), 143-164, esp. 162-164. Cross, J. S., Oswald and Byrhtnoth. Christian Saint and a Hero who is Christian", *English Studies* 46 (1965) 93-109, esp. 100-101.

⁷³⁹ Sub. "Saints Lives". This hypothesis is discussed by Mundal, "Helgenkult", 105-109.

⁷⁴⁰ Sawyer, "The Organisation of the Twelfth-Century Norwegian Church", 53. Sawyer is referring here to the establishment of the archbishopric of Nidaros in 1153/54. It could of course be argued that the Church in Denmark was more advanced than in both Norway and Sweden.

own ranks. In the last quarter of the twelfth century we see a shift in that direction in both Denmark and Norway. In 1187 Archbishop Absalon of Lund attempted to have the papacy recognise the saintly status of Bishop Ketill of Viborg (d. 1150) ⁷⁴¹ and in 1229 the Norwegian Church began a long-drawn out campaign to secure papal approval for the sanctity of (appropriately) Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson of Nidaros.⁷⁴²

The notion that the "Age of the Martyrs" came to an end when the Roman Empire ended its persecution of Christians and the supply of martyrs effectively dried up has become a scholarly commonplace. This, of course, is true but it only tells half the story. The rise of the confessor saint had equally to do, if not more, with the fact that the Church had become sufficiently entrenched to be able to regulate the lives of ordinary Christians in a manner unheard of in earlier times.⁷⁴³ In this respect the image of the confessor saint represented a direct reflection of the growing confidence and increasing power of the Church. The "New Saint" incorporated in his persona all the virtues that the Church held in high regard: authority and discipline.

Martyrdom, however, can be compared to an empty vessel which the laity could fill with whichever brew suited any given circumstances. As such it lay outside the Church's control and seen from this angle the story referred to earlier (ch. 4.1.) of St. Martin's dealings with the rural martyr-cult is a highly symbolic one. The archetypal confessor of the Church eradicates a local cult which perverts the idea of martyrdom beyond recognition.

The same general pattern is applicable to the Scandinavian lands in the twelfth century. The phenomenon of martyrdom could exist in the

⁷⁴¹ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, 251-252.

⁷⁴² For the exchange of letters between the archbishopric and the papacy see, *Regesta Norvegica* I, nr. 712, 713, 759, 760, 845, 920, 921. *Regesta Norvegica* II: 1264-1300. Ed. by Narve Bjørge (Oslo 1978), 71, 72, 73.

⁷⁴³ E.g., Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 13-16.

absence of ecclesiastical involvement; the only criterion was the perception by the laity that a secular figure who came to a violent end deserved the crown of martyrdom. It was precisely the lack of clear boundaries of definition which made martyrdom so well suited to exploitation in the politically uncertain period under discussion. The Church in turn neither had the capability nor, perhaps, the will to counter these un-official cults. Indeed there are indications that ecclesiastics may on occasions have been involved (i.e. the cult of Earl Haraldr *ungi*).

In the later middle ages the Church would take a determined stand against un-official cults of this nature. A case in point is the cult of the so-called "false Margrét" in Norway. Around the year 1300 a woman of German extraction appeared on the scene in the town of Bergen and claimed to be Margrét (better known as the "Maiden of Scotland"), the daughter of King Eiríkr Magnússon who had drowned on her way to Scotland in 1290. As a punishment for playing a royal impostor the woman was sentenced to execution in 1301. Afterwards some people upheld the view that she had indeed been the real Margrét and began to venerate her as a martyr. Nordness, where she had been burnt at the stake, became the centre of the cult and a place of pilgrimage. Auðfinnr, the bishop of Bergen, reacted to this development and in an open letter of 1320 he forbade the veneration of the "false Margrét".⁷⁴⁴ Although Auðfinn's efforts to eradicate the cult were not entirely successful⁷⁴⁵ his initiative nevertheless demonstrates that by this point in time the Church was no longer prepared to turn a blind eye to popular martyr cults.

⁷⁴⁴ Diplomatarium Norvegicum. Vol. VIII, ed. by C. R. Unger & H. J. Huitfeldt (Christiania 1874), nr. 67, 88-89. Further on the cult, and its possible political dimension, see Munch, P. A., Det norske folks historie. Fjerde del, anden binde (Christiania 1859), 346-352. At this point in time the ecclesiastical structure become so sophisticated that the case of the "false Margrét" sparked off a dispute over the proper procedure of handling such cases. See Bagge, S., Den kongelige kapellgeistlighet 1150-1319 (Bergen/Oslo/Tromsø 1976), 124-126.

