

**REPRESENTATIONS OF DEATH AND BURIAL IN THE  
FIRST SIX SAGAS OF SNORRI STURLUSON'S  
*HEIMSKRINGLA***

**Tegan N. Currie**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil  
at the  
University of St Andrews**



**2015**

**Full metadata for this item is available in  
St Andrews Research Repository  
at:**

**<http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>**

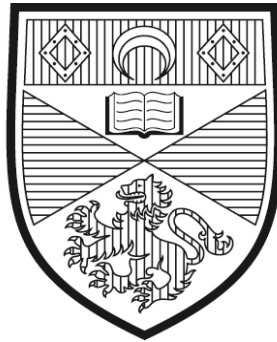
**Please use this identifier to cite or link to this item:**

**<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/9482>**

**This item is protected by original copyright**

**Representations of Death and Burial in the First Six Sagas of  
Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla***

**Tegan N. Currie**



University of  
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of MPhil  
at the  
University of St Andrews

26 April 2014

## **SUBMISSION OF PHD AND MPhil THESES REQUIRED DECLARATIONS**

### **1. Candidate's declarations:**

I, Tegan N. Currie, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 40,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September, 2011 and as a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy in October, 2013; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2013 and 2014.

Date:

Signature of candidate:

### **2. Supervisor's declaration:**

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Master of Philosophy in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date:

Signature of supervisor:

### **3. Permission for electronic publication: *(to be signed by both candidate and supervisor)***

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and the abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker, that my thesis will be electronically accessible for personal or research use unless exempt by award of an embargo as requested below, and that the library has the right to migrate my thesis into new electronic forms as required to ensure continued access to the thesis. I have obtained any third-party copyright permissions that may be required in order to allow such access and migration, or have requested the appropriate embargo below.

The following is an agreed request by candidate and supervisor regarding the electronic publication of this thesis:

Access to printed copy and electronic publication of thesis through the University of St Andrews.

Date:

Signature of candidate:

Signature of supervisor:

### **Abstract:**

This thesis explores textual depictions of the burial of leaders in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*. Central to my argument is the close connection between representations of burial and the broader qualities of good/bad kingship, and the relationship between kingship, Christianity, and legitimacy. Snorri himself encourages his readers to concentrate on burial, since his universal history is introduced by a *Prologus* dividing the ages of man into distinct phases marked out by forms of burial which is then reinforced in the early chapters of *Ynglinga saga*. My focus is upon the representations of burial in the pagan period – covered in the first six sagas of the text – because such representations, covering as they do the distant pagan past, allowed Snorri considerable licence to comment on the qualities of good and bad rulership. I explore cremation burials and inhumation burials, noting the convergences and ambiguities within Snorri's accounts of such practices, and I raise in particular the tensions between 'correct' Christian practices and pagan practices, and how to assess kingly qualities of certain individuals based on their burial rites. My final chapter continues exploring such themes by making a case for viewing hall burnings as a sort of 'negative burial', rich with associations of bad kinship and instability. This discussion of the representations of death and burial practice contributes new means of assessing and reading a particularly rich, but difficult text.

## **Table of Contents:**

<i>Abstract</i>	p. i
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	p. iii
<b>Introduction</b>	p. 1
<b>Chapter I:</b> The Text and its Time	p. 10
<b>Chapter II:</b> Cremation Burial in <i>Heimskringla</i>	p. 30
<b>Chapter III:</b> Inhumation Burial in <i>Heimskringla</i>	p. 49
<b>Chapter IV:</b> Pagan Period Hall Burnings in <i>Heimskringla</i>	p. 71
<b>Conclusions</b>	p. 97
<i>Appendix:</i> Table of instances of Death and Burial in <i>Heimskringla</i>	p. 99
Bibliography	p. 102

### **Acknowledgments:**

First of all I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Alex Woolf, for his help and guidance. I would also like to thank Dr. Elina Screen, who was my fellow Old Norse student, friend, and a great support during her time here at St. Andrews and beyond. A huge thank you to Dr. Paul Bibire who patiently instructed me in the wonderful world of the Old Norse language. I would also like to thank the fantastic Dorothy Christie and Audrey Wishart.

I would like to thank the legions of stunningly intelligent postgraduates within History and, more specifically, Mediaeval History who have been both a great help and inspiration during my time here. Everyone in the Scriptorium, both past (Gary, Berenike, Ed) and present (Joanna, Jane, Kenneth, Neil, Maria Christina, and Dawn), thank you for making even the worst days better through your patience, intelligence, and wicked humour.

To the members of the Old Norse reading group over the years, who put up with terrible attempts to mime vocabulary when they were stuck, you are all the most fabulous nerds there ever could be. I have enjoyed every meeting.

I wish to also thank Karin and Reinhold who knew just the right thing to say, in the fewest words, and at the best moments.

To my friends who hugged, baked, and drank with me, Thank you: Elisabeth Mincin you have been a fabulous friend for many years, Emma Paterson and Fiona Bellany who kept me smiling via the post, Varan and Rob Houghton for good food and better conversation, Jo, Eilidh, and Sarah, thank you for the laughs, hugs, chocolate, and coffee breaks.

To my parents, Douglas and Carol Currie, you are the most wonderful people in the world, and all I can say is that I couldn't have made it this far without you and your endless love and support. To my brother and sister-in-law, Devin Currie and Alicia Ballok, you are awesome and hilarious. All four of you make every trip home more than just a visit, it is the highlight of every year.

And finally, a deeply heartfelt thank you to Matthew McHaffie, whose strength, kindness, incredible intelligence, and ability to make me smile every day for the past three and a half years (that is 1271 days). You made everything alright, even when that seemed impossible.

I dedicate this to lost dreams and the bright hope of new ones.

## Introduction:

In fyrsta öld er kölluð brunaöld. Þá skyldi brenna alla dauða menn ok reisa eptir bautasteina, en síðan er Freyr hafði heygðr verit at Uppsölum, þá gerðu margir höfðingjar eigi síðr hauga en bautasteina til minningar um frændr sína. En síðan er Danr inn mikilláti, Danakonungr, lét sér haug gera ok bauð at bera sik þannig dauðan með konungsskrúði ok herbúnaði ok hest hans við óllu sǫðulreiði ok mikit fé annat ok hans ættmenn gerðu margir svá síðan, ok hófsk þar haugsöld í Danmǫrku, en lengi síðan helzk brunaöld með Svíum ok Norðmǫnnum.<sup>1</sup>

[The first age is called the Age of Burning. At that time all dead people had to be burned and memorial stones raised for them, but after Freyr had been interred in a mound at Uppsalar, many rulers built mounds as well as memorial stones in memory of their kinsmen. But after Danr inn mikilláti (the Haughty), king of the Danes, had had a mound built for himself and commanded that he should be carried into it when he was dead with his royal robes and armour and his horse with all its saddle-gear and many other goods, and many people of his line had later done the same, then the Age of Mounds began there in Danmǫrk, though the Age of Burning continued long after among the Svíar and Norwegians.<sup>2</sup>]

*Heimskringla* is a text steeped in religion, politics, conflict, and the ideals of leadership. It presents to the reader the deeds of the kings and leaders of the past for the purpose of education, entertainment, and the historical record. The *Prologus* to the text begins, like many other mediaeval texts, by discussing the author's sources and noting specifically those used for the locations of the burials of kings.<sup>3</sup> While there is debate on whether or not this version of the *Prologus* was part of the original text,<sup>4</sup> there is no doubt that whoever wrote it,

---

<sup>1</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla I*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk Fornrit XXVI* (Reykjavík, 1941) [Hereafter referred to as *ÍF*] pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla Volume I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, trans by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, 2011) [Here after referred to as *VSNR*] p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> '...sagt frá dauða hvers þeira ok legstað.' and 'Sagt er þar ok frá dauða hvers þeira ok haugstað.' *ÍF*, p. 4 ['...the death and burial place of each of them is related.' and 'There also the death and burial place of each of them is related.' *VSNR*, p. 3]. See also 'I.A.iv. – The Sources', p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that there was a prologue as part of the earliest text, but it was lost from the manuscript for which we have the best preservation of the rest of the text, however it is preserved in other less reliable

either in the thirteenth century or later, was drawing the attention of the reader to the matters of death and burial. Such an emphasis recurs throughout the text. In chapter eight of the first saga in the collection, *Ynglinga saga*, for example, the god Óðinn decrees the laws of burial:

Svá setti hann, at alla dauða menn skyldi brenna ok bera á bál með þeim eign þeira. Sagði hann svá, at með þvílíkum auðæfum skyldi hverr koma til Valhallar sem hann hafði á bál, þess skyldi hann ok njóta, er hann sjálf hafði í jörð grafit. En qskuna skyldi bera út á sjá eða grafa niðr í jörð, en eptir gofga menn skyldi haug gera til minningar, en eptir alla þá menn, er nokkut manns mót var at, skyldi reisa bautasteina, ok helzk sjá siðr lengi síðan.<sup>5</sup>

[He ordained that all dead people must be burned and that their possessions should be laid on a pyre with them. He said that everyone should come to Valhøll with such wealth as he had on his pyre, and that each would also have the benefit of whatever he himself buried in the earth. But the ashes were to be taken out to sea or buried down in the earth, and mounds were to be built as memorials to great men, and memorial stones were to be raised for all those who were of any account, and this custom lasted for a long time after that.<sup>6</sup>]

The correct burial of the kings and leaders, from the beginning of both the mythical and historical time periods, was put into law [*lög*] by a leader who was both a king and god. Archaeologically, it is clear that these decrees reflect the actual burial customs of the pagan period, although not necessarily in the order and exact combinations put forward in these two passages. Interestingly there is some disagreement even between the *Prologus* account of burial and what is decreed by Óðinn, specifically over the issue of the raising of mounds.<sup>7</sup> A possible explanation for this is the previously mentioned issue of preservation in relation to

---

manuscripts. For more on the discussion of the *Prologus* see: Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) pp. 55-57.

<sup>5</sup> *ÍF*, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> *VSNR*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> In the *Prologus* it is stated that only after the death and burial of Freyr did the raising of memorial mounds become a feature of burial practice, but in chapter eight of *Ynglinga saga* Óðinn decrees that along with other rites mounds should be raised as memorials.



the *Prologus*; the two accounts may very well have agreed at one point, but through copying and loss the exact wording may have changed.

The correlation between the written word and physical finds is both significant and rare when discussing mediaeval texts which describe a time period much earlier than their own.<sup>8</sup> It is a complicated relationship between the reality of the archaeological evidence and what is depicted in the saga literature. While many elements of burial practice accord reasonably well with the literature, such as the mode of body disposal and the sorts of grave goods often included in the burial, Snorri's evolutionary chronology of burial practice differs markedly from that found in the archaeology. For example, whilst the pre-Christian sagas emphasise cremation over inhumation, the archaeological evidence displays much greater diversity of burial practice. The cemeteries at the Swedish settlement of Birka, an important trading town in the tenth century, is a good example of such diversity. For instance, excavators have found and excavated over a thousand graves with roughly half of those being cremations of various types and the other half being inhumations of various types.<sup>9</sup> This suggests that no neat progression from one clearly defined burial rite to another clearly defined burial rite occurred, and therefore that Snorri's model of linear development has simplified matters considerably.<sup>10</sup> The extent to which such simplification was deliberate, or was recorded in the traditions – oral or written – Snorri worked with is difficult to determine. Regardless, however, the dissonance between text and archaeological practice is itself significant. It suggests that in practice, form of burial could still be a matter of personal choice. Likewise, Snorri's more prescriptive approach to the issue of burial practice allows him to highlight further these moments within his text as especially charged.

---

<sup>8</sup> For a good overview of the major practices see: Neil Price, 'Passing into Poetry: Viking-Age Mortuary Drama and the Origins of Norse Mythology', *Medieval Archaeology* Vol. 54 (2010), pp. 123-156.

<sup>9</sup> Anne-Sofie Gräslund, *Birka IV The Burial Customs: A study of the graves on Björkö* (Uppsala, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> For an archaeological survey of many different types of burial all in one location see the reports on Birka Björn Ambrosiani, and Helen Clarke, eds., *Investigations in the Black Earth: Early Investigations and Future Plans (Birka Studies, Volume I)*, (Stockholm, 1992); and, Björn Ambrosiani, and Helen Clarke, eds., *Excavations in the Black Earth 1990 (Birka Studies, Volume II)*, (Stockholm, 1995).

The general style and feel of the text is also integral in drawing attention to the descriptions of death and burial. As will be discussed in greater length in Chapter I.A.iii, the style of the overall text is both clearly descended from the corpus of Icelandic scholarship of the middle ages, and has elements that are individual to this text. The style of writing employed by most sagas is terse and characterised by an economy of language. In *Heimskringla* this is no different; indeed the frugality of the vocabulary is greater than most of the other works produced at the time. Therefore it is significant that at times, considerable effort is made to describe death and burial. Whereas most situations are discussed in the fewest words possible, Snorri still commits the words to describing death and burial, only adding to the significance of such passages in our interpretation of the text.

In this study, analysis will focus on passages drawn from the *Prologus* and the first six sagas of *Heimskringla* which describe the way in which the body of a king or leader was disposed of.<sup>11</sup> The study is restricted to these sagas because they are all firmly set within the pagan period in Scandinavia and the types of burial described above are all pagan in nature. Also, a similar study has been done comparing the representations of the actual deaths of the kings of Norway from King Magnús góði, the son of St Óláfr, through to the reign of the sons of Haraldr gilli in the synoptic histories of the time by Giovanna Salvucci in her doctoral thesis entitled, ‘‘The King is Dead’’: The Thanatology of Kings in the Old Norse Synoptic Histories of Norway, 1035-1161.’<sup>12</sup> *Heimskringla* is a text that revolves around the central figure of St Óláfr and the Christianization of Norway. It is therefore just as important to look at the way death and burial is used and discussed in the pagan period as it is in the Christian because it becomes a discussion of a cultural memory and ideas of their own

---

<sup>11</sup> All of the sagas contained in *Heimskringla* in order: *Prologus*, *Ynglinga saga*, *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, *Haralds saga hárfagra*, *Hákonar saga góða*, *Haralds saga gráfeldar*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Óláfs saga helga* [Haraldssonar], *Magnúss saga góða*, *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, *Óláfs saga kyrra*, *Magnúss saga berfætts*, *Magnússona saga*, *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla*, *Haraldssona saga*, *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs*, and *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar*.

<sup>12</sup> Giovanna Salvucci, ‘‘The King is Dead’’: The Thanatology of Kings in the Old Norse Synoptic Histories of Norway, 1035-1161’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Durham, 2005).

history. Salvucci rejected the earlier period as being dominated by hagiographical and legendary material, saying that only after this can ‘genuine “political-moral” commentary’ begin to be analysed.<sup>13</sup> I disagree with this. It is precisely because so little would have been known about the earlier period that we can see rich discussion about politics and leadership coming through. There would have been greater flexibility in the details of the accounts which would have leant themselves to creating a discussion under the guise of historical fact.

This present study, therefore, is an attempt to understand the relationship between the representations of death and burial and the political discussion of leadership in *Heimskringla*. Are the descriptions of death and burial in the pagan period a reflection of the political turmoil during the pagan period? Could those representations also be a comment on the political struggles of the late twelfth and early thirteenth century when the text was composed? Are they intended to identify the qualities of good and bad rulers as a way of educating the reader as to the qualities of good rulership? Or are they genuinely just historical notes intended to give weight and credence to the information presented around them?

It is, therefore, the aim of my study to locate and examine each example of the death and burial of a king or leader mentioned in the first six sagas of *Heimskringla*. I have identified three broad categories within the text: cremation, inhumation, and hall burning. A few other unclassifiable burials or non-burial exist within the corpus of evidence but, as there are so few and I have limited space, I will not be able to discuss them here. However, they consist of three sacrifices and two exposures.<sup>14</sup> After the evidence for each type of burial is presented, some brief conclusions on what that type appears to be saying politically will be noted. A longer and more in-depth discussion of all the evidence in relation to ideas of

---

<sup>13</sup> Salvucci, ‘“The King is Dead”: The Thanatology of Kings in the Old Norse Synoptic Histories of Norway, 1035-1161.’, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Sacrifices located in: *Yinglinga saga*, chap. 15 and 25; and *Óláfs saga Tryggvason*, chap. 42. Exposures located in: *Yinglinga saga*, chap. 27; and *Óláfs saga Tryggvason*, chap. 63.

leadership will follow. Finally, conclusions and a discussion of what further research should be done in the future will be offered.

Throughout the study many of the questions will be discussed and ideas will emerge inductively through the examples. Much of this discussion will centre around two main themes: that of the conceptualisation of good/bad rule, and the inter-relationship between political and religious evaluations of rulership. Both of these themes merit preliminary comment. First, what constitutes a good or bad ruler and from whose point of view are such assessments made? For this study I will be focusing on qualities of good and bad rulership from the perspective of Snorri and his early thirteenth-century contemporaries, as expressed through Snorri's own text. This is not say that Snorri would have only been capable of understanding rulership, and therefore assessing and writing about it, from his contemporary perspective. There is every possibility that Snorri, and by extension his audience, would have been sensitive to and aware of changing standards of good and bad rulership across time, a change made all the more perceptible due to the need to reconcile a pagan past with a Christian present. Two broad qualities seem to have lain at the heart of good rulership, for Snorri. First was the idea that a good ruler brings peace and prosperity. Such reflected an assessment of a ruler from an internal perspective within his territory. Set against this, however, is the second quality, and that is martial success. This presents rulership from an external perspective, whereby the mark of a good ruler is one who expands and achieves success against his foes. The two could overlap, of course, and interacted in complex ways, and part of successful rulership could be seen in pacifying troublesome regions. Whether morality figures in Snorri's articulation of good/bad rulership is harder to say. Political success – the twin virtues of peace and martial prowess – do seem more important to Snorri than abstract moral consideration. But religion, or more specifically, religious identity, does have its own role to play within constructions of good and bad rulers. The inter-relation of

political qualities and religious identity remains complex throughout the text, as will be seen clearly in discussion of the death of Jarl Hákon in Chapter II, and this relationship evades simple description.