⁷⁴⁵ Lidén, H. & E. M. Magerøy, Norges kirker. Vol. I (Bergen 1980), 147-149.

In the twelfth century, however, the laity could freely adopt the idea of martyrdom to the political circumstances of the time; its interpretation of the concept was out of the hands of ecclesiastical authorities. An illustrative, albeit somewhat anecdotal, example of this can be found in a speech which King Sverrir Sigurðarson delivered at the funeral of his long-standing enemy, Earl Erlingr *skakki*, which he had defeated in battle in 1179:

Hér eru nú mörg tíðendi at sjá ok vita, þau er mikils eru verð ok mönnum megu vera þakksamlig, at bæði til þessarar kirkju ok annarra eru bornir margir líkamir þeira manna, er fylgt hafa Magnúsi konungi. En þat er sem mörgum mun kunnigt vera, at Eysteinn erkibyskup ok margir aðrir lærðir menn hafa jafnan sagt, at allir þeir menn, er berðist með Magnúsi konungi ok verði land hans ok létist með því, at sálur þeira manna allra væri fyrr í Paradíso en blóðit væri kalt á jörðunni. Nú megum vér allir fagna hér svá margra manna heilagleik, sem hér munu helgir hafa orðit, ef þetta er svá sem erkibiskup hefir sagt, at allir sé þeir orðnir helgir menn, er fallit hafa með Erlingi jarli.⁷⁴⁶

Much to be seen and known is occurring here now, of great import and a cause of thankfulness to men, in that both here and to other churches are borne the bodies of many who sided with King Magnus. For, indeed, it is known to many that Archbishop Eystein and many other learned men have constantly said concerning all who die fighting for King Magnus and defending his land, that their souls will enter Paradise before their blood is cold upon the ground. We may here rejoice at the sanctity of many men who have become saints, if it is true which the archbishop has said, that everyone that has died fighting under Earl Erling.⁷⁴⁷

Judging from these words, Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson promised those who died on the “right side” in the civil war a place in paradise. The outstanding champion of ecclesiastical independence of the period followed here a tradition associated with the papal cause.⁷⁴⁸ Popes Leo IV (in 853), John VIII (in 878) and Alexander II (in 1063) had all promulgated the notion that those who died in battle while fighting for a just cause were automatically freed from their sins.⁷⁴⁹ In one exceptional

⁷⁴⁶ Sverris saga, 42–43.

⁷⁴⁷ Saga of King Sverrir, 50.

⁷⁴⁸ On Eysteinn and his time see Gunnes, E., *Erkebiskop Østein. Statsmann og Kirkebygger* (Oslo 1996).

⁷⁴⁹ Brundage, J. A., “Holy War and the Medieval Lawyers”, *The Holy War*. Ed. by Thomas Patrick Murphy (Columbus, Ohio 1976), 104–105.

case Pope Leo IX, in 1053, decreed that anyone killed defending the Holy See against the Normans were martyrs for the faith.⁷⁵⁰ In the so-called Canones Nidrosienses, a body of ecclesiastical regulations for the newly founded archbishopric of Nidaros probably written under the auspices of Archbishop Eysteinn, abbots and other ecclesiastics were encouraged to inform the people that anyone who died in the defence of their country and in the act of upholding peace would automatically go to heaven.⁷⁵¹

King Sverrir, however, equates this promise with martyrdom: "We may rejoice here at the sanctity of many men who have become saints who died fighting for Earl Erling." Whereas the archbishop had, apparently, preached that those who died in the service of King Magnús Erlingsson would have a secure place in heaven, Sverris interprets that promise as a guarantee that the same would become martyrs and saints.⁷⁵² Is this a mis-

⁷⁵⁰ Erdmann, C., Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens. Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Geistesgeschichte (Stuttgart 1935), 124-126. Riley-Smith, J., "Death on the First Crusade", The End of Strife. Ed. by D. Loades (Edinburgh 1984), 14-31; Morris, M., "Martyrs on the Field of Battle Before and During the First Crusade", Martyrs and Martyrologies. Ed. by D. Wood. Studies in Church History 30 (Oxford 1993), 93-105.

⁷⁵¹ "Uolumus autem, ut episcopi, abbates et reliqui sacerdotes per singulas civitates, burgos et villas populum sibi commissum modis omnibus exhortentur, quatenus contra excommunicatos et turbatores pacis viriliter studeant dimicare, eos pariter commonescentes, quod si pro defensione pacis et salvatione patrie fideliter moriantur, regna celestia consequentur." Latinske dokument til norsk historie fram til år 1204. Ed. and transl. by Eirik Vandvik (Oslo 1959), 44. Apparently these words echo a citation from Pope Leo IV (A.D. 847-855) where he refers to pagans and not rebel Christians. According to Housley this article of Canones Nidrosienses was incorporated into Gratian's Decretum. See Housley, N., "Crusade against Christians: their Origins and early Development, c. 1000-1216", Crusade and Settlement. Papers read at the First Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East and presented to R.C. Smail. Ed. by Peter W. Edbury (Cardiff 1985), 24-25. More recently attempts have been made to argue the case that the Canones Nidrosienses dates from the reign of King Sverrir Sigurðarson rather than Magnús Erlingsson. See Sandaaker, O., "Canones Nidrosienses - intermesso eller opptakt", Historisk tidsskrift (norsk) 67 (1988), 3-38, esp. 20-25.

⁷⁵² A comparable extension or broadening of the concept of heavenly reward in return for dying for a just cause took place in relation to crusaders to the Holy Land. At no point did the papacy promise martyrdom to those who were killed in battle against the Saracens. However when contemporary, or near contemporary, historians reflected on the experience of the First Crusade, it became common place to see those Christians who died in this undertaking as martyrs. Cowdrey, H. E. J., "Martyrdom and the First Crusade", Crusade and Settlement. Papers read at the First Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East and presented to R.C. Smail. Ed. Peter W. Edbury (Cardiff 1985), 46-56.

interpretation on Sverri's behalf? Did Eysteinn preach that martyrdom would follow death in battle or did this notion develop amongst the foot-soldiers of King Magnús Erlingsson? Although these questions cannot be answered, Sverri's speech is one example of how fluid the boundaries of martyrdom were during this highly unstable period in the North.

Conclusions

In this study I have examined the cult of and the hagiography on St. Magnús, earl of Orkney, and attempted to place both within a Scandinavian, and to a lesser extent, European context. In the process I have sought to throw light on the phenomenon of the sanctity of secular leaders and associated literature, in the eleventh- and twelfth-century Scandinavian lands.

The hagiographic corpus on the Orkney saint is largely preserved in Old-Norse sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth century. However, at least one work on the saint was written in the twelfth century, a Latin Life composed by a certain *magister* Robert. Although this *vita* may not have been the earliest hagiographic work on St. Magnús, it was the one used by the author of Magnús saga lengri, (Magnús saga the longer), composed in my estimation on the occasion of the incorporation of the saint's feast into the Icelandic liturgical calendar in 1326.

The hagiographic pattern of the Magnús corpus accords well with other works on Scandinavian princely martyrs, in particular on the Danish Knud Lavard. A just and popular ruler arouses envy in the mind of a kinsman who finally betrays and kills him. A similar narrative design can also be found in English hagiography on princely saints from the tenth and eleventh centuries and Lives of Eastern-European rulers from the same period. Irrespective of the question of influence, one can say that hagiographers from the more peripheral regions of Christian Europe adopted a similar approach as they confronted the task of presenting the killing of a ruler within the context of inter-dynastic feud in terms of martyrdom.

Magister Robert was undoubtedly an Englishman and as such his view-point was that of an outsider interpreting a slice of the history of a relatively recently converted region of Christian Europe. From this perspective Robert's approach can be compared with that of Aelnoth of Canterbury, the second hagiographer of King Knud IV of Denmark. Just as the killing of Knud in 1086 represents for Aelnoth the central event in the history of the Danish people, thus the martyrdom of Earl Magnús heralds in Robert's view the final victory of Christianity over paganism in Orkney. Although the ideal of just rulership – pious life-style and patronage of the Church – is duly stressed there is a notable emphasis in both works on the salvific effects of the two martyrdoms. Although I maintain that the appearance of this aspect in the *Lives* by Robert and Aelnoth represents an innovation in Western hagiography on princely saints, it can be found in a similar context in Eastern European hagiography from the tenth and the eleventh centuries.