There has been a great deal of research undertaken in multiple fields on both the pagan period in Norway and in Iceland, as well as the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth century. It is intended here to outline very briefly some of the major trends and works in relation to *Heimskringla*, along with the themes which will form the framework for discussion in this thesis. *Heimskringla* is probably the most well known of the collections of kings' sagas, and for good reason. It covers a vast amount of time, starting in the mythical past and finishing in 1177, and does so in an informative and engaging way. Many historians have looked to *Heimskringla* not so much for its own inherent qualities as a text, but instead as an example or a case study when discussing the more general questions of the reliability of mediaeval texts and their relationship to the time period in which they were produced. *Heimskringla* is a rich source for many different subjects. It has been used to discuss the sorts of texts in existence at the time by tracking the sources used for its creation.<sup>15</sup> It has been used to discuss the politics and society of both the time and of the supposed author Snorri Sturluson.<sup>16</sup> Historians have used it as a source for the conversion of Scandinavia.<sup>17</sup> There

---

<sup>15</sup> Theodore M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey* (New Haven, 1964), and also, 'The Oral Sources of Óláfs saga helga in *Heimskringla*', in *Saga-Book*, vol. XXXII (2008) pp. 5-38; Shami Ghosh, *Kings' Sagas and Norwegian History: Problems and Perspectives* (Leiden, 2011); John Kennedy, *Translating the Sagas: Two Hundred Years of Challenge and Response* (Turnhout, 2007); Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf, eds., *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing* (Copenhagen, 2008); Arnved Nedkvitne, *The Social Consequences of Literacy in Medieval Scandinavia* (Turnhout, 2004); Hermann Pálsson, *Oral Tradition and Saga Writing* (Wien, 1999); Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, eds., *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross* (Turnhout, 2007); and, Slavica Ranković, Leidulf Melve, and Else Mundal eds., *Along the oral-written continuum: types of texts, relations, and their implications* (Turnhout, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Theodore M. Andersson, 'The Politics of Snorri Sturluson', in *The journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 93, no. 1 (1994), pp. 55-78; Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's 'Heimskringla'* (Berkeley, 1991), and also, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway, c. 900 – 1350* (Copenhagen, 2010); Patricia Pires Boulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway* (Leiden, 2005); Jesse L. Byock, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power* (Berkeley, 1988); Shami Ghosh, *King's Sagas and Norwegian History: Problems and Perspectives* (Leiden, 2011); Steinar Imsen, ed., *The Norwegian Domination and the Norse World c.1100 – 1400* (Trondheim, 2010); and, Gro Steinsland, et al, eds.,

has also been extensive work done on the period depicted in the sagas. There are numerous archaeological surveys or discussions of settlement and burial sites throughout Scandinavia and the North Atlantic regions.<sup>18</sup> Broad studies of the ideas and rituals surrounding death have also been produced in great numbers, and are very helpful in connecting the literary depictions with the physical evidence unearthed by archaeologists.<sup>19</sup> But there has been virtually no discussion, particularly in English, about death and burial in *Heimskringla* itself.

The first six sagas provide a rich harvest of material from which to approach a study of depictions and representations of death and burial. I have identified ninety chapters in which death and burial are mentioned. In those ninety chapters there are about one hundred and sixty-two deaths.<sup>20</sup> Of those deaths there are eight examples of cremation, twenty-six of inhumation, twenty-five specific examples of a mound being built over either a cremation or an inhumation site, five cases of memorial stones being raised, five instances when objects are included in a burial, twelve hall burnings, three sacrifices, one ship burial, and one body

---

*Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes* (Leiden, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Theodore M. Andersson, 'The Conversion of Norway according to Oddr Snorrason and Snorri Sturluson', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* vol. 10 (1977) pp. 83-95; and, Brigit and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: from conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500* (Minneapolis, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Jesse Byock, Phillip Walker, Jon Erlandson, Per Holck, Davide Zori, Magnús Guðmundsson, and Mark Tveskov, 'A Viking-Age Valley in Iceland: The Mosfell Archaeological Project', *Medieval Archaeology: Journal of the Society for Medieval Archaeology*, Vol. XLIX, 2005, pp. 195-218; Adolf Friðriksson, *Sagas and Popular Antiquarianism in Icelandic Archaeology* (Aldershot, 1994); Lotte Hedeager, *Iron Age Myth and Materiality: An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400 – 1000* (Abingdon, 2011); Per Holck, 'The Skeleton from the Gokstad Ship: New Evaluation of an Old Find', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2009), pp. 40-49; Shannon Lewis-Simpson, ed., *Vinland Revisited: The Norse World at the Turn of the First Millennium* (St. John's, 2003); Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide, and Steinar Gulliksen, 'First Generation Christians, Second Generation Radiocarbon Dates: The Cemetery at St. Clement's in Oslo', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1, (2007), pp. 1-25; Neil Price, 'Passing into Poetry: Viking-Age Mortuary Drama and the Origins of Norse Mythology', *Medieval Archaeology* Vol. 54 (2010), pp. 123-156; Martin Rundkvist, *Mead-halls of the Eastern Geats: Elite Settlements and Political Geography AD 375 – 1000 in Östergötland, Sweden* (Stockholm, 2011); and, Duncan Sayer, and Williams, Howard, eds. *Mortuary practices and social identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in burial archaeology in honour of Heinrich Härke* (Exeter, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London, 1996); Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1994); D. M. Hadley, *Death in Medieval England: an archaeology* (Stroud, 2001); Mike Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (Stroud, 1999); and, Howard Williams, ed., *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies* (New York, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> There is ambiguity at points on exactly how many people have died.

deliberately left exposed (i.e. unburied). Some of the one hundred and fifty-eight deaths have more than one of those elements, just listed, in the description.<sup>21</sup>

In Chapter I the text and the time period in which it was produced form the topic of discussion. I begin with comment on what is known about the text itself, touching on the manuscript history, the issues of authorship and date, the style, sources used by the author, and the various translations and editions published of *Heimskringla*. The discussion of the sources for not only the first six sagas, but whole of the text, is important because understanding what was and was not used in various sections of the overall work may prove helpful and enlightening in furthering the interpretation of the events being depicted as well as the events of Snorri's time that may be being commented on via depictions of the past. The discussion then moves to the context within which the text was produced, looking at Snorri Sturluson, his life, and the Civil Wars in Norway. Finally an account of the conversion of Norway to Christianity and the reasons for it will be given. Following on from that will be the analysis chapters: Chapter II, which will focus on the accounts of cremation burial in the sagas studied; Chapter III, which will look at inhumation burials; and Chapter IV will look at a very different type of burial, namely the examples of hall burnings in *Heimskringla*. Each of these chapters undertakes a close analysis of the depictions and representations of a particular type of death and burial, and aims to connect such representations to wider themes of rulership and legitimacy. Finally, a conclusion rounds off the thesis, and here I will tie discussion of the corpus of evidence to the broader questions raised in this Introduction.

---

<sup>21</sup> For the distribution of the evidence as well as in which saga and chapter they are located please see the chart in the Appendix.

## **Chapter I: The Text and Its Time**

### **I.A. – ‘*Heimskringla*’:**

The title *Heimskringla* is not the original one given to the work, if there ever was one. It is derived from the first line of the first saga in the collection. The opening sentence of *Ynglinga saga* states, ‘Kringla heimsins, sú er mannfólkit byggvir, er mjök vágskorin’<sup>1</sup> [‘The disc of the world that mankind inhabits is very indented with bays’<sup>2</sup>]: thus the title merely means ‘the disc of the world’ or ‘the round world’. There are mediaeval references to a work that is sometimes known as ‘the Lives of the Kings of Norway’<sup>3</sup> or the chronicles of the Kings in the later sagas, but that is as close to a possible original title as we get.<sup>4</sup> *Heimskringla* was first used as the title for the edition by Johan Peringsköld in 1697, and conveniently it does fit with the overall scope of the work.<sup>5</sup>

*Heimskringla* consists of sixteen sagas and a *Prologus*. All the sagas except for the first are sagas of individual kings, or of joint kings.<sup>6</sup> The *Prologus*, which does not survive in all the manuscripts, starts by setting out briefly the author’s sources, key historical points including the history of burial customs, and a brief history of the scholars of Iceland. Next follows *Ynglinga saga*, which starts with a very wide scope describing the world, the locations of the continents, and a description of the peoples and animals living within the world’s various regions. The beginning of the true narrative portion of the text starts with the

---

<sup>1</sup> Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, in *Íslensk Fornrit XXVI* (Reykjavík, 1941) [Here after referred to as *ÍF*] p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla Volume I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, trans by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, 2011) [Here after referred to as *VSNR*] p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Such as in *Orkneyinga Saga*, chapter 21. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Orkneyinga Saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney* (London, 1978) p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> Diana Whaley notes that: ‘There are other mediaeval references to sagas of Norwegian kings, in *Orkneyinga saga* ch. 21, *Knýtlinga saga* chs 1, 21, 22 and 124, *Þórðar saga hreðu* ch. 1 and *Flateyjarbók* I 152, 217 and III 469. The precise wording of the references varies. *Í ævi Noregskonunga* is commonest, but *í ævisögu* / *ævisögum* / *sögum* / *bók Noregskonunga*...’ *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> For more on this edition and where it falls in the overall history of translations and editions of *Heimskringla* see the following sub-section ‘Translation and Editions’ in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Such as the later sagas that contain the history of multiple brothers who all ruled simultaneously. Such as *Magnússona saga* and *Haraldssona saga*.



leader of the Æsir,<sup>7</sup> Óðinn, going forth and finding new lands, thus setting up the ideal against which all subsequent leaders will be judged. The rest of *Ynglinga saga* describes the legendary roots of the Norwegian royal line from Óðinn in Sweden up to the reign of Hálfðan svarti. Much of what is contained in *Ynglinga saga* comes from the 9<sup>th</sup> century skaldic poem *Ynglingatal* which is essentially a list of the kings along with a record of their deaths and burials, but Snorri has taken some of these and used them for his own purpose. I shall not be focusing as much on the skaldic poetry as the prose because not all of the passages being discussed in this thesis are accompanied by poetry.<sup>8</sup> However, the mere fact that some do and some do not have skaldic accompanying them is significant as a tool to see how Snorri is manipulating his sources for his own literary and historical aims. Then follow the individual, king-specific sagas:<sup>9</sup> *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, *Haralds saga hárfagra* [c.868-931], *Hákonar saga góða* [c.933-960], *Haralds saga gráfeldar* [c.961-970], *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* [c.995-1000], *Óláfs saga helga* [Haraldssonar] [1015-30], *Magnúss saga góða* [1035-47], *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* [1046-66], *Óláfs saga kyrra* [1067-93], *Magnúss saga berfætts* [1093-1103], *Magnússona saga* [1103-30], *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla* [1130-36], *Haraldssona saga* [1136-61], *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs* [1157-62] and *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar* [1161-84, saga ends in 1177]. The longest individual saga is *Óláfs saga Helga*. It takes up an entire volume in the *Íslensk fornrit*,<sup>10</sup> while the rest are of various lengths

---

<sup>7</sup> The Æsir are one of the groups of gods/mythical figures that were presented in the mythology and literature as being the ancestors of the ruling classes in Scandinavia. The authors of the mediaeval texts approached the pagan past, in particular the gods/Æsir, in a number of ways so as to not conflict with their own Christian beliefs. For more on this subject see: Lars Lönnroth, 'The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (February, 1969) pp. 1-29.

<sup>8</sup> Such as the deaths and burials of Óðinn, Njörðr, and Freyr, *ÍF*, pp. 22-25, all of which are key to the discussion at hand.

<sup>9</sup> Approximate regnal dates in brackets after each saga title. Many of the earlier ones are disputed, but it is helpful to have some idea of when each would have been in power more generally.

<sup>10</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla II*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslensk Fornrit XXVII* (Reykjavík, 1945).

ranging from very brief, such as *Hálfðanar saga svarta*<sup>11</sup>, to moderately long, such as *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.<sup>12</sup>

### **I.A.i. – The Manuscripts:**

No autograph manuscript survives of the text, however it is a testament to *Heimskringla*'s popularity and vast scope that it was never completely lost nor was it drastically altered through copying. It appears, as Diana Whaley points out, that 'there seems to have been a sense that [*Heimskringla*] could be supplemented... but not bettered...' after it was completed in the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Considering the length of *Heimskringla*, the time it would have taken to copy out, and the expense of such a venture, it is remarkable how many manuscripts and fragments do survive. None of the surviving versions of the text are complete, but it has been possible to piece together a full version of what the text probably looked like in the mid- to late-thirteenth century. There are two main groups of extant texts: group K, also known as \*x, and group J, also known as \*y. The earliest of these is from the K, or \*x, group and dates from c.1258–64 and is known as *Kringla*; unfortunately all but one leaf of the original manuscript was destroyed in the 1728 Copenhagen fire. The text was, however, copied in the seventeenth century by Ásgeir Jónsson<sup>14</sup> during a revival of interest in the kings' sagas<sup>15</sup> and these transcripts form the basis for the majority of any Old Norse-Icelandic edition since they are virtually complete. The vellum manuscript of K, from which the paper copies were made and from which the entirety of the K group derives, was not the archetype, but a copy of \*x, which was itself copied from what is believed to be the lost

---

<sup>11</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 84-93.

<sup>12</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 225-372.

<sup>13</sup> Whaley, Diana, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) pp. 46-47.

<sup>14</sup> There are three seventeenth-century paper transcripts surviving: AM 35, 36, and 63 fol. All are part of The Árni Magnússon Collection in Iceland.

<sup>15</sup> Diana Whaley notes that interest in the kings' sagas seems to have dropped drastically by the end of the fourteenth century, but that thanks to the influx of humanistic scholarship into the Scandinavian regions they became popular once more. Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) p. 47.

original. There are a few fragments that also derive from the same grouping as K and they are KBS Papp. fol. nr, 18 (18), 39, and F. 39 and F are derived from \*x<sup>1</sup>, but it is generally thought that 39, c. 1300, is a more accurate copy of \*x<sup>1</sup> than F, which is from the early-fourteenth century. The K texts are usually thought of as being the closest to the original. The other manuscripts are all thought to be less reliable and further from the archetype than those just discussed. This group, known as J or \*y, consists of *Eirspennill* (E), *Jöfraskinna* (J), and *Gullinskinna* (G), along with the fragments AM 325 VIII, 14to and 325 X 4to; all are from the fourteenth century.<sup>16</sup> The only manuscripts to contain all three sections of the text,<sup>17</sup> K and 39, and of the J-group only J has parts one and three. None of the J-group contains *Óláfs saga helga*; it is believed that the copiers were in possession of a separate version of the saint's saga and therefore did not need to copy it out again.<sup>18</sup>

Some textual variation can be traced in the manuscripts of *Heimskringla*. Mostly, the variations consist of phonological, orthographic, synonym, or general grammatical differences.<sup>19</sup> The few more drastic changes to the content appear in *Óláfs saga helga*, as it tended to be copied out separately more than any of the other sagas in the collection.<sup>20</sup> Manuscripts F and those in the J group have additional information from *Morkinskinna*.<sup>21</sup> It is easier to spot these additions as they tend not to fit with the very reasoned and restrained style that the original text appears to have had. Many of the texts that would have been used to make additions are still in existence, thus making it easier for historians to identify said additions. However, it has been an ongoing challenge for historians and philologists to try and understand and untangle the various sources that may have been used in the initial

<sup>16</sup> For more on this grouping see: Whaley, Diana, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) pp. 43-44.

<sup>17</sup> The text is traditionally divided up as follows: 'Part One' contains: *Prologus*, *Ynglinga saga*, *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, *Haralds saga hárfagra*, *Hákonar saga góða*, *Haralds saga gráfeldar*, and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*; 'Part Two' contains: *Óláfs saga helga*; and 'Part Three' contains: *Magnúss saga góða*, *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, *Óláfs saga kyrra*, *Magnúss saga berfætts*, *Magnússona saga*, *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla*, *Haraldssona saga*, *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs*, and *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar*.

<sup>18</sup> Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction*, pp. 41-47.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> *VSNR*, p. xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) p. 45.

composition of the text.<sup>22</sup> The events depicted have roots in many types of source and that they have been gathered and formed into the extensive work that is *Heimskringla*. One final point on the manuscripts of *Heimskringla* must be made: it appears from the many associations between the extant versions of the text with Norway that it was being produced and exported from Iceland for a mainland Scandinavian audience.<sup>23</sup>

### **I.A.ii. – The Authorship and Date:**

The question of the authorship for *Heimskringla* is deeply problematic, and is probably an irresolvable issue. Opinions differ greatly on this point, and I shall try and briefly state the main arguments for those opinions and make some brief conclusions on how this may or may not affect our understanding of the text. The discussion of authorship is here combined with the discussion of the dating of the text because arguments for one are usually connected with the other.

The dating of the text is much more straightforward than many of the mediaeval sagas historians use. The narrative ends in 1177, and the oldest version we have of the text is the single surviving leaf from the c.1258-64 manuscript. Based on its sources, which will be discussed in greater detail below, we can narrow the date of *Heimskringla*'s composition to between 1220 and 1240. By looking at the events of Snorri's life during that time as well as the general events going on in Iceland, it seems most probable that the text would have been composed during the relative peace of the 1220s and early 1230s. Though it must be admitted, much of this dating rests on the presumed attribution of authorship to the chieftain Snorri Sturluson.

The earliest versions of the text, dating from the late thirteenth century, do not refer to any one person as the author. The earliest explicit mention of Snorri as the author of

---

<sup>22</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, trans by Lee M. Hollander (Austin, 1964) p. xxi.

<sup>23</sup> *VSNR*, p. xiii.

*Heimskringla* is from a Danish translation of c.1551 which was done by the Norwegian Laurents Hanssøn. It is argued that he must have had a now lost manuscript from which he derived the attribution, but this assertion is far from conclusive. Hanssøn's translation does not make clear whether the entire text or just the *Prologus* was the work of Snorri; Hanssøn only notes at the end of his own translator's preface that Snorri was the author of the *Prologus* to *Heimskringla*.<sup>24</sup> Another piece of evidence suggesting Snorri's authorship is the attribution of *Heimskringla* to Snorri made by a Norwegian priest named Peder Claussøn, who translated the text into Danish in c.1599; however, as Patricia Pires Boulhosa points out, 'it was only when Claussøn's translation was published by the Dane Ole Worm, in 1633, that the *Preface* was added and the work was formally attributed to Snorri Sturluson.'<sup>25</sup>

There is, on the other hand, indirect evidence that Snorri was the likely author of *Heimskringla*, or that he was at least involved in its production. Snorri was known by his contemporaries and near contemporaries as an authority on the Norwegian kings, as well as to have compiled books on the subject.<sup>26</sup> In *Íslendinga saga*, Snorri's nephew Sturla is said to have gone to stay with his uncle to copy out some great works, referred to as *sögubækur*,<sup>27</sup> which Snorri had compiled. This seems to have happened about ten years after Snorri first went to Norway,<sup>28</sup> thus there is ample time and possible inspiration for such a work as *Heimskringla* to have been completed.<sup>29</sup> Whilst none of this evidence directly states that the text we know as *Heimskringla* was solely composed by Snorri Sturluson, it at least shows that he was active and known for being interested in and creating works that sound extremely similar to it, as well as the existence of a text that could be the one we now have.

---

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Pires Boulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway* (Leiden, 2005) pp. 9-12.

<sup>25</sup> Boulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway* (2005) p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Can be translated as 'saga-books', 'history-books', or 'story-books'.

<sup>28</sup> For more on his movements between Norway and Iceland see the section on Snorri Sturluson's life below.

<sup>29</sup> Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (1991) p. 13.