In another sense *magister* Robert's *Life of St. Magnús* was innovative within the narrow confines of its particular genre. An analysis of those passages attributable to Robert in M.s.I. (and other related sources) and the hagiography on St. Thomas Becket reveals that the literary corpus on the Canterbury saint influenced the English author. In particular, Robert's use of biblical allusions and comparisons of biblical characters to historical figures points in that direction. Moreover, the correspondence between his *Life of Magnús* and the Becket sources appears to be confined to a textually related corpus of early writings on the English martyr which includes John of Salisbury's epistolary accounts of the Becket dispute and the *Lives of Becket* by William of Canterbury and the so-called Anonymous II. The most intriguing parallels, however, are between the incompletely preserved *Life of the Canterbury martyr* by Robert of Cricklade, prior of St. Frideswide's in Oxford (d. ca. 1180), and the

sections attributable to *magister* Robert in the Magnús corpus. Although the identification of Prior Robert with *magister* Robert, the author of the *vita* of St. Magnús, is not a new one, it has hitherto not been supported by a close examination of the relevant texts. With some confidence it can now be asserted that an English author, almost certainly Robert of Cricklade, wrote (or perhaps re-wrote) an hagiographic work on St. Magnús earl of Orkney sometime in the 1170s. This Life was one of the last works of hagiography on a martyred prince to be composed in Western Europe. In spite of the incomplete preservation of the Life, the innovative approach to his task that *magister* Robert adopted makes his composition a worthy swan-song of this genre.

As regards the emergence of St. Magnús' cult I have emphasised that the canonisation of the earl occurred at a pivotal point in the development of the Orkney bishopric. From the last quarter of the eleventh century the resident bishop was effectively the court-chaplain of one branch of the ruling dynasty, the Páll-line. This situation reflected both the immature state of the Orkney bishopric and the need of bishops to protect their position against rival candidates who were supported by the archbishopric of York. By the middle of the 1130s, however, the external threat to the resident bishop had receded. Against this background Bishop Vilhjálmr of Orkney elevated the remains of Earl Magnús in December 1135.

In one sense his translation of the relics from Birsay to Kirkwall soon thereafter represented a shift in allegiance from the Páll-line to the Erlendr-line of the ruling house. However in St. Magnús the bishopric acquired both a heavenly patron and a focal point of religious observance which heralded a new stage in its development. From this new-found base the Orkney bishops were able to assert their own authority in relation to the secular arm.

There was also of course a dynastic dimension to the emergence of the cult. The canonisation of a member of the Erlendr-line of the ruling dynasty bestowed lustre, prestige and an aura of legitimacy on the rule of Rögnvaldr Kali, the earl responsible for commencing the construction of St. Magnús Cathedral in 1137/38 or shortly thereafter. There are of course many examples of princely cults promoted for similar purposes in the more peripheral lands of Christian Europe where succession to rulership did not follow any clear-cut procedure. In this sense the interests of the temporal and ecclesiastical authorities coincided in the promotion of St. Magnús' sanctity.

A similar pattern can be observed in relation to the better known princely cults of Scandinavia. In Norway the cult of St. Ólafr originated in a period when the Norwegian Church was still in its missionary phase and ecclesiastical structure was in an embryonic form. Accordingly it was only at a later stage, with the appearance of a resident bishop in Nidaros, that the Church could effectively appropriate the cult to its own purposes. In the second half of the eleventh century it was the kings of Norway who promoted the cult of St. Ólafr and identified their own rule with the supernatural authority of their saintly kinsman. The reign of Haraldr *harðráði* (1046-1066) was particularly important in this development and I have argued that his acquaintance with the cults of Boris and Gleb in Kievan Rus' provided him with a model for the promotion of the cult of his half-brother.

The canonisations of St. Ólafr and St. Magnús were not undertaken on the initiative of their dynastic successors but by an Anglo-Saxon missionary bishop and an Orkney bishop respectively. When King Magnús *góði* and Earl Rögnvaldr Kali came to power they began to promote cults that had already been established. A similar pattern can be seen in relation to the origins of the cult of King Knud of Denmark; in 1095 the

ecclesiastical community of Odense elevated the corporal relics of the slain king in order to secure for itself a heavenly royal patron and, in the process, promote the ideals of Christian kingship. Later in the same year King Erik *ejegod* was chosen to be king and it was on his initiative that papal sanction for the canonisation of Knud IV was secured.