It is also important to think about at this stage what is really meant by the term ‘author’ in this context. Sverre Bagge describes it thus:

Snorri apparently conceives of his task as telling the truth of the past according to the testimony of the best witnesses, has a vague idea of historical authorship, and copies freely from his predecessors. However, my analysis of Snorri’s chronology and composition shows him as more than a transcriber or compiler and rather as an author with definite ideas as to what to include and what not, and both able and willing to make bold reconstructions and rearrangements in his sources in order to create a coherent history. He is thus more and less independent in his attitude to his materials than a modern historian.<sup>30</sup>

It is, however, completely possible that Snorri was working with one or more scribes during the writing and compiling of the sagas in *Heimskringla*. Indeed, it seems both logical and obvious when certain phrases in the text are looked at carefully that Snorri probably dictated as well as had someone else do much of the copying out. One such phrase can be found in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*: ‘Þat vil ek nú næst rita láta at segja frá íslenskum mǫnnum.’<sup>31</sup> [‘Now I want to have narratives written about Icelanders next.’<sup>32</sup>] As will be seen later in the discussion of Snorri as a historical figure, he did have access to two of the largest and best collections of the written word in Iceland at the time, the seats of Oddi and Reykjaholt. Personally, and for the purposes of this study, I suggest that while Snorri may not have been the only person working on the text, he probably was the person behind its creation and the one dictating the direction it took. Just as easily as one can say that there is no direct evidence for his attribution as the person behind the text, there is also no categorical proof that he was not.

### **I.A.iii. – The Style:**

<sup>30</sup> Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson’s ‘Heimskringla’* (Berkeley, 1991) p. 57.

<sup>31</sup> *ÍF*, p. 328.

<sup>32</sup> *VSNR*, p. 205: see footnote 516 on the same page for Finlay and Faulkes’s take on the passage.

*Heimskringla* has a distinct style, but it is still clearly part of the mediaeval Icelandic written tradition. ‘Saga-style’ is very difficult to describe as it tends to be used to refer to a number of different literary features. Diana Whaley describes it thus:

In its narrower features saga-style is concise, essentially unpretentious in vocabulary and syntax, and sparing with descriptive and evaluative epithets and rhetorical devices... In the broader features of classical saga-style there is again a kind of equilibrium – between scholarship and art, information and entertainment, fact and fiction.<sup>33</sup>

When reading *Heimskringla* it is evident that this description fits well. The overall style of the text is a restrained and logical presentation of the history of the kings as described in the evidence available. It is difficult for modern historians to look at the works produced at this time and think of them as comparable with the works of history being written today. However, I do not think that there is any reason that we can not consider of works such as *Heimskringla* as both entertaining pieces of literature and informative accounts of history.

For the most part the narratorial voice does not intrude upon the reader, and events are presented without lengthy discussion on their nature. As noted by Whaley, the points at which the reader becomes aware of the presence of a narrator are when ancient customs are described or introduced, at which point the tense switches to the past illustrating the chronological detachment of the written words from the events.<sup>34</sup> Vocabulary and wording is not effusive, but what is said is to the point and with just enough depth of meaning to make the text readable and interesting. Many chapters in *Ynglinga saga* can sometimes contain the entire reign of a king in a few brief lines.<sup>35</sup> The reader is given enough information to understand a passage’s significance within the overarching plot, but with subtlety that invites

---

<sup>33</sup> Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) p. 83.

<sup>34</sup> Most obviously in passages such as: *Ynglinga saga* chapter thirty-four: ‘Viðá um Svíþjóð váru í þann tíma heraðskonungar.’ Sometimes it also appears when the narrator is describing a location as it is at the time of composition, such as: *Haralds saga hárfagra* chapter forty-two, page 147: ‘Þeir steinar standa nú þar í kirkjugarðinum, er þá váru í hauginum ok nú var frá sagt.’ *ÍF*, p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> Such as chapters sixteen and twenty of *Ynglinga saga*.

contemplation, such as chapter forty-five of *Ynglinga saga* or chapter forty of *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*.<sup>36</sup> While other writers and compilers in Iceland also employed this style of verbal frugality, its consistency in this text makes it obvious that it was either purposefully executed in such a way as to be different from other works or it was the genuine style of the compiler. An economy of style makes it possible to offer bold statements through careful word choices, deliberate additions, subtractions, and word placements, as for example when Snorri describes Emundr lögmaðr as ‘hann var kallaðr undirhyggjumaðr ok meðallagi trúr’<sup>37</sup> [‘he was called a guileful man and of middling trustworthiness.’<sup>38</sup>] Through this phrase of ‘meðallagi trúr’, Snorri makes his thoughts known on the Emundr lögmaðr, as it is an ironically extreme understatement on the man’s character.<sup>39</sup>

For the most part, descriptions of events and people are passed over quickly. Important events are described in greater detail, but still not nearly to the same extent as other synoptic histories;<sup>40</sup> for example, chapter thirty-six of *Ynglinga saga* where the preparations for a funeral feast and a trap to kill seven other kings is described.<sup>41</sup> Descriptions of individuals are usually located when the king or leader first comes to power, such as in the case of Haraldr hárfagri,<sup>42</sup> or when the king or leader has died. The connection between more descriptive passages and death underscores the need for this study because it is in these situations where extra care is being taken by the author or compiler and thus they invite further reflection and examination. Words and phrases are not wasted in this text, they are used exactly how they were meant to be, and therefore when the time has been taken to

---

<sup>36</sup> Respectively, p. 76 and pp. 145-146, *ÍF*.

<sup>37</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla II*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslensk Fornrit XXVII* (Reykjavík, 1945) p. 148.

<sup>38</sup> My own translation.

<sup>39</sup> For more see: William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, 1990).

<sup>40</sup> The difference between events in *Heimskringla* and *Morkinskinna* being the most extreme. Theodore M. Andersson, and Kari Ellen Gade, trans. with intro. and notes, *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030-1157)* (Ithaca, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 65-67 [*VSNR*, pp. 36-37]. This passage will be discussed in greater detail in the section on hall burnings.

<sup>42</sup> *ÍF*, p. 94 [*VSNR*, p. 54].



explain in greater detail, something significant is likely going on. Similarly, if a statement appears to be overtly curt the author may be making a point through the exclusion of information. As will be seen in the representations of the deaths and burials of kings and leaders, comparisons are made between events through the use of parallels and allusions to previous events. All this points to the importance of analysing depictions and representations of death and burial, for such moments communicate essential meaning within the text.

#### **I.A.iv. – The Sources:**

When reading *Heimskringla*, it would be easy to think that it was a seamless creation of history using only the sources specifically mentioned in the text. However, it comes from an established tradition of writing in Iceland and is therefore fed and influenced by the store of information already in existence. It is impossible to speak about Icelandic scholarship in the middle ages without briefly discussing the progression from an oral culture to a written one. It is believed by some scholars that the roots of the mediaeval works lie in a distant oral, most likely poetic, past.<sup>43</sup> The continuing debate on this subject tends to focus around the nature and accuracy of the relationship between written word and oral past. Many of the authors and compilers of the sagas cite the earlier poetry as their source for the distant past, believing that it is more trustworthy than any other source available. In the *Prologus* of *Heimskringla* it is expressly stated that while the works of other previous ‘historians’, such as *Ari inn fróði*, were consulted, it was from the poems that a great deal of the information for the text was taken and it was, ‘...ritat eptir fornum kvæðum eða söguljóðum, er menn hafa haft til skemmtanar sér.’<sup>44</sup> [‘...written according to old poems or narrative songs which

---

<sup>43</sup> For a brief, but helpful, discussion of this transition see: Gísli Sigurðsson, ‘Oral sagas, poems and lore’, *The Manuscripts of Iceland*, Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds., (Reykjavík, 2004) pp. 1-11.

<sup>44</sup> *ÍF*, p. 4.

people used for their entertainment.<sup>45]</sup> However it is also possible to identify some of the sources used by Snorri in the composition of *Heimskringla* with greater precision.

There are innumerable issues with attempting to identify what texts were available and used by Snorri when he composed his great work. To start with, there are probably many sources that he used which have not survived and those which do have gone through as many hands as *Heimskringla*, if not more, and therefore may look very different to the ones he was using in the thirteenth century. It is also nearly impossible to tell when Snorri is using commonly known facts or stories that had no need to be written down, and when he was creating a new and individual take on the situation.<sup>46</sup>

Unfortunately, there is not time nor space in the present discussion to do full justice to the work that others have done in identifying sources for *Heimskringla*, however I will briefly go through the most important of them. It is helpful to note here that not all of the sources mentioned below are for the six sagas that will be studied here, but I believe that it is both helpful and very important to understand all the works that went into the whole of the text. This is because the themes, ideas, and influences that those sources would have had on Snorri are not restricted to the passages that are directly related to the events being depicted. Ideals, themes, and imagery are not held by the boundaries of chapters, sagas, and reigns. Having a good knowledge of the sources is also very helpful in securing a period of composition for the work and therefore also what Snorri may be trying to comment on. However, attention will be drawn to the ones that probably played the largest role in the sagas being looked at in this study. Snorri's likely sources consist of a few distinct categories, the first of which is other kings' sagas. As would be expected, there are a number of lives of St Óláfr that probably played a part in the composition of the version in *Heimskringla*;

---

<sup>45</sup> *VSNR*, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> For more examples of the issues faced in the attempt to identify sources, see: Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) p. 63.

further, Snorri's life of the saint was probably the very first saga he wrote.<sup>47</sup> One version of the saint's life is the *Oldest Saga of Óláfr helgi*, thought to be written around 1200 and using *Ágrip* as a source. As for Snorri's writing on Óláfr Tryggvason, he probably used a now lost earlier version of Oddr Snorrason's c.1190 life of Óláfr.<sup>48</sup> Snorri also would have known and used *Sverris saga* which was written by Karl Jónsson at the request of Sverrir, during his reign [1177-1202].<sup>49</sup> There are also a number of historical works, sometimes referred to as the synoptic histories, which played a part in the composition of *Heimskringla*: the *Historia de antiquitate regum Norvagiensium*, written by the monk Theodoricus, was written in Norway sometime around 1180;<sup>50</sup> *Historia Norvegiæ (A History of Norway)* was probably composed around 1150;<sup>51</sup> *Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sögum*, another Norwegian work from the end of the twelfth century [c. 1190], and probably the most influential on Snorri's work; a now lost work known as *Hryggjarstykki*, written by Eiríkr Oddsson; and *Morkinskinna* which was completed before 1220. Much of Snorri's information does, moreover, seem to have come from the body of skaldic verse that was constantly quoted in the literature and historical works of Iceland. Snorri must also have gained a lot of insight and information from his trips to Norway, which will be discussed below, when he must have spoken with learned people at the court of the king and the regent. This brief list of some of the sources shown to have played a part in *Heimskringla* demonstrates the effort and scope of Snorri's scholarship, thus making the text all the more impressive.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) pp. 52-55.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 68.

<sup>49</sup> It is also noted by Hollander and Whaley in their introductions that the existence of this work may have been the reason that Snorri's account of the kings of Norway stops just before *Sverris saga* begins. Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, trans. by Lee M. Hollander (Austin, 1964) p. xviii; Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) p. 69.

<sup>50</sup> Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norvagiensium – An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*, trans. and ann. by David and Ian McDougall, *Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series Volume XI* (London, 1998) pp. xi-xiii.

<sup>51</sup> *A History of Norway and The Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr*, trans. Devra Kunin, *Viking Society for Northern Research Volume XIII* (London, 2001) pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>52</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the sources, see: Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) pp. 63-82.

The sources used to for the information found in what we now refer to as *Heimskringla I* consisted of many different types. *Historia Norvegiæ* is one of the only ones mentioned above that covers the legendary period depicted in *Ynglinga saga*, while *Historia de antiquitate regum Norvagiensium* and *Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sǫgum* both start in the mid to late ninth century. Snorri also appears to owe a large debt to the historical works of Ari and *Skjöldunga saga*. Much of the rest of his information for theses earlier sagas seem to have been gleaned from poetical works such as *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*, as noted in the *Prologus*, among others now lost.

#### **I.A.v. – The Editions and Translations:**

As was evident in the discussion of the manuscripts and surviving paper copies of *Heimskringla*, it started being translated from the Old Norse-Icelandic into other languages in the sixteenth-century with Laurents Hanssøn's Dano-Norwegian version of most of the first six sagas in 1550-51, but it was not until the seventeenth century that a printed edition was produced. Johan Peringskiöld printed an edition in 1697 that included both a Swedish and Latin translation. In 1777-83 a Danish and Latin edition was printed by Gerhard Schöning and Skúli Thorlacius; in 1864-68 a Norwegian edition was produced by C. R. Unger, but it took until 1944 for the complete work to be published in Iceland by Steingrímur Pálsson.<sup>53</sup> There are two further Icelandic editions, both in three volumes; firstly Finnur Jónsson's edition from 1893-1901, which was produced in a single volume edition in 1911, and Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson's in 1941-51 for the *Íslenzk Fornrit* series. For this study Bjarni's edition will be used for all the Old Norse-Icelandic quotations from *Heimskringla*. English translations of the text began to appear in the mid nineteenth century with Samuel Lang's *The Heimskringla, or, Chronicle of the Kings of Norway* (1844). This was followed by the 1893-

---

<sup>53</sup> Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) p. 47.

1905 translation *The Stories of the Kings of Norway called the Round World (Heimskringla)* by William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon. In 1932 an illustrated English version by Erling Monsen, with assistance from A. H. Smith, called *Heimskringla or the Lives of the Norse Kings* was published. The two most recent translations are Lee M. Hollander's edition from 1964, and the first of three volumes (the final two are still forthcoming) by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes published in 2011. Hollander's translation, while very good when it comes to the poetry and for the most part maintaining the overall style of the original, can lose some of the readability and feel of the text one gets from reading the Old Norse-Icelandic. Finlay and Faulkes's translation, while incomplete, is clearly intended for close study in conjunction with the *Íslenzk Fornrit* editions. As well as informative footnotes, references to the chapters and pages of the *Íslenzk Fornrit* series are included in the body of the text which makes cross referencing and personal comparison of the translation much easier.

## **I.B. – Snorri Sturluson and the Late Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Century:**

### **I.B.i. – Snorri Sturluson:**

Snorri Sturluson<sup>54</sup> was probably born in Hvammr, western Iceland, in c.1179, to Sturla Þórðarson, or Hvamm-Sturla, and Guðný Bǫðvarsdóttir. Snorri had two older brothers, Þórðr and Sigvatr. From the surviving texts it appears that his family descended from the great Snorri *goði*<sup>55</sup> and the family still held the chieftainship [*Snorrungagoðorð*]. Snorri was fostered, as was common, by Jón Loptsson, a deacon and important chieftain, in southern Iceland at the centre of ecclesiastical and secular learning, Oddi. Snorri married into a wealthy family and inherited his father-in-law's estate in Borgarfjörðr. Through various connections and means Snorri was able to gain power and shares in *Lundarmannagoðorð*,

<sup>54</sup> For more on Snorri Sturluson, see: Theodore M. Andersson, 'The Politics of Snorri Sturluson', in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 93, no. 1 (1994), pp. 55-78. Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's 'Heimskringla'* (Berkeley, 1991). Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> Snorri goði is one of the main characters in *Eyrbyggja saga*.

Reykjaholt, Eyvellingagoðorð, and Skagafjörður in the north. Snorri was thus very powerful and involved as a chieftain, and in c.1216 he was elected for the first time as *lǫgsögumaðr* [law speaker].

In 1218-1220 Snorri made his first visit to Norway, staying with Skúli jarl Bárðarson, the regent to King Hákon Hákonarson. Over the two winters and one summer of his stay, he visited many places and important people, gaining friends, a title (*skutilsveinn*) that meant he was one of the royal retainers (*hirð*), and gifts through his skill at composing poetry. When he returned to Iceland in the summer of 1220 it was under orders from the king of Norway to plead the case of Iceland submitting to Norway in an attempt to resolve a trade dispute between his foster family and Norwegian merchants. He did not make much headway with this task, but he did send his own son Jón *murtr* as a hostage to Norway and made it safe for Norwegian merchants in Iceland.<sup>56</sup>

It is most likely that during the 1220s Snorri worked on *The Prose Edda* as well as on the *Separate Saga of Óláfr helgi* and then started work on *Heimskringla* in the mid to late 1220s, having been inspired and informed by his trip to Norway. It is most likely that the *Separate Saga of Óláfr helgi* was written first and then reworked when *Heimskringla* was started.<sup>57</sup> Snorri was elected as *lǫgsögumaðr* [law speaker] again from 1222-1231 and continued to make advances politically and financially in Iceland, earning himself both respect and enemies. Through the marriages of his daughters, Snorri had gained a great deal of power, but it would be these arrangements that would prove his downfall. The marriages failed and legal disputes broke out between the families. In 1232 Snorri was able to claim half of the chieftainship of one of his ex-son-in-laws, another one of the ex-son-in-laws had been cheated of property, and the last disliked the ambitious nature of the Sturlungs. In 1237-1239 Snorri made another visit to Norway, this time avoiding the now adult King Hákon

<sup>56</sup> For more on this see: Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway, c. 900 – 1350* (Copenhagen, 2010) pp. 87-88.

<sup>57</sup> Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (1991) pp. 52-55.

after failing to convince Iceland to submit. He also does not seem to have been as friendly with Skúli as he had been before.

While Snorri was in Norway, his brother and nephew, Sigvatr and Sturla, fought with two of his ex-sons-in-law, Kolbeinn *ungi* and Gizurr Þorvaldsson, and both the Sturlungs died. Snorri left Norway after hearing of the battle, even though the king had banned him from leaving the country. By 1240 Gizurr Þorvaldsson was in possession of letters ordering him to take Snorri into custody for treason to his sworn liege, King Hákon, because he had ignored the ban on his movements. Gizurr and a band of men, including wronged family and former family, found Snorri and killed him. Snorri's property then reverted to the king, except for the ecclesiastical establishment of Reykjaholt, which the king placed it in the care of Þórðr kakali, Snorri's nephew.

### **I.B.ii. – Norway and the Civil Wars:**

The 'unification' of Norway under King Haraldr hárfagri is a significant point in the text of *Heimskringla*; it is equally important for a discussion of the political situation during the time when the text was composed. Haraldr is said to have gained control of all Norway, although it was really the region we would now think of as Western Norway, sometime towards the end of the ninth century.<sup>58</sup> Denmark was, and stayed, the dominant power in Scandinavia throughout most of the middle ages; Haraldr's attempts to consolidate power under an individual ruler might well have been a reaction to this.<sup>59</sup> Equally important for our further discussion of conflict and the Civil Wars, it is vital to note that there was a struggle for power after the death of Haraldr. In the saga literature there are three main types of pretenders after

---

<sup>58</sup> Sverre Bagge notes that: 'According to the Icelander Ari the Wise in the first half of the twelfth century, Harald ruled from 870 until 931/32. We do not know the evidence for this and consequently cannot trust it, but no better alternative has arisen, so the current opinion is that Harald's unification must have taken place by the end of the ninth century.' Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway, c. 900 – 1350* (Copenhagen, 2010) p. 25.

<sup>59</sup> Brigit and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: from conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500* (Minneapolis, 1993) p. 54-55.

Harald's death, as laid out by Bagge: 'Harald's many descendents who often fought amongst themselves; their rivals, the earls of Lade in Trøndelag; and the king of Denmark.'<sup>60</sup> The situation and the lack of stability in the realm, even though the saga writers wish us to believe that Haraldr was the one to finally unite the realm, echo the events that immediately preceded the writing of *Heimskringla*.

The Civil Wars broke out in the 1130s and were a constant, if not always active, feature of the politics of Norway up to 1240. The period following these protracted conflicts is what many historians refer to as Norway's age of greatness. A good deal of scholarship has been done on these internal Norwegian conflicts, so a brief summary of the events is all that is really needed here. It was common in the Viking Age to have conflicts between leaders, particularly if two sons were both able to gain acceptance from the assembly as king; in such cases an arrangement would be made, either by dividing the land or the power, but, crucially, the outcome would eventually be an amicable settlement after a period of conflict. The difference between those and the conflicts arising after c.1130 is that there was no such conclusion to the events post c.1130; conflict might have gone dormant for a period, but would eventually be rekindled. A number of theories have been offered as to why, but all share the conviction that the Civil Wars were a symptom of a fundamentally different society, compared to the pre-Civil Wars period.<sup>61</sup> At the heart of this protracted conflict was competition over land and resources. The factions and various pretenders who attempted to claim the realm thereafter were not organized in logical ways; support appears to be based around personal connections that could easily shift and change, though not always. Things started with the very first 'pretender', Harald Gille, who claimed to be the son of Magnúss *berfættr*, and continued through multiple generations where more than one son wanted to be

---

<sup>60</sup> Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom* (Copenhagen, 2010) p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 41.



the ruler of Norway, each with a group of men to support him.<sup>62</sup> Factions seem to have stayed roughly the same, although under different names, from roughly 1150 onwards.<sup>63</sup> During the 1220s and the 1230s very little occurred, thus facilitating Snorri's travels and the ultimate composition of *Heimskringla*. However, Snorri would have been aware of the last rumblings of the civil wars through his friendship with King Hákon Hákonarson's regent, Jarl Skuli, who was killed in 1240 as he prepared to rebel against the king. Snorri, having backed Skuli, was then killed the following year. The constant back and forth between the sides is not important for this discussion, and is far too complicated to be described here; what does matter is the situation that emerged toward the end of the period when Snorri was writing, i.e., the 1230s. As Bagge writes, 'The civil wars led to stronger social, geographical, and ideological divisions, which, however, made a more intense concentration of political power possible, eventually leading to greater unity.'<sup>64</sup> It is important to recognise that Snorri compiled his text amidst a context of civil war in Norway coming to a close. Whilst complex, it is vital to emphasise that one of Snorri's aims may have been to present a more or less coherent political narrative of the Norwegian kings, thereby making sense of this ongoing conflict. Further, *Heimskringla* may reflect the influence of an ideological programme, emanating from the royal court, which stressed this 'concentration of political power', and presented a model of Norwegian kingship. As such, themes of kingship, the treatment of rulers, and the ideals and values of good versus bad leadership may have acquired an especial significance for Snorri.

---

<sup>62</sup> For a very helpful description of the major pretenders and the events that followed that first succession crisis see: Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway, c. 900 – 1350* (Copenhagen, 2010) p. 33-46.

<sup>63</sup> Bagge puts the end date for most of these factions as being 1217, after which there was a short period of peace. Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway, c. 900 – 1350* (Copenhagen, 2010) p. 46.

<sup>64</sup> Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom* (Copenhagen, 2010) p. 63.

## I.C. – Conversion to Christianity:

Narratives and ideologies of kingship in circulation in early thirteenth-century Norway were intrinsically connected to wider narratives of the conversion of Scandinavia.<sup>65</sup> It is therefore necessary to conclude with a very brief account of the conversion process, since this process was an element of *Heimskringla*, along with many other Old Norse-Icelandic texts.<sup>66</sup> The text of *Heimskringla* begins in the pagan era and moves through various attempts to Christianize, eventually reaching the life of St Óláfr and the ‘official’ conversion of Norway, and finishing with the sagas of the Christian kings.

Contact between Scandinavians and Christians had occurred for many years, but the real process of conversion seems to have started in the ninth century. For the early years of the conversion Christianity was tolerated rather than accepted with open arms.<sup>67</sup> From tolerance came slow conversion and then eventually formal acceptance by leading figures, but it was not a smooth and seamless process. In Norway in particular, the conversion was anything but immediate. There is archaeological evidence that burial customs started to change as early as the first half of the tenth century,<sup>68</sup> but the complete process of conversion took much longer. In the literature of the middle ages the two Óláfr’s, Tryggvason and Haraldsson [the saint], are credited with the official conversion of Norway, but there is also evidence of the movement of missionaries, English missionaries in the case of Norway.<sup>69</sup> The

---

<sup>65</sup> See: Hans Jacob Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence: Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages*, trans., Alan Crozier (Leiden, 2008) esp. pp. 57-68, on how ideas of royal authority were modeled on images of God as king.

<sup>66</sup> In many of the Icelandic sagas the conversion to Christianity plays a central role in the narrative. In the case of *Heimskringla*, the central role of the conversion is made painfully clear by the length and central location of *Óláfs saga helga* [*Haraldssonar*] within *Heimskringla*.

<sup>67</sup> Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500* (Minneapolis, 1993) pp. 100-101.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. pp. 102-103.

<sup>69</sup> Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, ‘Religions Old and New’, in Sawyer, Peter, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings* (Oxford, 2001) p. 219.

conversion of Norway, and Scandinavia more broadly, is both the cause of and the product of fundamental changes in the character of Norwegian kingship.<sup>70</sup>

### **I.D. – Conclusions:**

*Heimskringla* is a complex and layered text full of information and insights into the world in which Snorri Sturluson lived. As well as telling us about the social and political context of when it was written it demonstrates how he and others around him saw their own rich past. It is not an easy text to work with, as can clearly be seen from the discussion of the manuscripts, authorship, or identifying the sources used, but it is rewarding. *Heimskringla* is not just an account of the deeds of the kings; it is a reflection of the time it was composed, the turmoil in the aftermath of the death of Haraldr hárfagri reflecting the succession crisis to come in the final four sagas. And throughout all of these discussions the theme of death and burial of the leaders involved in the conflicts occupies a vital role.

---

<sup>70</sup> For more on the conversion see: Theodore M. Andersson, 'The Conversion of Norway according to Oddr Snorrason and Snorri Sturluson', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* vol. 10 (1977) pp. 83-95. Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway, c. 900 – 1350* (Copenhagen, 2010) pp. 21-40. Stefan Brink, 'Christianisation and the Emergence of the Early Church in Scandinavia', in Brink, Stefan, and Price, Neil, eds. *The Viking World* (London, 2012) pp. 621-628. Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford, 2003) pp. 463-488. Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500* (Minneapolis, 1993) pp. 100-108. Peter Sawyer, 'The process of Scandinavian Christianization in the tenth and eleventh centuries', *The Christianization of Scandinavia: Report of a Symposium held at Kungälv, Sweden 4 -9 August 1985*, eds. Sawyer, Brigit and Peter, and Ian Wood, (Alingsås, 1987) pp. 68-87. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Religions Old and New', in Sawyer, Peter, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings* (Oxford, 2001) pp. 202-224.

## **Chapter II: Cremation Burial in *Heimskringla***

### **II.A. – Introduction:**

In this chapter, discussion of the moral and political interpretation of the descriptions of pagan burial practice in *Heimskringla* will focus on the most obvious and, in many ways, the most iconic form of burial associated with pre-Christian Scandinavia: cremation burial. As already stated in the Introduction, the *Prologus* draws attention to the matters of death and burial in the text. It describes the separation of the ‘Ages’ into two distinct categories of burial custom; the first is the age of cremation (‘brunaöld’), which continues on after the introduction of the second, namely inhumation burial, which is described as the beginning of the age of mound burial (‘haugsöld’). The assessment in the *Prologus* of how and when the changes to burial practices took place are inaccurate when compared to the archaeological record,<sup>1</sup> but it does show a broad understanding of the ways in which leading individuals would have been buried in the pagan period. This is of particular interest when discussing cremation burials; we know many of the aspects of this rite through scientific analysis, but in the thirteenth-century individuals would have only known them through oral history or what they might have gleaned from opening burials in search of valuables.<sup>2</sup> What the *Prologus* lacks in detail and accuracy, it makes up for by pointing the reader to certain key elements, such as memorial stones, which serve as interpretative clues when reading the text and therefore also possibly for what might be being said when some of those aspects are not present.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide and Steinar Gulliksen, ‘First Generation Christians, Second Generation Radiocarbon Dates: The Cemetery at St. Clement’s in Oslo’, *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1, (2007), pp. 1-25. Neil Price, ‘Passing into Poetry: Viking-Age Mortuary Drama and the Origins of Norse Mythology’, *Medieval Archaeology* Vol. 54 (2010), pp. 123-156. Neil Price, ‘Dying and the dead: Viking Age mortuary behaviour’, in Brink, Stefan, and Price, Neil, eds. *The Viking World* (London, 2012) pp. 257-273. Duncan Sayer, and Howard Williams, eds. *Mortuary practices and social identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in burial archaeology in honour of Heinrich Härke* (Exeter, 2009). Howard Williams, ed., *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies* (New York, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Grave robbing is an old practice, it is even noted in the saga literature. In *Grettir’s Saga* the hero, Grettir, breaks into the mound of Kar. He fights with the dead man, defeating him, and then taking the treasure he had been buried with. Jesse Byock, trans., *Grettir’s Saga* (Oxford, 2009) pp. 50-53.

The other initial passage from the Introduction of this thesis which sets the ground work for the discussion of burial practice in this thesis is chapter eight of *Ynglinga saga*. It is in this passage that the burial ‘laws’ are set out by Óðinn in his new realm. The passage states clearly that the correct burial requires that a person be burned along with his possessions, which he would retain in the afterlife; afterwards, the ashes should be buried or taken out to sea; and for very great and notable individuals, additional memorial stones should be put up in their honour. This is clearly establishing the criteria that the reader should use to assess the standing of the individuals whose burials are discussed in the rest of the text. Through such descriptions the pre-Christian kings and leaders are separated out as either good or bad rulers, though there need not, at this stage, be any direct criticism of the fact that such leaders are pagan.

The idea of the noble heathen, or the concept of Christian authors being sympathetic to their pagan ancestors who had yet to be exposed at any length to Christianity, is not new. As Lars Lönnroth says:

It is characteristic of this theme that a pagan hero is shown in a situation where he appears to be a sort of precursor, or herald, of Christianity, at the same time retaining enough of the pagan ethics to emphasize the difference between the old and new religion. It is, however, essential to the theme that the hero should never have been in close contact with the Christian faith – it is primarily his natural nobility, in combination with his good sense, and a half-mystical insight into the workings of nature, that makes him act as if he were already on the verge of conversion.<sup>3</sup>

There are three main directions that the treatment of pagan characters by Christian authors could take according to Rudolf Schomerus, as laid out by Lönnroth: first, heathens are under the control of the devil or demons pretending to be gods; second, the idea that the pagan gods and goddesses were actually people who became legendary figures that were then turned into

---

<sup>3</sup> Lars Lönnroth, ‘The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas’, *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (February, 1969) p. 2.

gods by the Scandinavians; and thirdly, that the pagan religion that they practiced was just a slightly ‘imperfect’ version of Christianity that was ‘derived from the natural instincts of the human heart and from primitive observations of nature.’<sup>4</sup> The first approach was used mostly by the religious authors, usually writing in Latin, whereas the other two tend to be used by secular authors, such as Snorri. It is crucial to remember these ideas and approaches that a Christian author might have of and to the pagan past in relation to cremation burial because it is the most different from the rites of burial that were accepted and practiced by devout Christians.

There are eight examples of cremation burial in the six sagas discussed in this thesis. This is a relatively small sample in comparison with the corpus of material for the other forms of burial in the text, but this sample is significant in terms of both content and underlying meaning. The majority of the passages appear in the first saga of the collection, *Ynglinga saga*, which portrays what is usually described as the mythological period, with six of the eight cremation burials located in the first twenty three chapters of the saga. There are no cremations in *Hálfðanar saga Svarta*; one in chapter twenty five of *Haralds saga Hárfraga*; none in either *Hákonar saga Góða* or *Haralds saga Gráfeldar*; and the eighth and final cremation is in chapter fifty of *Óláfs saga Tryggvason*.

In accordance with the outline of the *Prologus*, the first and earliest burials mentioned in *Heimskringla* are cremations, and they broadly match the criteria set out in the ‘laws’ of chapter eight. The deceased are burned on a pyre, along with some of their possessions, and some have memorial stones and mounds raised in their honour. About halfway through the first saga the traditional cremations<sup>5</sup> cease to be mentioned. It is not until the third saga in the collection, *Haralds saga Hárfraga*, that another cremation is mentioned and it is quite

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. pp. 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> i.e. Body disposal through burning that are planned after the death of an individual rather than as part of how the individual dies, such as hall burnings where the fire is both the way the individual dies and how the body is disposed of.

different from the previous ones. In this the burning of the body is the cleansing force that breaks a leader out of the spell set by the dead woman, thus marking a shift an interpretative shift with respect to cremation, a point to which I shall return.

## II.B. – Analysis:

The first two cremations are in chapter nine of *Ynglinga saga*, and recount the deaths and burials of the mythological first rulers of the Svíar, Óðinn and Njǫrðr. The description of Óðinn's burial stands out in particular because it follows directly the chapter in which he is said to have given laws instructing the population in the correct way to bury worthy people.

The text states:

Óðinn varð sótt dauður í Svíþjóð. Ok er hann var at kominn dauða, lét hann marka sik geirsoddi ok eignaði sér alla vápn dauða menn. Sagði hann sik mundu fara í Goðheim ok fagna þar vinum sínum. Nú hugðu Svíar, at hann væri kominn í inn forna Ásgarð ok myndi þar lifa at eilífu. Hófsk þá at nýju átrúnaðr við Óðin ok áheit. Opt þótti Svíum hann vitrask sér, áðr stórar orrostur yrði. Gaf hann þá sumum sigr, en sumum bauð hann til sín. Þótti hvárrtveggi kostur góður. Óðinn var brenndr dauður, ok var sú brenna gǫr allveglig. Þat var trúa þeira, at því hæra sem reykin lagði í loptit upp, at því háleitari væri sá í himninum, er brennuna átti, ok þess auðgari er meira fé brann með honum.<sup>6</sup>

[Óðinn died of sickness in Svíþjóð. And when he was on the point of death he had himself marked with the point of a spear and claimed as his own all men who were killed by weapons. He said he was going to go to Goðheimr and be reunited with his friends there. Now the Svíar believed that he had gone to the old Ásgarðr and would live there for ever. Then belief in Óðinn and invocation of him were renewed. The Svíar often thought he appeared to them before great battles were to take place. Then he gave victory to some of them, and others he summoned to himself. Both outcomes were considered good. Óðinn was burned when he was dead, and that burning was carried out most magnificently. Their belief was that the higher the smoke rose into the sky, the loftier in heaven would be the

---

<sup>6</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 22-23.

one who had been burned, and the better off the more wealth  
that was burned with him.<sup>7]</sup>

The description here of Óðinn's death and burial is intertwined with the mythology that Snorri and the other Icelandic authors were familiar with, while also expanding and describing in more detail the reasons specific rites are deemed proper.<sup>8</sup> There are the clear similarities in the descriptions of how one should be buried and the burial of Óðinn, such as the burning on the pyre with many objects proving that he had been a successful and prosperous leader in life and that he would continue to be so after death. However, there are also some very important additions to the proscriptions which had been laid out in Óðinn's laws.

Firstly, there is the idea that certain Æsir could claim people based on how they had died; in this case, those who died in battle or were 'marked' with a weapon would go to Óðinn. Óðinn himself was marked with a spear because he was not dying due to wounds inflicted by a weapon, but through illness because he had been a good and effective ruler who had established his kingdom, made it secure, and therefore was dying in a time of peace. Those who had been claimed by one of the Æsir would go back to the land from which Óðinn, Njörðr,<sup>9</sup> and Freyr all originated, usually referred to as either Goðheimr or Asgarðr, where they and their followers would live forever.

Secondly is the idea that with Óðinn's death his cult became greater; henceforth he began appearing to those who were about to enter battle both to give an omen of victory and to summon great warriors to him in the afterlife. This idea of a heavenly being or symbol

---

<sup>7</sup> *VSNR*, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Snorri in particular clearly had a vast understanding of the mythology as he is believed to have composed the *Prose Edda* which gives one account of the history of the gods and world.

<sup>9</sup> In *The Prose Edda* it says this about Njörðr: 'He lives in heaven at the place called Noatun [Enclosure for Ships]. He rules over the movement of the winds, and he can calm sea and fire. One invokes him in seafaring and fishing. He is so rich and prosperous that he can grant wealth in lands or valuables to those who ask for his aid. Njord is not of the Æsir family. He was brought up in Vanaheim, but the Vanir sent him as a hostage to the gods.' Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans., Jesse L. Byock (London, 2005) p. 33.



appearing to people before important events is one that may be intended as an allusion to Christianity and the eventual conversion of these people.<sup>10</sup> By describing a similar tradition or motif, Snorri may have been trying to emphasize the ideas of a pagan past that, while wrong in the eyes of Christianity, had parallels in a religion which was based around many of the same things but that has not yet been enlightened to the fact that there is ‘one true god’ and not a pantheon of gods rooted in the natural world.

Thirdly, the purpose of the inclusion of possessions in a cremation burial is further explained in the description of Óðinn’s burial. In the burial ‘laws’, it is stated that an individual should be burned with his possessions, and, that he would have use in the afterlife of any wealth he had himself buried during his lifetime. With Óðinn’s cremation, this is explained further: the smoke from the burning of the body and those possessions would not only reflect the status of the individual in life, but would also indicate the prestige/esteem in which the person would be held in the afterlife. Ibn Fadlān’s account of the burial of a Rus leader also depicts many of the same key elements of burial as well as many others which will be discussed later, such as ship burial.<sup>11</sup>

The description of the reign, death, and burial of Njǫrðr is much briefer than that of Óðinn and appears in the same chapter of *Ynglinga saga*. The text reads as follows:

Njǫrðr af Nóatúnum gerðisk þá valdsmaðr yfir Svíum ok helt upp blótum. Hann kǫlluðu Svíar þá dróttin sin. Tók hann þá skattgjafar af þeim. Á hans dögum var friðr allgóðr ok alls konar ár svá mikit, at Svíar trúðu því, at Njǫrðr réði fyrir ári ok fyrir fésælu manna. Á hans dögum dó flestir díar ok váru allir brenndir ok blótaðir síðan. Njǫrðr varð sótt dauðr. Lét hann ok marka sik Óðni, áðr hann dó. Svíar brenndu hann ok grétu allmjök yfir leiði hans.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Such as in the case of the emperor Constantine who, very famously, is said to have seen the sign of the cross over the sun while on campaign with the words ‘In hoc signo vince’, and he went on to win against all odds.