The emergence of the cult of St. Erik of Sweden is another case where the interests of the temporal and the spiritual authorities co-incided in the creation of a princely martyr-cult. The establishment of the archbishopric of Uppsala in 1164 and coming to power of Knut Eriksson in 1167 formed the background for the creation of the cult of the Swedish king. It seems that Archbishop Stephan of Uppsala promoted the cult of Erik in order to enhance the stature of Uppsala as a religious centre while Knut Eriksson supported the cult of his father in order to strengthen the position of the Erik-dynasty in its power-struggle against potential rival claimants.

The one cult which fits uneasily within the pattern expounded here above – and in a sense represents the exception which proves the rule – is that of Knud Lavard. In contrast to the cults of St. Magnús, St. Ólafr, St. Knud of Odense and St. Erik of Sweden his cult was from the beginning a dynastic undertaking. Not until 1170, with the papally approved canonisation of Knud, did the interests of Crown and Church converge.

Considering the fragile state of the Church in our period it is not surprising that ecclesiastics in the Nordic countries were willing to recognise the saintly status of secular rulers. In a society where the organisation of religious life was still in a rudimentary state the obvious choice for sainthood was not the bishop or the abbot but a figure who was indispensable for the upholding of christian life, that is the secular ruler. Against this background the ecclesiastical centres of Kirkwall in Orkney, Odense and Århus in Denmark, Uppsala in Sweden and Nidaros in Norway all adopted the cults of native princely martyrs in order to enhance

their stature and create a focal point for their identity. In addition the cults provided an ideal opportunity to promote the ideas of Christian kingship in a newly converted society.

In the same period the secular power was also in a state of transformation from rulership dependant on the personal qualities of the sovereign to a Christian one where the office of kingship was hallowed by divine will. The emergence of the cults of St. Ólafr, St. Knud of Odense, St. Erik, and to a degree that of St. Magnús, can be seen as early attempts to bestow legitimacy on the ruler and his office in the absence of formalised rituals such as coronation and unction. In a sense the princely saints' cults were symptoms of the relative weakness of both the temporal and spiritual authorities in this period.

Pagan notions relating to the sacral nature of Nordic rulership were of secondary importance in this respect. In this respect Ireland provides a useful point of contrast. Although pagan sentiments relating to the sacral nature of Irish kingship survived the conversion to Christianity, there is not a single example from the medieval period of an Irish ruler being venerated after his death. The contrast between the two regions in this matter can at least partly be explained by the closer interaction between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* in the Nordic lands.

Still, underlying mental attitudes may well have facilitated the emergence of the princely cults. In this respect I have drawn attention to the apparently deep rooted tradition in Norse society of a deceased ancestor legitimising the authority of the living. Although I acknowledge that the sources on this issue are inconclusive and my research into this aspect only scratches the surface of a complicated issue, I believe there is case to be made that such sentiments may have facilitated the acceptance of princely cults in the Scandinavian dominions, particularly in Orkney, Norway and Sweden where the concept of *óðal*, the ancestral land, was

particularly strong. This, however, is a subject which deserves a separate study.

I have argued that the princely cults of the eleventh- and twelfth century Nordic lands were symptoms of a transitional period in the development of the ecclesiastical and secular authorities. The same holds true in relation the cults of secular leaders that did not enjoy official promotion by the two authorities. The immature state of the Nordic Church and the political situation in the Scandinavian lands provided a fertile ground from which these cults could emerge. However as the cults appeared in response to particular political circumstances, and were not supported by those in power, their life-span was brief. Still, considering these were the first, and practically the only cases, of popular saints' cults in the Nordic lands in this period, their significance should not be underestimated. Above all they show that in the minds of the Scandinavian people in this period sanctity was essentially synonymous with martyrdom. True, martyrdom was also a popular manifestation of sanctity in the more established countries of Christian Europe. There, however, the Church was also in a position to promote cults of confessor saints, the majority of whom were drawn from the upper echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Not until the last quarter of the twelfth century did the Nordic Church acquire the self-confidence and authority to effectively introduce cults of that nature.

To a considerable extent this has been a study of the manifold manifestations of martyrdom in the two centuries or so following the conversion of the Scandinavian lands to Christianity. As a form of sanctity which was lacking in clear boundaries of interpretation, martyrdom was ideally suited to the fluid ecclesiastical and political scene in the Nordic dominions in this era. For English hagiographers, ambitious ecclesiastics, aspiring rulers and the followers of lost political causes, it represented

different things and was applied by them for varied purposes. In this respect the words of *magister* Robert, borrowed from St. Jerome, that “each one brings such things as he has means to bring into the tabernacle of God, as a help to mercy for himself” are not out of place.

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