<sup>11</sup> The account of Ibn Fadlān translated in: Angus A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald, eds., *The Viking age: a reader* (Toronto, 2010) pp. 106-110.

<sup>12</sup> *ÍF*, p. 23.

[Njorðr of Nóatun then became the ruler over the Svíar and maintained the worship. The Svíar then called him their lord. He received tribute payments from them. In his day very good peace prevailed and all kinds of such good harvest that the Svíar believed that Njorðr had power over the harvest and prosperity of men. In his day most of the gods died and were all burned, and afterwards worshipped. Njorðr died of sickness. He also had himself marked for Óðinn before he died. The Svíar burned him and wept bitterly over his grave.<sup>13</sup>]

Njorðr, like Óðinn before him, was a good leader who brought peace and prosperity to his people, and therefore also died of illness rather than wounds acquired in battle. Following the pattern put in place by Óðinn, Njorðr had himself marked by a spear to ensure that he would join his predecessor in the afterlife. He too was burned on a pyre, and in this instance the tomb, or the post-cremation stage of the burial at which point the ashes were buried, is mentioned briefly in that his subjects wept there for him.

The above descriptions are of good leaders who ruled well, brought prosperity and good harvests; they were buried in an honourable fashion, and were respected and celebrated by their followers. Their burials were in line with the criteria set out in the preceding chapter and Snorri does not make any explicit remarks on the fact that these are pagan, rather than Christian traditions. Instead the traditions are described in a way which resonates with Snorri's own construction of the pagan past, and in a neutral manner, without judgement. This way of discussing the pagan right of cremation burial continues in chapters thirteen<sup>14</sup>, sixteen<sup>15</sup> and nineteen<sup>16</sup> of *Ynglinga saga*. Whilst the three individuals concerned all died in

---

<sup>13</sup> *VSNR*, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> 'Svíar tóku lík hans, ok var hann brenndr við á þá, er Skúta heitir. Þar váru settir bautasteinar hans. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: En á vit / Vilja bróður / vitta véttr / Vanlanda kom / þás trollkind / of troða skyldi / líðs grímhildr / ljóna bága, / ok sá brann / á beði Skútu / menglōtuðr, / es mara kvalði.' *ÍF*, p. 29; ['The Svíar took his body, and it was burned by the river called Skúta. His memorial stones were placed there. So says Þjóðólfr: And to visit / Vili's brother / a witch's spell / sent Vinlandi, / when troll-kind / trampled – / ale-night's Hildr – / the enemy of men, / and he burned / on the bed of Skúta, / the necklace-waster / the nightmare smothered.' *VSNR*, p. 17].

<sup>15</sup> 'Dómarr hét sonr Dómalda, er þar næst réð ríki. Hann réð lengi fyrir lōndum, ok var þá góð árferð ok friðr um hans daga. Frá honum er ekki sagt annat en hann varð sótt dauðr at Uppsölum ok var færðr á Fýrisvöllu ok brenndr þar á árbakkanum, ok eru þar bautasteinar hans. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: Ok ek þess opt / of yngva hrør / fróða menn / of fregit hafðak, hvar Dómarr / á dynjanda / bana Hqolfs / of borinn væri. / Nú ek þat veit, / at verkitinn / Fjölñis niðr / við Fýri brann.' *ÍF*, pp. 32-33; ['The Son of Dómaldi, who ruled the kingdom next,

different ways, their respective cremations still have similar vocabulary as each other and as the cremations of Óðinn and Njǫrðr. For example, they all use the word *brenndr* and are accompanied by the poetry which Snorri used as his source. Within the context of the passages they are referred to as being good leaders, as is explicitly stated of Dómarr in chapter sixteen, ‘Hann réð lengi fyrir lǫndum, ok var þá góð árferð ok friðr um hans daga.’ [‘He ruled the domains for a long time, and there were good seasons and peace in his day.’], or are thought well enough of to earn the honour of memorial stones, such as with Vanlandi in chapter thirteen, ‘Þar vǫru settir bautasteinar hans.’ [‘His memorial stones were placed there’]. What is of further importance in these passages is that all three of them are ‘supported’ by the addition of the poetical ‘source’ from which Snorri took the information in that chapter.<sup>17</sup>

The final cremation burial in *Ynglinga saga* seems to mark a change in attitude when describing the pagan ritual and its implications about the political worthiness of the leader under discussion. This passage comes from chapter twenty three<sup>18</sup> and the text describes this cremation-burial as highly unusual. In the preceding chapters the fraternal co-rulers over the

---

was called Dómarr. He ruled the domains for a long time, and there were good seasons and peace in his day. Nothing is said of him other than that he died of sickness at Uppsálir and was taken to Fýrisvellir and burned on the river bank there, and his memorial stones are there. So says Þjóðólfr: And I had often / asked the wise / about the end / of the king, / where Dómarr / to the crackling / bane of Hálfr / had been borne. / Now I know / that gnawed by pain / by Fýri was burned / Fjǫlnir’s kin.’ *VSNR*, p.19].

<sup>16</sup> ‘Hon bað konung at gera erfí eptir fǫður sinn... En er Agni konungr var sofnaðr, þá tók Skjálfr digrt snæri ok festi undir menit. Menn hennar slógu þá tjaldstóngunum, en kǫstuðu lykkju snærisins upp í limar tréssins, drógu þá síðan, svá at konungr hekk næst uppi við limar, ok var þat hans bani. Skjálfr ok hennar menn hljópu á skip ok røru í brot. Agni konungr var þar brenndr, ok er þar síðan kǫlluð Agnafir á austanverðum Taurinum vestr frá Stokkssundi. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: Þat telk undr, / ef Agna her / Skjalfar rǫð / at skǫpum þóttu, / þás gæðing / með gullmeni / Loga dís / at lopti hóf, / hinns við taur / temja skyldi / svalan hest / Signýjar vers.’ *IF*, pp. 37-39; [‘She asked the king to hold a funeral feast for her father... And when King Agni was asleep Skjálfr took a thick cord and fastened it under the neck-ring. Her men then took down the tent-poles and threw a loop of the cord up into the branches of the tree, then pulled on it, so that the king was hanging almost up against the branches, and that was the death of him. Skjálfr and her men leapt aboard a ship and rowed away. King Agni was burned there, and that place, to the east of Taurr and west of Stokkssund, has since been called Agnafir (Agni’s Meadow). So says Þjóðólfr: I think it a wonder / if Agni’s men / found Skjalf’s plots / acceptable, / when Logi’s lady / hauled aloft / the great man / with a gold ring, / he who by Taurr / had to ride / the chill stallion / of Signý’s man.’ *VSNR*, pp. 21-22].

<sup>17</sup> For more on the use of verse in *Heimskringla* see: Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) pp. 75-77, and, pp. 119-123.

<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note here that the entire saga consists of fifty chapters; it not at the end of this saga. While I do think this is interesting that the change in attitude starts as early as this, it is very necessary to remember that *Ynglinga saga* covers much more time than any of the other sagas, hence there are more deaths and burials in general in this saga over all.

Svíar, Álfr and Yngvi, killed each other in a dispute over Álfr's wife, thus leaving Álfr's son Huggleikr to rule the kingdom alone as Yngvi's sons were still youths.<sup>19</sup> During Huggleikr's time as king of the Svíar, the sea-king Haki attacked with a great force of men, killing Huggleikr, and took possession of the land.<sup>20</sup> The sons of Yngvi, Jörundr and Eiríkr, were then becoming well known warriors and raiders, even killing Guðlaugr, king of Háleygir.<sup>21</sup> Jörundr and Eiríkr then decided to attack and take back the land that their cousin, uncle, and father had ruled over, and thus they attacked King Haki with a great army. Eiríkr was killed in the battle and Jörundr fled with his men. However, as the text says:

Haki konungr fekk svá stór sár, at hann sá, at hans lífdagar mundi eigi langir verða. Þá lét hann taka skeið, er hann átti, ok lét hlaða dauðum mönnum ok vápnum, lét þá flytja út til hafs ok leggja stýri í lag ok draga upp segl, en leggja eid í tyrvið ok gera bál á skipinu. Veðr stóc af landi. Haki var þá at kominn dauða eða dauðr, er hann var lagiðr á bálit. Sigldi skipit síðan loganda út í haf, ok var þetta allfrægt lengi síðan.<sup>22</sup>

[King Haki was so badly wounded that he realised that his days were numbered. Then he had a *skeið* (warship) taken that he owned, and had it loaded with dead men and weapons, then had it taken out to sea and had the rudder put in place and sail hoisted, and resinous fir-wood set fire to and a pyre made on the ship. The wind was blowing off land. Haki was at the point of death or already dead when he was laid on the pyre. Then the ship sailed blazing out to sea, and that was very famous for a long time afterwards.<sup>23</sup>

In popular culture the image of a burning ship on water is one that is instantly recognizable as a 'Viking' or pagan Scandinavian burial practice. Although iconic, it does not, however, appear often in the literature and is virtually impossible to verify archaeologically.<sup>24</sup> There is

<sup>19</sup> For Álfr and Yngvi, see chapter twenty one, *ÍF*, pp. 40-42; [*VSNR*, pp. 23-24]. For Huggleikr see chapter twenty two, *ÍF*, pp. 42-43; [*VSNR*, p. 24].

<sup>20</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 42-43; [*VSNR*, p. 24].

<sup>21</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 44-45; [*VSNR*, p. 25].

<sup>22</sup> *ÍF*, p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> *VSNR*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> Although many films, television, paintings, cartoons, and modern literature have used the imagery of the burning ship sent out to sea.

ample evidence for ship burials on land, or for cremations that are then surrounded by a ‘ship setting’, or indeed cremations that then have a ship-shaped mound raised over them.<sup>25</sup> Many of these burial sites are located near bodies of water, as can be seen in some of the passages that will be discussed. All of the elements for a cremation burial in a ship on the water are present in the literature and the archaeology, yet they are still rare, which makes this passage particularly important and the probable source for the imagery in popular culture today.

The inspiration for the burial of Haki is very likely the mythical burial of Baldr, the son of Oðinn. In *The Prose Edda*, which is thought to have been produced by Snorri Sturluson, Baldr is described as being Oðinn’s second son; he is wise, ‘the best, and all praise him. He is beautiful and so bright that light shines from him.’<sup>26</sup> Therefore, when he was killed, the Æsir wished to cremate him with great honour. Thus *The Prose Edda* records:

The Æsir took Baldr’s body and carried it to the sea. Baldr’s ship was called Ringhorn and it was the greatest of all ships. The gods wanted to launch it and use it for Baldr’s funeral pyre... Baldr’s body was carried out on to the ship, and when his wife Nanna, Nep’s daughter, saw this, her heart burst from sorrow and she died. She too was carried on to the funeral pyre, which was then set on fire. Next Thor stood up and blessed the pyre with Mjollnir. A dwarf named Lit ran in front of his feet. Thor kicked the dwarf with his foot; it landed in the fire and burned to death. Many kinds of beings came to this cremation. First to be mentioned is Odin. Frigg was with him, as were the valkyries and his raven. Frey rode his chariot. It was drawn by the boar called Gold Bristle or Sheathed Tooth. Heimdall rode the horse Golden Forelock, and Freyja drove her harnessed cats. Many from among the frost giant and mountain giants also came. Odin laid the gold ring Draupnir [Dripper] on the pyre. It had the characteristic afterwards that, every ninth night, eight gold rings of equal weight dripped from it. Baldr’s horse, with all its riding gear, was led onto the pyre.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> For more on ships and their role in life and death, see: Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Birgitte Munch Thye, eds., *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia: Papers from an International Research Seminar at the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen, 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> May 1994* (Copenhagen, 1995); and Erin Halstad-McGuire, ‘Sailing Home: Boat-Graves, Migrant Identities and Funerary Practice on the Viking Frontier’, Elizabeth Anderson, et al. eds., *Memory, Mourning, Landscape* (Amsterdam, 2010) pp. 165-187.

<sup>26</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans., Jesse L. Byock (London, 2005) p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

Haki's burial shares many of these same elements that are listed in the description of Baldr's magnificent cremation aboard his ship. Haki is burned with followers who died alongside him, just as Baldr is cremated with his wife and a dwarf; Haki has the instruments of war included on the ship just as Baldr's horse was included in his cremation; and they both see their death coming and try to prepare or stave off the inevitable.<sup>28</sup> We can even take the analysis further by also noting that both Haki and Baldr were killed by those who had been deemed to be too young and were therefore not initially a threat. Baldr was killed by a piece of mistletoe because 'it seemed too young for [Frigg] to demand its oath' like she had from all other things living or inanimate.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Jǫrundr and Eiríkr, who were the cause of Haki's death, did not become king after their father's death because they were still children, and thus power passed to their cousin.<sup>30</sup> Both the mistletoe and the brothers became threats after their initial dismissal. The similarities between the death of a Baldr and the death of Haki seem deliberate; as the probable author of both works the connection between the accounts is even stronger. With this inter-textual reference, and by highlighting a connection between the death and burial of Baldr and Haki, Snorri is cleverly alluding to a moment of central significance: the beginning of the end of the golden age of the pagan Æsir.

The death of Baldr marks a turning point in the mythology of the gods. Baldr has prophetic dreams of his own doom and therefore the Æsir get all living and inanimate things in the world to promise not to hurt him,<sup>31</sup> with only mistletoe excluded from this oath

---

<sup>28</sup> '...Baldr the Good had a series of ominous dreams; he saw his life threatened. When he told the Æsir about his dreams, they took council and decided to seek a truce for Baldr, protecting him from all dangers. Frigg took oaths that Baldr would not be harmed by water and fire, iron and all kinds of metal, stones, the earth, trees, diseases, animals, birds, poisons and snakes. When this was done and became known, Baldr and the Æsir took to amusing themselves by having Baldr stand in front of all the others at the assembly while some would shoot at him, some would strike blows, and some would hit him with stones. Whatever was done caused him no injury, and all thought this remarkable.' Ibid., p. 65

<sup>29</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, (2005), p. 66.

<sup>30</sup> 'Hugleikr hét sonr Álfs, er konungdóm tók yfir Svíum eptir þá bræðr, því at synir Yngva váru þá börn at aldri.' *ÍF*, p. 42; ['It was the son of Álfr called Hugleikr who became king over the Svíar after the brothers, because Yngvi's sons were still children.' *VSNR*, p. 24].

<sup>31</sup> See Footnote 30, p. 37.

because it was too young to do so.<sup>32</sup> Loki discovers this and gets the blind Høðr to shoot Baldr with a twig of mistletoe, thus killing the god of light. It is said in *The Prose Edda* that:

This misfortune was the worst that had been worked against the gods and men. Baldr's death left the gods speechless and so weak that they were unable to muster the strength to lift him up in their arms. They all looked at one another, and all were of a single mind against the one who had done the killing. But no one could take vengeance because the place was deeply revered as a sanctuary. When the Æsir first tried to speak, all they could do is weep, and no one could form words to tell the others of his grief. Odin suffered most from this misfortune. This was because he understood most clearly how grievous was the loss, and that the death of Baldr was ruin for the Æsir.<sup>33</sup>

The final two sentences are the most important of this passage because they alert the reader to the connection between the death of Baldr and Ragnarok. Baldr must die because he, along with Hod, will then return from the world of the dead after Ragnarok so that the world can be reborn. Baldr's death is the harbinger of the end of the time of the Æsir, when they will all fight and die. His death is not the decisive action that changes everything instantaneously, but instead with his passing to the realms to the dead [Hel], the tide changes for the Æsir.<sup>34</sup>

In the case of Haki, his death seems to be marking the end of an age of frequent and accepted pagan burial via cremation. After this extravagant burial at sea there are only two more cremation 'burials'<sup>35</sup> and they have very different tones, as well as being somewhat removed from these early ones within the overall text of *Heimskringla*. The similarities in the way the death and burial of Baldr and Haki are presented in the two texts makes for a compelling case that the connection drawn between the two individuals was a deliberate

---

<sup>32</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, p. 66

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>34</sup> For another discussion of the passage about Baldr, see: Vésteinn Ólason, 'The Un/Grateful Dead – From Baldr to Bægifótr', Ross, Margaret Clunies, ed., *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society* (Odense, 2003) pp. 153-171.

<sup>35</sup> In these cases, they are probably better understood as body disposals than burials, but this change in view in its' self makes them significant.

choice on the part of Snorri. In both cases there is the unusual, but now iconic, right of being burned on a pyre on a ship on a body of water.

The next cremation, which appears in chapter twenty five of *Haralds saga ins Háfagra*, makes it clear that the attitude towards the pagan right of cremation burial has changed direction significantly. In this instance a good king, Haraldr, falls in-lust with a beautiful Lappish woman by the name of Snæfríðr and marries her. It is said that he ‘unni svá með ærslum, at ríki sitt ok allt þat, er honum byrjaði, þá fyrir lét hann.’<sup>36</sup> [‘loved her so madly that his kingdom and all his duties he then neglected.’<sup>37</sup>]. When Snæfríðr eventually died: ‘en litr hennar skipaðisk á engan veg, var hon jafnrjóð sem þá, er hon var kvik. Konungr sat æ yfir henni ok hugði, at hon myndi lifna. Fór svá fram þrjá vetr, at hann syrgði hana dauðu, en landslýðr allr syrgði hann villtan.’<sup>38</sup> [‘her colour changed not a bit, she was as ruddy as when she was alive. The king sat over her continually and thought that she would return to life. So three years went by, that he mourned her dead while all the people of the land mourned him astray in his wits.’<sup>39</sup>] The power of this woman over King Haraldr did not lessen after her death, but apparently intensified. Finally, Þorleifr *spaki* decides ‘til læknanar’ [to treat, heal cure] the king by using his wit and intelligence by addressing the king in this way:

„Eigi er, konungr, kynligt, at þú munir sváfríða konu ok kynstóra ok tígnir hana á duni ok á guðvefi, sem hon bað þik, en tígn þín er þó minni en hæfir ok hennar í því, at hon liggr of lengi í sama fatnaði, ok er miklu sannligra, at hon sé hrærð ok sé skipt undir henni klæðum.“ Ok þegar er hon var hrærð ór rekkjunni, þá slær ýldu ok óþefani ok hvers kyns illum fnyk af líkamanum. Var þá hvatat at báli, ok var hon brennd. Blánaði áðr allr líkaminn, ok ullu ór ormar ok eðlur, froskar ok pøddur ok alls kyns illyrmi. Seig hon svá í øsku, en konungrinn steig til vizku ok hugði af heimsku, stýrði síðan ríki sínu ok

---

<sup>36</sup> *ÍF*, p. 126.

<sup>37</sup> *VSNR*, p. 73.

<sup>38</sup> *ÍF*, p. 126.

<sup>39</sup> *VSNR*, p. 73.



styrkðisk, gladdisk hann af þegnum sínum ok þegnar af honum, en ríkit af hváru tveggja.<sup>40</sup>

[‘It is not, king, surprising that you should commemorate a woman so beautiful and of such noble descent, and should honour her with down and velvet, as she bade you, but your nobility is less than it ought to be, and so is hers, in that she lies too long on the same clothes, and it is much more proper that she should be moved from the bed and the cloths under her be changed.’ And as soon as she was moved from the bed, then decay and foul stench and all kinds of foul smells sprang out of the corpse. Then a pyre was hastily built and she was burned. Before that the whole body went black and there swarmed out of it worms and adders, frogs and toads, and all kinds of nasty maggots. Thus she descended to ashes, and the king ascended to wisdom and turned his mind from folly, afterwards ruled his kingdom and gained strength, rejoiced in his subjects and they in him, and the kingdom in both.<sup>41</sup>]

The spell the king was under is broken when the body was moved and it becomes clear that she was not what she seemed to be in both life and death. The only way Haraldr could be cleansed of this force which resulted in his ignoring the kingdom and becoming a bad leader was to burn the body. It is when Snæfriðr is disposed of through cremation that the true nature of this woman and her effect on the king is revealed as represented by her body going black quickly and the many horrible creatures that made their escape from her body as the flames consumed it. The passage depicts a moment of enlightenment for King Haraldr who, being the apical figure for the subsequent Norwegian royal dynasty, is looked to as an ideal. The cremation of someone who was a bad influence on a good king shows that the pagan rite has gone from one of honour and a show of wealth and importance, to one that is used to cleanse and free an important leader from evil by completely disposing of the body.

The very last cremation involves an individual who appears in all three of the last sagas considered in this study, from his birth in chapter eleven of *Hákonar saga góða* to his death and disposal in chapters forty nine and fifty of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. Hákon

---

<sup>40</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 126-7.

<sup>41</sup> *VSNR*, p. 73.

Sigurðarson was the son of Jarl Siguðr Hlaðajarl<sup>42</sup> and his wife Bergljót. Supposedly he was named by and after King Hákon góði, as is briefly noted in chapter eleven of *Hákonar saga Góða*.<sup>43</sup> Hákon Sigurðarson would go on to become *jarl* after his father, but would also manage to gain control over a large amount of Norway. He is an important and powerful player in many of the political and religious manoeuvrings depicted in the final three sagas; in some regards he gets more attention than their eponyms, a point which comes across clearly in the discussion of his death and the disposal of his body. In chapter twenty seven of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* we are told of the conversion of the Danish king Haraldr Gormsson by Poppó<sup>44</sup> and how the king then forced him [i.e., Hakon] to be baptised along with all his men who were with him.<sup>45</sup> King Harald also sent *Jarl* Hákon on his way with priests and clerics to convert the people of Norway. But on his departure, *Jarl* Hákon ‘þá skaut hann á land upp ǫllum lærðum mǫnnum, en hann sigldi þá út á haf... En er hann kom austr fyrir Gautasker, þá lagði hann at landi. Gerði hann þá blót mikit.’<sup>46</sup> [‘shoved all the clerics up ashore, and then he himself sailed out to sea... And when he came east off Gautasker, then he sailed to land. Then he performed a great pagan sacrifice.’<sup>47</sup>]. *Jarl* Hákon had been given the chance to be a good Christian, but had rejected it completely, unlike his namesake King Hákon, who was a Christian but had been forced by his people to take part in pagan rituals

---

<sup>42</sup> *Jarl* Siguðr Hlaðajarl is described as ‘allr spekinga var mestr í Nórēgi’ *ÍF*, p. 150 [‘the most sensible of men in Norway’ *VSNR*, p. 88], he also spoke for the king, even proposing him as king to the assembly. *Jarl* Siguðr was also a staunch pagan according to the text, but was happy to negotiate with the farmers and *jarls* on behalf of the king when conflicts arose about the nature of the king’s personal religion and his desire to convert his people to the Christian faith.

<sup>43</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 163-164 [*VSNR*, p. 96]

<sup>44</sup> Poppo also appears in: Adam of Bremen, *The History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Francis J. Tschan (New York, 2002) §2.33, p. 78-9. Articles that discuss the subject of Poppo: Lene Demidoff, ‘The Poppo Legend’, *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, Volume 6 (1973) pp. 39-67; Peter Sawyer, ‘The process of Scandinavian Christianization in the tenth and eleventh centuries’, *The Christianization of Scandinavia: Report of a Symposium held at Kungälv, Sweden 4 -9 August 1985*, eds. Sawyer, Brigit and Peter, and Ian Wood, (Alingsås, 1987) pp. 68-87.

<sup>45</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 259-260; *VSNR*, p. 161.

<sup>46</sup> *ÍF*, p. 260.

<sup>47</sup> *VSNR*, p. 161.

and whose burial is both pagan and Christian.<sup>48</sup> *Jarl Hákon* is therefore the epitome of the good leader who unfortunately rejects the ‘true Faith’ at a time when he really should know better, which brings us to his death and cremation.

*Jarl Hákon*, by the time of his death was losing power in Norway, according to the sagas, for two main reasons: first, he was angering his followers by sleeping with the daughters of rich men for a week or two and then sending them away;<sup>49</sup> and secondly, because of his ongoing disputes with the Danish king after his forced baptism and subsequent rejection of Christianity. It is at this point that Óláfr Tryggvason decides to make his move to claim the kingdom over which he has a right to be king due to his supposed descent from Haraldr inn hárfagri. Óláfr arrives in Norway just as a dispute between the *jarl* and his people is breaking out over a woman ordered to his presence, and whose company the *jarl* wished to enjoy. A group of farmers and men were in pursuit of the *jarl* and one of his slaves, who was called Karkr. The final place where Hákon and his slave hid was a hole in the ground in a pigsty located on the farm of one of his mistresses, Þóra of Rimull. Eventually Hákon’s own slave killed him, cutting off his head and bringing it to Óláfr, who then cut off the slave’s head as reward.<sup>50</sup> After which,

Þá fór Óláfr konungr ok fjölrði bónda með honum út til  
Niðarhólms ok hafði með sér hqfuð Hákonar jarls ok Karks. Sá

<sup>48</sup> Some of the relevant chapters in *Hákonar saga Góða* are: chapter thirteen, *ÍF*, pp. 166-167 [*VSNR*, pp. 97-98]; chapter fourteen, *ÍF*, pp. 167-168 [*VSNR*, pp. 98-99]; chapter fifteen, *ÍF*, pp. 169-170 [*VSNR*, pp. 99-100]; chapter sixteen, *ÍF*, pp. 170-171 [*VSNR*, p. 100]; chapter seventeen, *ÍF*, pp. 171-172 [*VSNR*, p. 101]; chapter eighteen, *ÍF*, pp. 172-173 [*VSNR*, pp. 101-102]; and chapter thirty-two, *ÍF*, pp. 192-193 [*VSNR*, pp. 114-115]. The burial of Hákon will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter III of this thesis.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Meðan Hákon jarl réð fyrir Nórøgi, þá var góð árferð í landi ok góðr friðr innan lands með bóndum. Jarl var vinsæll við búendr lengsta hríð ævi sinnar. En er á leið, þá gerðisk þat mjök at um jarl, at hann var ósiðugr um kvennafar. Gerðisk þar svá mikít at, at jarl lét taka ríkra manna døtr ok flytja heim til sín ok lá hjá viku eða tvær, sendi heim síðan, ok fekk hann af því óþokka mikinn af frændum kvinnanna, ok tóku bæendr at kurra illa, svá sem Þrændir eru vanir, allt þat er heim er í móti skapi.’ *ÍF*, pp. 290-291; [‘While Jarl Hákon ruled over Norway, there were good harvests in the country and good peace within the country among the farmers. The jarl was popular with the farmers for the greater part of his life. But as time went on, it increasingly came about that he was unprincipled in his relations with women. This got so bad that the jarl had rich men’s daughters taken and brought back to him and he lay with them for one or two weeks, afterwards sending them home, and as a result he became very disliked by the women’s kinsfolk and the farmers began to complain bitterly, as the Þrændir are accustomed to do about everything that displeases them.’ *VSNR*, p. 180].

<sup>50</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 297-298 [*VSNR*, pp. 184-185].

hólmr var þá hafðr til þess at drepa þar þjófa ok illmennni, ok stóð þar gálgi, ok lét hann þar til bera höfuð Hákonar jarls ok Karks. Gekk þá til allr herrinn ok æpði upp ok grýtti þar at ok mæltu, at þar skyldi níðingr fara með öðrum níðingum. Síðan láta þeir fara upp í Gaulardal ok taka þar búkinn ok drógu í brot ok brenndu. Varð hér svá mikill máttir at fjándskap þessum, er Þrændir gerðu til Hákonar jarls, at engi maðr mátti nefna hann annan veg en jarl inn illa. Var þetta kall haft lengi síðan. En hitt er satt at segja frá Hákon jarli, at hann hafði marga hluti til þess at vera höfðingi, fyrst kynkvíslir stórar, þar með speki ok kænleik at fara með ríkdóminum, røskleik í orrostum ok þar með hamingjuna at vega sigrinn ok drepa fjándmennina. Svá segir Þorleifr Rauðfeldarson: Høkon, vitum hvergi, / hafizk hefr runnr af gunni, / fremra jarl und ferli, / folk-Ránar, þér mána. / Þú hefr öðlinga Óðni, / etr hrafni af ná getnum, / vesa máttu af því, vísi, / víðlendr, níu senda. Manna örvastur var Hákon jarl, en ina mestu óhamingju bar slíkr höfðingi til dánardægrs síns. En þat bar mest til, er svá varð, at þá var sú tíð komin, at fyrirdæmask skyldi blótskaprinn ok blótmenninir, en í stað kom heilög trúa ok réttir siðir.<sup>51</sup>

[King Óláfr and a large number of farmers with him went out to Niðarhólmr, taking with him the heads of Jarl Hákon and Karkr. This little island was at that time used for executing thieves and criminals on, and a gallows stood there, and he had the heads of Jarl Hákon and Karkr taken there. Then the whole army went there and shouted out and threw stones at it, saying that there should a villain go with other villains. Afterwards they got people to go up into Gaulardalr and get the body and dragged it away and burned it. There was here such strength in the antipathy that the Þrændir felt towards Jarl Hákon, that no one could refer to him by any other name than 'jarl inn illi' ('the evil jarl'). This appellation was used long afterwards. But it is true to say about Jarl Hákon, that he had many of the qualities requisite for a ruler, first of all a fine pedigree, and along with that wisdom and cleverness in managing his rule, boldness in battle and in addition the good fortune to be able to win victory and kill his enemies. So says Þorleifr Rauðfeldarson: We know no greater jarl / beneath the moon's pathway, / Høkon, than you; bush of army-goddess, / you prospered through battle. / You have ushered to Óðinn – / the offered corpses ravens feed on – / nine royal men; this, ruler, / rendered your lands extensive. Jarl Hákon was the most generous of men, but this kind of ruler experienced the greatest misfortune until his dying day. And the chief cause of it happening like this was, that then the time had come for

<sup>51</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 298-299.

heathen worship and heathen worshippers to be condemned,  
and be replaced by the holy Faith and proper morals.<sup>52]</sup>

All of the political and religious disputing that led up to this shameful end for a leader, who was noted many times as being a good one for most of the time he was in power, is clearly showing that the attitude toward paganism has truly changed in that there is no mercy or honour left for a leader who had the chance to be a good Christian and rejected it. The standards of rulership have changed. Gone is the strong association between good rulership and prosperity, as seen with Óðinn and the early cremations; instead, we are presented with a model of bad rulership centred on the rejection of Christianity and *Jarl Hákon's* sexual misadventures. At the end of this passage Snorri makes it clear that this is the end of the time period during which paganism and those who practice it can be seen as good and noble men, and that includes their way of burying people through cremation. As can be seen in the locations of these cremations throughout *Heimskringla* as a whole, cremation has clearly already been phased out for the most part, because now it is only reserved for the worst of the worst, those who misguide the path of good leadership and also reject the now known 'true Faith'.

## II.C. – Conclusions:

In this chapter I have presented and analysed the passages describing the burials of kings and leaders. I began by looking at the the initial description of correct burial practice as presented in the 'laws' of Óðinn, then how the cremations of Óðinn and Njǫrðr are described, and how they fit with Óðinn's laws. Following on from that is the discussion of Haki and his iconic ship burial, which serves as a turning point in the narrative of burial, religion and politics. Henceforth, cremation is discussed in terms of disposal rather than honour with the deaths of

---

<sup>52</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 298-299 [*VSNR*, pp. 185-186].

Snæfríðr and *Jarl* Hákon. Hákon in particular is of interest as he is described, in poetry in particular, as a good king and leader, but his wilful defiance in the face of the advancing conversion to Christianity, and escapades with women, earn him an ignominious end.

One of the questions that I wished to address in this chapter is whether or not there was a change in attitude when discussing the pagan burials the closer the narrative got to the coming of missionaries and the conversion. As can be seen in the above examples, there is a very clear change that occurs in regards to what constitutes a good burial for a good leader in the approach to the conversion, but there is also some ambiguity. The final ‘cremation’ of *Jarl* Hákon notes that it was not because he was a bad leader in a political sense, but instead he was a bad leader in the religious sense. Hákon refused to accept Christianity and that was the reason that Snorri stresses as his downfall. There are deeper implications to this. With the early cremations, Snorri uses his representations of cremation burials to stress the good qualities of the late ruler; these qualities are focussed, not surprisingly, on prosperity and ideas of peace. Given the transformation of the symbolism of cremation within his account, Snorri’s treatment of Hákon, which includes the contradictory scaldic assessment of his rule, stands out as exceptional. It is possible that this episode raises deep questions about the importance of Christianity as a source of legitimacy to individual rulers, and to what extent traditional sources of legitimacy, and even identity, matter? The question is ambiguous with Hákon, and this ambiguity we shall encounter again.

### **Chapter III: Inhumation Burial in *Heimskringla***

#### **III.A. – Introduction:**

Inhumation burials in archaeology are some of the most important categories for understanding the culture and rituals of a group of people. As Howard Williams and Duncan Sayer point out, ‘Not only are graves a discrete context within which human remains and material culture are deposited deliberately in association with each other during a specific period of time and space, but burials are also the intentional outcomes of ritual processes.’<sup>1</sup>

Inhumation burials in the archaeological record show the status and wealth of the individual through how and with what they are buried – which is harder to ascertain from the remains of a cremation burial – but it is more indicative of how the people who were still alive regarded the deceased. In the historical and/or literary context of *Heimskringla*, inhumation burials bring attention to leaders within the text to show the good and bad qualities of a leader through many of the same devices as are employed in a physical burial. Inhumation burials are often accompanied with one or more pieces of additional information: the text sometimes describes what was placed with the individual, whether there was a mound, whether memorial stones were erected, and whether or not such elements were still present at the time of Snorri’s composition of *Heimskringla*.

Inhumation burials appear in twenty-one chapters of the sagas studied in this thesis.<sup>2</sup> In those twenty-one chapters there are twenty-four individuals who die and twenty-six burials. The discrepancy between the two figures is due to one burial containing two bodies

---

<sup>1</sup> Howard Williams and Duncan Sayer, ‘1. ‘Halls of Mirrors’: death and identity in medieval archaeology’, eds. Duncan Sayer and Howard Williams, *Mortuary practices and social identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in burial archaeology in honour of Heinrich Härke* (Exeter, 2009) pp. 1-22.

<sup>2</sup> In *Ynglinga saga*, there are ten chapters with inhumations; *Hálfðanar saga Svarta*, there are two; *Haralds saga Hárðfagra*, four; *Hákonar saga Góða*, two; *Haralds saga Gráfeldar*, one; For the Old Norse see: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla I*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslensk Fornrit XXVI* (Reykjavík, 1941) [Here after referred to as: *ÍF*]. For the English translation see: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla Volume I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, trans by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, 2011) [ Here after to be referred to as : *VSNR*].

and one person who was segmented and buried in four different places.<sup>3</sup> All of the passages have a reference to the location of the burial and many are supported by poetry.<sup>4</sup> While not every passage has a reference to a mound, there are mentions of twenty-four individual mounds in connection with inhumation burials.<sup>5</sup> The vast majority of the references use either the noun *haugr* [a howe, mound, cairn]<sup>6</sup> or the verb *heygja*, *ð* [to bury in a howe, mound]<sup>7</sup> to describe the type of burial. Only one burial uses a different term in the Old Norse, it appears in chapter nine of *Haralds saga Gráfeldar* and it uses the verb *liggja* [to lie], in this case it is intended to mean ‘to lie, be buried.’<sup>8</sup>

### III.B. – Analysis:

Once again we return to the *Prologus*; there it states that the first individual to be buried in a mound, as opposed to being burned, is Freyr, who took power after the death of Njörðr.<sup>9</sup> Freyr’s burial is described in chapter ten of *Ynglinga saga*, and introduces the idea that the prosperity and peace that a ruler has brought to a region can be preserved by keeping the body of the said ruler within the realm, thus conducting an inhumation burial rather than a cremation burial. The passage reads:

Freyr tók sótt, en er at honum leið sóttin, leituðu menn sér ráðs  
ok létu fá menn til hans koma, en bjoggu haug mikinn ok létu  
dyrr á ok þrjá glugga. En er Freyr var dauðr, báru þeir hann  
leyniliga í hauginn ok sǫgðu Svíum, at hann lifði, ok varðveittu

<sup>3</sup> These will be noted more fully later in this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Chapters with poetry: in *Ynglinga saga*: chap. 21, *ÍF* pp. 40-42, [*VSNR* pp. 23-24]; chap. 23, *ÍF* pp. 44-45, [*VSNR* pp. 25-26]; chap. 25, *ÍF* pp. 47-50, [*VSNR* pp. 26-28]; chap. 26, *ÍF* pp. 50-53, [*VSNR* pp. 28-30]; chap. 29, *ÍF* pp. 56-58, [*VSNR* pp. 32-33]; chap. 44, *ÍF* pp. 75-76, [*VSNR* p. 43]; chap. 46, *ÍF* pp. 77-78, [*VSNR* pp. 43-44]; chap. 47, *ÍF* pp. 78-79, [*VSNR* pp. 44-45]; chap. 49, *ÍF* pp. 81-82, [*VSNR* pp. 46-47]. *Hákonar saga Góða*: chap. 27, *ÍF* pp. 181-182, [*VSNR* pp. 107-108]; chap. 32, *ÍF* pp. 192-197, [*VSNR* pp. 114-119].

<sup>5</sup> Again, numbers are here looking at individual mentions of mounds, and therefore the two bodies in one and the one body split into four must be remembered.

<sup>6</sup> Is used as part of place names frequently and in reference to *þing* sites, for further usage of the word see: Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1957) p. 241.

<sup>7</sup> Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1957) p. 260.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.

<sup>9</sup> ‘...en síðan er Freyr hafði heygðr verit at Uppaqlum, þá gerðu margir hofðingjar eigi síðr hauga en bautasteina til minningar um frændr sína.’ *ÍF*, p.4; [‘...but after Freyr had been interred in a mound at Uppsalar, many rulers built mounds as well as memorial stones in memory of their kinsmen.’ *VSNR*, p. 3].



hann þar þrjá vetr. En skatt öllum helltu þeir í hauginn, í einn glugg gullinu, en í annan silfrinu, í inn þriðja eirpenningum. Þá helzk ár ok friðr. Freyja helt þá upp blótum, því at hon ein lifði þá eptir goðanna, ok varð hon þá in frægsta, svá at með hennar nafni skyldi kalla allar konur tígnar, svá sem nú heita frúvur. Svá hét ok hver freyja yfir sinni eigu, en sú húsfreyja, er bú á. Freyja var heldr marglynd. Óðr hét bóndi hennar. Dætr hennar hétu Hnoss ok Gersimi. Þær váru fagrar mjök. Af þeir nafni eru svá kallaðir inir dýrstu gripir. Þá er allir Svíar vissu, at Freyr var dauðr, en helzk ár ok friðr, þá trúðu þeir, at svá myndi vera, meðan Freyr væri á Svíþjóð, ok vildu eigi brenna hann ok kǫlluðu hann veraldargoð, blótuðu mest til árs ok friðar alla ævi síðan.<sup>10</sup>

[Freyr caught an illness, and as the illness progressed people thought out what to do, and they let few people come to him, and built a great tomb and put a doorway and three windows in it. And when Freyr was dead they carried him secretly into the tomb and told the Svíar that he was still alive, and kept him there for three years. And they poured all the tribute into the mound, the gold through one window, the silver through the second, and copper coins through the third. Then prosperity and peace continued. Freyja kept up the sacrifices, for she was the only one of the gods left alive, and she became the best known, so that all noble women came to be called by her name, just as now the name *frúvur* ('ladies') is used. Similarly everyone was called *freyja* ('mistress') of what she possessed, and *húsfreyja* ('mistress of a household') if she is in charge of a dwelling. Freyja was rather fickle. Her husband was called Óðr. Her daughters were called Hnoss and Gersimi. They were very beautiful. The most precious treasures are called by their names. When all the Svíar knew that Freyr was dead, but prosperity and peace continued, they believed that that would last as long as Freyr remained in Svíþjóð, and they did not want to burn him, and they called him *veraldargoð* ('god of the world'), and sacrificed to him ever afterwards for prosperity and peace.<sup>11</sup>]

Freyr, like Óðinn, died of illness rather than in a violent fashion.<sup>12</sup> Dying from illness has no negative sense here, even though death in battle is glorified through exaltation of life (or rather after-life) in the realms of the dead, such as Valhöll; here, illness is instead the marker of an effective leader who had control of the kingdom and brought both wealth and good

<sup>10</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>11</sup> *VSNR* p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> As already discussed in 'Chapter II' of this thesis, p. 31.

seasons to the people. Illness, as opposed to old age, is sudden and can strike down a leader at the height of their powers. Old age can result in an extended period of time where the leader is unable to defend his people properly.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, dying from illness seems to be a literary marker, its historical truth obviously being difficult to ascertain, of a successful leader who was not defeated in battle, nor one who had to hand over the governing of the realm due to the loss of their faculties.

The account of Freyr's burial also seems to imply that the prosperity an individual had brought would leave along with his physical form during the cremation process. In the case of Freyr, it took the people closest to him building a mound for his body and pretending that he was still alive for them to come to the conclusion that peace and prosperity would continue if the body remained. Freyr becomes the *veraldargoð* [god of the world] acting as the worldly equivalent to Óðinn and his realm of the gods and dead. This idea that the body will continue to give the realm peace and prosperity even after the death of the leader can be, and should be seen in connection with the Christian beliefs of saints and relics.

The power attributed to certain individuals and their bodies is not a belief unique to Christianity. Ancestor worship and the acceptance of living beings as gods both in their lifetimes and after their deaths appears in many cultures, such as ancient Egypt with the pharaohs and in ancient Rome with the idea of the emperor gods.<sup>14</sup> In Scandinavia the importance of ancestors can be seen through the importance of burial practices. The location of burial mounds was used as a way of securing the position of the ruling class and making claims to land.<sup>15</sup> There are ideas that the individual 'lives on' in the mound after burial. This

---

<sup>13</sup> As can be seen in the case of Aun; who extends his life by sacrificing his sons to Óðinn and eventually becomes so old that by the time he had sacrificed seven sons he couldn't walk and had to be carried on a chair, by the eighth he was confined to bed, by the ninth sacrificed son 'þá drakk hann horn sem lébarn.' *ÍF* p. 49, ['he had to drink from a horn like a baby.' *VSNR* p. 27].

<sup>14</sup> For more on this see: Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, trans. Éva Pálmai (Cambridge, 2002) pp. 20-43.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the subject, see: Eva S. Thäte, '7. Barrows, roads and ridges – or where to bury the dead? The choice of burial grounds in late Iron Age Scandinavia', in Sayer, Duncan, and Williams, Howard, eds. *Mortuary practices and social identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in burial archaeology in honour of Heinrich Härke*

concept is exhibited in the archaeological record through the placement of objects that were important in life within the grave of the deceased, but also through things like the mooring rock that is associated with the great ship burial at Oseberg.<sup>16</sup> The mooring rock in particular seems to be an attempt by those burying the deceased individual to keep that person tethered to the land.

The idea that something, in this case the physical remains of an individual, is key to bringing protection and prosperity seems to have strong connections with the tradition of relics within the Christian religion. Saints' relics in Christianity, being objects that were either from or had been touched by a holy being, act as a connection to the powers of the individual. A relic could provide healing and/or divine protection for both this world and the realm of death.<sup>17</sup> Places that were lucky enough to have obtained such an object would have the protection of the saint that was associated with it. There are obvious parallels between the desire to obtain parts of a powerful person and the similar idea of saints' relics in Christianity, but for the present purposes, such ideas provide the reader with another way to interpret the values of good leadership. Freyr's burial represents a bridge between earthly and

---

(Exeter, 2009), pp. 104-122; Bente Magnus, 'Dwellings and Settlements: Structure and Characteristics', pp. 5-44, and, Stefan Brink, 'Law and Legal Customs in Viking Age Scandinavia', pp. 87-127, both in, Jesch, Judith, ed., *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: an ethnographic perspective* (reprint, Woodbridge, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Foote and Wilson expand on this thought by saying: 'A corpse might be carried from a house by a special route, and generally it was treated with great care. This was not least because of a common belief in "dead walkers", people who appeared dead and were certainly buried, but who retained their physical form and could return to plague the living, usually with an increase in brute strength and malevolence. Various measures might be taken to help fix a dead person in his grave or in the other world or to aid him on the journey he had to undertake – sometimes both kinds of measures were taken at the same time, since the ancient Scandinavians did not necessarily find the two aims inconsistent. We hear of tying special shoes to a dead man's feet for the march he had ahead of him, and of adding a special mooring stone to the boat used as a resting-place for the man to be buried. It may be noted that the Osberg ship was securely moored by a cable round a great boulder in its mound. Ship-burials and ship-shapes reflect an original notion of an other-world voyage, but they can also express an opinion as to what a man might need in his new life after death – comparable to the horse or weapons or tools that also accompanied him... From the best furnished grave it is difficult not to get the impression that the people who filled them with all kinds of useful and decorative objects were making sure that the dead man got all that he was due and all that might – not necessarily would – be useful to him, at the same time as they displayed an ostentation that would impress their neighbours in this world and put the dead man one up in the company he was to keep in the next.' Peter Foote, and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: the society and culture of early medieval Scandinavia* (London, 1970) pp. 406-407.

<sup>17</sup> Martina Bagnoli, Holger A. Klein, C. Griffith Mann, and James Robinson, *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (London, 2010).

supernatural; the location of a burial becomes a concrete geographical site of power, which with Freyr is explicitly connected with his good rulership, and such sites (and by extension others) become important sources of legitimacy which are linked to a people's prosperity, and their ongoing protection from beyond the mound.

Following on from Freyr's burial and the setting of the scene for the types of meaning we are supposed to take from the descriptions of burials in *Heimskringla*, there are a number of fairly straightforward mentions of inhumations. All but one of these next eleven cases of inhumation in the text appear in *Ynglinga saga*, with the final and eleventh passage appearing in *Hálfðanar saga Svarta*. Of those eleven there are four cases of leaders dying from illness, and one from old age;<sup>18</sup> four more die in violent circumstances;<sup>19</sup> one dies when he is

---

<sup>18</sup> All from *Ynglinga saga*: **Chapter 25**, 'Hálfðan konungr varð sótt dauðr at Uppsölum, ok er hann þar heygðr.' *ÍF* p. 48; ['King Hálfðan died of sickness at Uppsálar, and he is buried there...' *VSNR* p. 27]; and 'Síðan andaðisk Aun konungr, ok er hann heygðr at Uppsölum.' *ÍF* p.49; ['Then King Aun died [of old age], and he is buried at Uppsálar.' *VSNR* p. 27]. **Chapter 44**, 'Hann varð gamall maðr. Hann varð sótt dauðr á Þótni ok var síðan fluttr út á Vestfold ok heygðr þar, sem heitir Skæreiði í Skíringssal. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: Þat frá hverr, / at Hálfðanar / sökmiðlendr / sakna skyldu, / ok hallvarps / hlífinauma / þjóðkonung / á Þótni tók. / Ok Skæreið / í Skíringssal / of brynjalfs / beinum drúpir.' *ÍF* pp. 75-76; ['He lived to be an old man. He died of sickness at Þótn and was then taken out to Vestfold and placed in a mound at the place called Skæreið in Skíringssalr. So says Þjóðólfr: All have heard / that Hálfðan was / mourned by all / mediators, / and the goddess, / guardian of the stones / thrown, the king / at Þótn took. / And Skæreið / in Skíringssalr / broods over / the bones of the warrior.' p. 43]. **Chapter 47**, 'Hálfðan hét sonr Eysteins konungs, er konungdóm tók eptir hann... Hann var hermaðr mikill ok var lögum í vikingu ok fékk sér fjár... Holtar á Vestfold var Hqfuðbær hans. Þar varð hann sótt dauðr, ok er hann heygðr á Borró. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: Ok til þings / þriðja jofri / Hveðrungs mæ / ór heimi bauð, / þás Hálfðan, / sás Holtum bjó, / norna dóms / of notit hafði. / Ok buðlung / á Borrói / sigthafendr / síðan fólú.' *ÍF* pp. 78-79; ['The son of King Eysteinn, who succeeded to the kingdom after him, was called Hálfðan... He was a great warrior and went raiding for long periods and gained property... His main estate was Holtar in Vestfold. There he died of sickness, and his burial mound is at Borró. So says Þjóðólfr: And to a meeting / the maid of Hveðrungr / a third king / called from the world, / when Hálfðan - / in Holtar he lived- / reached the last of / his allotted span. / And at Borró / they buried then, / victorious ones, / their warlike king.' *VSNR* pp. 44-45]. **Chapter 49**, 'Óláfr konungr hafði at Geirstöðum atsetu. Hann tók fótarkerk ok andaðisk þar af, ok er hann heygðr á Geirstöðum. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: Ok niðkvísl / í Nóregi / þróttar þrós / of þróazk hafði. / Réð Óláfr / ofsa forðum / víðri grund / of Vestmari, / unz fótverkr / við Foldar þróm / vígmíðlung / of víða skyldi. / Nú liggir gunndjarfr / á Geirstöðum / herkonungr / haugi ausinn.' *ÍF* p. 82; ['King Óláfr had a residence at Geirstaðir. He got a pain in his leg and died of it, and he was placed in a mound at Geirstaðir. So says Þjóðólfr: And the kin-branch, / Óðinn's offspring, / in Norway / had flourished well. / Long ago Óláfr / governed the mighty / wide extent / of Vestmarir, / until leg-pain / laid him low / by Fold's shore, / the fighting leader. / Now, bold in war, / the battle-king / lies at Geirstaðir / laid in a mound.' *VSNR* pp. 46-47]. All Old Norse-Icelandic from: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla I*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslensk Fornrit XXVI* (Reykjavík, 1941). All English translation from: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla Volume I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, trans by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> All are from *Ynglinga saga*: **Chapter 21**, 'Álfr konungr gekk at hásætinu, brá sverði undan skikkju ok lagði í gognum Yngva, bróður sinn. Yngvi hljóp upp og brá mækinum ok hjó Álf banahogg, ok fellu þeir báðir dauðir á gólfít. Váru þeir Álfr ok Yngvi heygðir á Fýrisvöllum. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: Ok varð hinn, / es Álfr of vá, / vqrðr véstalls, / of veginn liggja, / es Döglíngr / dreyrgan mæki / qfundgjarn / á Yngva rauð. / Vasa þat bært, / at Bera skyldi / valsæfendr / vígs of hvetja, / þás bræðr tveir / at bönnum urðusk / óþurfendr / of afbrýði.' *ÍF* pp. 41-42;

knocked overboard a ship;<sup>20</sup> and the last one, which appears in *Hálfðanar saga Svarta*, ultimately dies by his own sword and hand.<sup>21</sup> Of the passages just cited, three discuss the

---

[‘King Álfr went to the high seat, drew a sword from under his cloak and thrust it through his brother Yngvi. Yngvi jumped up and drew his sword and struck Álfr his death-blow, and they both fell dead on the floor. Álfr and Yngvi were placed in a burial mound at Fýrisvellir. So says Þjóðólfr: Then must he too / whom Álfr slew, / guardian of altars, / on ground lie, / when Dagr’s grandson / dyed his sword / enviously / in Yngvi’s blood. / It could not be borne / that Bera should / whet to warfare / workers of slaughter, / when two brothers / brought each other down, / uselessly / out of jealousy.’ *VSNR* pp. 23-24]. **Chapter 23**, ‘Jörundr ok Eiríkr váru synir Yngva Alrekssonar. Þeir lágu úti á herskipum þessa hrið alla ok váru hermenn miklir. Á einu sumri herjuðu þeir í Danmörk, ok þá hittu þeir Guðlaug Háleygjakonung ok áttu við hann orrostu, ok lauk svá, at skip Guðlaugs var hroðit, en hann varð handtekinn. Þeir fluttu hann til lands á Straumeyrarnes ok hengðu hann þar. Urpu menn hans þar haug eptir hann. Svá segir Eyvindr Skáldaspillir: En Guðlaugr / grimman tamði / við ofríkapp / austrkonunga / Sigars jó, / es synir Yngva / menglōtuð / við meið reiddu. // Ok náreiðr / á nesi drúpir / vingameiðr, / þars víkr deilir; / þar ’s, fjōlkunnt / um fylkis hrør, / steini merkt, / Straaumeyrarnes.’ *ÍF*, p. 44; [‘Jörundr and Eiríkr were the sons of Yngvi Alreksson. They stayed out on warships all this time and were great warriors. One summer they raided in Danmörk, and then they met Guðlaugr, king of Háleygir, and fought a battle with him, and the end of it was that Guðlaugr’s ship was cleared and he was taken captive. They took him ashore at Straumeyrarnes and hanged him there. His men raised a burial mound over him there. So says Eyvindr skáldaspillir (‘Poet-spoiler’): But Guðlaugr / the grim steed / -through overbearing / of eastern kings- / of Sigarr rode, / when sons of Yngvi / the ring-waster / raised on a tree. // And, death-laden, / droops on the ness / splitting the bays / the swinging gallows; / there, famous / for fall of the king, / marked with a stone, / is Straumeyrarnes.’ *VSNR*, pp. 25-26]. **Chapter 26**, ‘Þat var eitt sinn, at hann var riðinn á veiðar með menn sína... Griðungr snýr í móti, ok kom konungr lagi á hann, ok skar ór spjótí. Griðungr stakk hornunum á síðu hestinum, svá at hann fell þegar flatr ok svá konungr. Þá hljóp konungr á fœtr ok vill brgða sverði. Griðungr stakk þá hornunum fyrir brjóst honum, svá at á kafi stóð. Þá kómu at konungs menn ok drápu griðunginn. Konungr lifði litla hrið, ok er hann heygðr at Uppsölum. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: Ok lofsæll / ór landi fló / Týs qttungr / Tunna ríki. / En flæming / farra trjónu / jötuns eykr / á Agli rauð, / sás of austmörk / áðan hafði / brúna horg / of borinn lengi, / en skíðlauss / Skilfinga nið / hœfis hjorr / til hjarta stóð.’ *ÍF*, pp. 52-53; [‘It happened one time that he had ridden out hunting with his men... The bull turned toward him, and the king got his spear into it, and the spear-head broke off. The bull plunged its horns into the horse’s flank so that it immediately fell flat, and so did the king. Then the king jumped to his feet and tried to draw his sword. The bull gored him in the chest so that its horns pierced deeply. Then the king’s men came up and killed the bull. The king lived for a short time, and he is buried at Uppsalar. So says Þjóðólfr: And from the land / fled the lauded / kin of Týr / Tunni’s realm. / And on Egill / the giant’s draught-beast / reddened the bill / of the bull’s snout, / having worn / in woods of Sweden / its forehead-peak / for a long time; / the cattle-sword, / scabbardless, / of the Skilfing prince / pierced the heart.’ pp. 29-30]. **Chapter 29**, ‘Aðils konungr var at díablóti ok reið hesti um díarsalinn. Hestrinn drap fótum undir honum ok fell ok konungr af fram, ok kom hofuð hans á stein, svá at haussinn brotnaði, en heilinn lá á steininum. Þat var hans bani. Hann dó at Uppsölum ok er þar heygðr. Kolluðu Svíar hann ríkan konung. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: Þat frák enn, / at Aðils fjörvi / vitta véttr / of víða skyldi / ok dáðgjarn / af drasils bógum / Freys qttungr / falla skyldi. / Ok við aur / ægir hjarna / bragnings burs / of blandinn varð, / ok dagsæll / deyja skyldi / Ála dolgr / at Uppsölum.’ *ÍF*, pp. 58-59; [‘King Aðils attended a sacrifice for the Dísi (goddesses or guardian spirits) and rode a horse through the hall of the Dísi. The horse stumbled under him and fell, and the king was thrown forward, and his head struck a stone so that the skull was broken and his brains lay on the stone. That was the death of him. He died at Uppsalar and his burial mound is there. The Svíar considered him a great king. So says Þjóðólfr: I learned further / that the life of Aðils / a witch’s work / would destroy / and, keen in deeds, / the kinsman of Freyr / had to fall / from horse’s shoulders. / And with soil / the skull’s sea / of the ruler’s son / was blended, / and he had to die, / with days blessed, / Áli’s foe / at Uppsalar.’ *VSNR*, pp. 32-33].

<sup>20</sup> ‘Þá er þeir sigldu inn um Jarlsey, sat Eysteinn konungr við stýri. Skip annat sigldi nær þeim. Báruskot nokkut var í. Laust beitiássinn af qðru skipi konung fyrir borð. Þat var hans bani. Menn hans náðu líkinu. Var þat flutt inn á Borr ok orpinn haugr epti á rōðinni út við sjá við Vqðlu. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: En Eysteinn / fyr ási för / til Býleists / brōður meýjar, / ok nú liggir / und lagar beinum / rekks lōðuðr / á raðar braddi, / þars élkaldr / hjá jōfur gauzkum / Vqðlu straumr / at vági kōmr.’ *ÍF*, pp. 77-78; [‘When they were sailing round Jarlsey, King Eysteinn was sitting at the rudder. Another ship sailed close to them. There was rather a swell. The tacking boom on the other ship knocked the king overboard. That was the death of him. His men retrieved his body. It was taken into Bórro and a mound was raised for him out on the ridge by the sea near the Vaðla river. So says Þjóðólfr: But a

burial using the noun *haugr* [howe, mound] and the rest are described using the verb *heygja* [to bury in a howe].<sup>22</sup> None of these have particularly extensive descriptions of the burial, but it is significant that it is clear what type of burials these are, and that they are connected with certain qualities of the leader, such as martial prowess, bravery, suitable devotion to the pagan gods, prosperity, generosity, and a general impression good leadership.

The next significant burial of a leader is that of Hálfðan svartí in chapter nine of *Hálfðanar saga Svarta*. In this passage the importance of the leader's body as a source of continued peace and prosperity is once again emphasised by Snorri when he describes the dispute over where and how to bury the body, and its eventual resolution. Hálfðan is the first leader to be given a saga all to himself and this is important for how we interpret the passage below. The death and burial of Hálfðan svartí is described thus:

Hálfðan svartí ók fráveizlu á Haðalandi, ok bar svá til leið hans, at hann ók um vatnit Rønd. Þat var um vár. Þá váru sólbráð mikil. En er þeir óku um Rykinsvík, þá hǫfðu þar verit um vetrinn nautabrunnar, en er mykrin hafði fallit á ísinn, þá hafði þar grafit um í sólbráðinu, en er konungr ók þar um, þá brast niðr íssin, ok týndisk þar Hálfðan konungr ok lið mikit með honum. Þá var hann fertøgr at aldri. Hann hafði verit allra konunga ársælstr. Svá mikit gerðu menn sér um hann, at þá er þat spurðisk, at hann var dauðr ok lík hans var flutt á Hringaríki ok var þar til graptar ætlat, þá fóru ríkismenn af Raumaríki ok af Vestfold ok Heiðmørk ok beiddusk allir at hafa líkit með sér ok heygja í sínu fylki, ok þótti þat vera

---

sailyard / sent Eysteinn / to Býeistr's / brother's girl, / under sea's bones / the bidder of men / rests now on / the ridge's crest, / where, snow-cold, / by the Gautish king, / to the sea flows / the stream of Vaðla.' *VSNR*, p. 44].

<sup>21</sup> 'Hárekr bjósk ok hafði hundrað manna, stillti svá ferðinni, at þeir kómu yfir vatnit í óttu til bæjar Haka, tóku dyrr allar á skála þeim, er húskarlar sváfu í. Síðan gengu þeir til svefnbúrs þess, er Haki svaf í, ok brutu upp, tóku í brot Ragnhildi ok Guthorm, bróður hennar, ok allt fé þat, sem þar var, en þeir brenndu skálann ok alla menn, þá er inni váru. Þeir tjölduðu vagn einn allvegligan ok settu þar í Ragnhildi ok bróður hennar ok fóru til íssins. En Haki stóð upp ok gekk eptir þeim um hríð, en er hann kom at vatsísnum, þá snøri hann niðr hjóltum á sverðinu, en lagðisk á blóðrefilinn, svá at sverðit stóð í gognum hann. Fekk hann þar bana, ok er hann heygðr á vatsbakkanum.' *ÍF*, p. 89; ['Hárekr set out and took a hundred men, arranging his expedition so that they got across the lake to Haki's dwelling in the small hours, and put guards on all the doors of the hall that the household were sleeping in. Then they went to the sleeping chamber that Haki slept in and broke into it, carried off Ragnhildr and her brother Guthormr and all the wealth that was there, and they burned the hall and all the men that were in it. They put a covering on a very splendid wagon and put Ragnhildr and her brother in it and went onto the ice. But Haki got up and followed them for awhile, and when he got to the ice of the lake, he turned the hilt of his sword downwards and leaned on the point so that the sword pierced him through. There he met his death, and he is buried in a mound on the lakeshore.' *VSNR*, pp. 50-51].

<sup>22</sup> Cleasby and Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1957) p. 241 and p. 260, respectively.

árvænt þeim, er næði. En þeir sættusk svá, at líkinu var skipt í fjóra staði, ok var höfuðit lagit í haug at Steini á Hringaríki, en hverir fluttu heim sinn hluta ok heygðu, ok eru þat allt kallaðir Hálfðanarhaugar.<sup>23</sup>

[Hálfðan svarti was driving from the banquet in Haðaland, and his route happened to take him driving across the lake of Rønd. It was in the spring. The ice was thawing quickly in the sun. And as they were driving across Rykinsvík, there had been there in the winter a watering hole for cattle, and where the dung had fallen on the ice, there it had eaten into it in the thawing sun, and when the king drove across it, the ice collapsed, and King Hálfðan perished there and a large part of his men with him. He was then forty years old. His reign had been blessed with most prosperous seasons. People thought so much of him that when it became known that he was dead and his body taken to Hringaríki and was going to be buried there, then the rulers came from Raumaríki and from Vestfold and Heiðmörk and all asked to take the body with them and bury it in a mound in their own district, and it was considered a promise of prosperity for whoever got it. And they came to this agreement that the body was divided into four parts, and the head was laid in a mound at Steinn in Hringaríki, and they each took back with them their own share and buried it, and these are all known as Hálfðan's mounds.<sup>24</sup>]

The gruesome description of the body of the king being divided and then buried in four different regions over which he had had control in life is odd.<sup>25</sup> However there are a number of interesting implications to this passage. First, the passage clearly builds on the imagery previously set out in chapter ten of *Ynglinga saga*.<sup>26</sup> Indeed as Steinsland says, '*Hálfðanar saga svarta* looks suspiciously like the work of a historian who wanted to link the Norwegian royal line to the old Svae-traditions about Freyr and the Ynglingar.'<sup>27</sup> It is explicitly stated

<sup>23</sup> *ÍF* pp. 92-93.

<sup>24</sup> *VSNR* p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> In reference to the word *rikismaðr* (-menn), which is here translated as 'rulers', has a slightly more complicated meaning than the English implies. It can mean 'ruler', but in that a person is powerful and usually wealthy as well. It can be used in reference to a king and his power, but it can equally, and I believe it should be taken as such in this case, as a person who has power of a region that is under the overall rule of a king. For more on this and related words see: Cleasby and Vigfusson *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1957) p. 499.

<sup>26</sup> As discussed on pages 48-52 of this chapter.

<sup>27</sup> Gro Steinsland, 'Origin Myths and Rulership. From the Viking Age Ruler to the Ruler of Medieval Historiography: Continuity, Transformations and Innovations', in Steinsland, Gro, et al, eds., *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes* (Leiden, 2011) p. 41.

here that, ‘Hann hafði verit allra konunga ársælstr.’ [‘His reign had been blessed with most prosperous seasons.’]<sup>28</sup>, and that because of this the leaders of each region wished to have him buried in their territory because it would bring prosperity to whomever had a piece. It is reminding the reader about the power of a good leader to continue bringing prosperity just like Freyr did. As usual with Snorri, however, the reference to Freyr is not the only one being made in this passage; there is another level of meaning.

In both *The Poetic Edda* and *The Prose Edda* (also known as *Snorra Edda*), we are told that a being by the name of Ymir, from whom all the frost giants are descended, was killed by Óðinn and his brothers, Vili and Ve, and the world was created from his body.<sup>29</sup> In *The Prose Edda* the forming of the world from the dead body of Ymir is described initially as being broken down into four main groupings:

They took Ymir and they moved him into the middle of Ginnungagap and made from him the world. From his blood they made the sea and the lakes. The earth was fashioned from the flesh, and mountain cliffs from the bones. They made stones and gravel from the teeth, the molars and those bones that were broken.<sup>30</sup>

The text goes on to relate how the sky was created from the skull of Ymir held up by four dwarves representing the cardinal directions, but here, the reference to the body being divided to create a space for future beings to live on resonates clearly with the description of the burial of Hálfðan svartí. As argued by François-Xavier Dillmann, the dismemberment of Hálfðan is contributing to the foundation myth by relating it to the foundation of the world through the dismemberment of an individual.<sup>31</sup> Hálfðan svartí is the foundation on which the

---

<sup>28</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 92-93; [*VSNR*, p. 53].

<sup>29</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans., Jesse L. Byock (London, 2005) pp. 15-17. Larrington, Carolyne, trans., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford, 1999) p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda* (2005) p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> François-Xavier Dillmann, ‘Pour l’étude des traditions relatives à l’enterrement du roi Hálfðan le Noir’, eds. Michael Dallapiazza et al., (Trieste, 2000) pp. 147-56, as noted, in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla Volume I:*



future power of his son, Haraldr hárfagra, will build creating the ‘Kingdom of Norway’ and a strong line of kings. By obtaining and burying parts of his body in the different regions, the author is setting up the foundation and the foundation myth for not only his son but the whole line of kings to follow, much in the way that the body of Ymir becomes the land on which the peoples of the world will dwell and prosper. Steinsland also notes, ‘The traditions about Hálfðan svarti’s many burial mounds thus link the human founder of the dynasty physically to his territory; the area under his rule is identified with the dead king’s body.’<sup>32</sup> The only difference here is that Ymir is described in *The Prose Edda* as being ‘evil’<sup>33</sup> and purposefully killed while Hálfðan svarti is praised and dies through an accident.

The final point to be made about this passage is that it does not appear in the other synoptic histories of Norway that go back to the reign of Hálfðan svarti. *Ágrip*<sup>34</sup> (c.1190) says simply that Hálfðan was feasting in ‘Haðalandi, en þá er hann fór þaðan í sleða, [þá drukkna]ði hann í Rønd [í R]ykinvík, þar er nautabrunnr var, ok var færðr til Steins síðan á Hringaríki ok var þar heygðr.’<sup>35</sup> [‘Haðaland, and leaving there in a sledge he drowned in Rønd in Rykinvík, where there was a hole in the ice for cattle; and he was taken to Steinn in Hringaríki and there buried in a mound.’<sup>36</sup>]. Similarly, the *Historia Norwegiae* (c.1160-75) says that as he was returning from a feast, he ‘was carelessly driven into a break in the frozen

---

*The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, trans by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, 2011), footnote 114, p. 53.

<sup>32</sup> Gro Steinsland, ‘Origin Myths and Rulership. From the Viking Age Ruler to the Ruler of Medieval Historiography: Continuity, Transformations and Innovations’, in Steinsland, Gro, et al, eds., *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes* (Leiden, 2011) p. 41.

<sup>33</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans., Jesse L. Byock (London, 2005) p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ágrip af Noregskonunga sögum. Fagrskinna – Noregs konunga tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, *Íslensk Fornrit XXIX* (Reykjavík, 1985). *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum: A Twelfth-Century Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. and trans. M.J. Driscoll, *Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series Volume X*, gen. eds. Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum: A Twelfth-Century Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. and trans. M.J. Driscoll, *Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series Volume X*, gen. eds. Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London, 2008) p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

surface, where herdsmen customarily watered their beasts, and perished under the ice...’;<sup>37</sup> significantly no mention is made of the burial itself. *Fagrskinna* B-text, written probably c.1220 around the same time the *Heimskringla* was being thought about, also relates briefly that he fell through the ice, died, was taken to Steinn in Hringaríki, and was ‘buried there in a mound.’<sup>38</sup> However, an addition to the A-text of *Fagrskinna* gives a more detailed account (even more than that found in *Heimskringla*). It says:

Then they drove onto the ice on the lake called Rønd. And they came to the place called Røekinsvík. Then the ice cracked under him and under his horse... he perished there with his father-in-law Dagr inn fróði, and some twenty men with them. This was considered bad news by all those who heard of it, for he was a propitious and popular man. And so great had been the prosperity during the king’s reign that as soon as they found his body they divided it up... And they divided his body because they believed that his propitiousness would always remain with him whether he was alive or dead.<sup>39</sup>

If, as the descriptions from *Ágrip*, *Historia Norwegiae*, and *Fagrskinna* B-text seem to suggest, the tradition had been that Hálfðan svartí was buried in one mound at Steinn in Hringaríki then the change becomes all the more interesting. The omission of the story about the body being divided in the earlier texts makes one think that this story came into being for a purpose at a very specific time. Steinsland suggests that, ‘the stories about the division and burial of Hálfðan’s body establish simultaneously a contrast to and continuity with the ideas on St Óláfrs’ whole body.’<sup>40</sup> It may be that Snorri, or one of his near contemporaries was

---

<sup>37</sup> *A History of Norway and The Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr*, trans. Devra Kunin, *Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series Volume XIII* (London, 2001) p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum. Fagrskinna – Nóregs konunga tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, *Íslensk Fornrit XXIX* (Reykjavík, 1985) p. 58. *Fagrskinna, A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway: A Translation with Introduction and Notes*, trans. Alison Finlay (Leiden, 2004) p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> For Old Norse of this passage see: *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum. Fagrskinna – Nóregs konunga tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, *Íslensk Fornrit XXIX* (Reykjavík, 1985) p. 366., *Fagrskinna, A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, trans. Alison Finlay (Leiden, 2004) Appendix I, pp. 296-297.

<sup>40</sup> Gro Steinsland, ‘Origin Myths and Rulership. From the Viking Age Ruler to the Ruler of Medieval Historiography: Continuity, Transformations and Innovations’, in Steinsland, Gro, et al, eds., *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes* (Leiden, 2011) p. 42. For the chapters regarding the movement of St Óláfrs body, its’ protection, and the care employed in keeping

looking to make the claim of the descendants of Hálfðan svarti and his son Haraldr even stronger by painting this picture of power and the right to the kingdom handed down through the line, as well as showing what good kingship will inspire the people to do. This saga is also the only saga out of the six studied here that does not contain any supporting poetry; this may hint at the idea that Snorri was purposefully constructing a foundation myth and therefore was not using or did not have the poetical evidence like for the rest of *Heimskringla*.

The next passage of note comes from chapter eight of *Haralds saga Háfagra* and it depicts the power that Haraldr had built up for himself as well as the importance of ancestral burial in the transfer of power.

Norðr í Naumudal váru bræðr tveir konungar, Herlaugr ok Hrollaugr. Þeir höfðu verit at þrjú sumur at gera haug einn. Sá haugr var hlaðinn með grjóti ok lími ok viðum gorr. En er haugrinn var algorr, þá spurðu þeir bræðr þau tíðendi, at Haraldr konungr fór á hendr þeim með her. Þá lét Herlaugr konungr aka til haugsins vist mikla ok drykk. Eptir þat gekk Herlaugr konungr í hauginn með tólfta mann. Síðan lét hann kasta aptr hauginn. Hrollaugr konungr fór upp á haug þann, er konungar váru vanir at sitja á, ok lét þar búa konungs hásæti ok settisk þar í. Þá lét hann leggja dýnur á fótþallinn, þar er jarlar váru vanir at sitja. Þá veltisk Hrollaugr konungr ór konungshásætinu ok í jarlssæti ok gaf sér sjálfr jarlsnafn. Eptir þat fór hann á móti Haraldri konungi ok gaf honum allt ríki sitt ok bauð at gerask hans maðr ok sagði konungi all sína meðferð. Þá tók Haraldr konungr sverð ok festi á linda honum, þá festi hann skjöld á háls honum ok gerði hann jarl sinn ok leiddi hann í hásæti. Þá gaf hann honum Naumdœlafylki at yfirsókn ok setti hann þar jarl yfir.<sup>41</sup>

North in Naumudalr two brothers were kings, Herlaugr and Hrollaugr. They had spent three summers constructing a mound. This mound was built with stone and lime and timber. And when the mound was finished, then the brothers heard news that King Haraldr was going against them with an army. Then King Herlaugr had a great deal of food and drink driven

---

it intact, see: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla II*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslensk Fornrit XXVII* (Reykjavík, 1945) pp. 393-409; and for the English translation: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, trans by Lee M. Hollander (Austin, 1964) pp. 521-533.

<sup>41</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 99-100.

to the mound. After that King Herlaugr went into the mound with eleven men. Then he had the mound closed. King Hrollaugr went up onto the mound that kings were accustomed to sit on, and had a royal throne set up there and sat in it. Then he had cushions placed on the platform where jarls were accustomed to sit. Then King Hrollaugr rolled himself out of the royal throne and into the jarl's seat and gave himself the title of jarl. After that he went to meet King Haraldr and gave him his whole kingdom and offered to become his man and told the king his whole procedure. Then King Haraldr took a sword and fastened it on his belt, fastened a shield round his neck and made him his jarl and placed him on a high seat. Then he gave him Naumdœlafylki to supervise and set him as jarl over it.<sup>42</sup>

In this passage one brother becomes the 'ancestor' on whose burial the transfer of power occurs when it becomes clear that Haraldr is a force to be reckoned with. Hilda Ellis Davidson describes and gives a wide range of examples of the practice of sitting on a mound, noting in particular the above case as showing that Hrollaugr is showing that he has given up his own power and is submitting to become a vassal of Haraldr.<sup>43</sup> It is also noted that in some instances the 'mound dweller' actually imparts some knowledge or power (in her example from the *Páttir Þorleifs Jarlaskálds*, it is the ability to compose poetry) on the person who sits on the mound, almost passing on the baton to the next generation.<sup>44</sup> The political nature of this burial in particular reminds the reader of the overall purpose of many of these descriptions of death and burial, namely discussion about kingship and legitimacy.

The next significant burial appears in chapter forty-two of *Haralds saga ins Hárgagra* and it describes the internal structure of Haraldr's burial mound and its association with a church.

Haraldr konungr varð sótt dauðr á Rogalandi. Er hann heygðr á Haugum við Karmtsund. Í Haugasundi stendr kirkja, en við sjálfan kirkjugarðinn í útnorðr er haugr Haralds konungs ins

<sup>42</sup> *VSNR*, p. 57.

<sup>43</sup> Hilda Ellis Davidson, *The Road to Hel. A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge, 1943) pp. 105-111.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

hárfagra. Fyrir vestan kirkjuna liggr legsteinn Haralds konungs, sá er lá yfir legi hans í hauginum, ok er steinninn hálf fjoðrtánda fets langr ok nær tveggja álna breiðr. Í miðjum hauginum var leg Haralds konungs. Þar var settr steinn annarr at höfði, en annarr at fótum, ok lögð þar hellan á ofan, en hlaðit grjóti tveim megin útan undir. Þeir steinar standa nú þar í kirkjugarðinum, er þá váru í hauginum ok nú var frá sagt.<sup>45</sup>

[King Haraldr died of sickness in Rogaland. He is buried in a mound at Haugar by Karmsund. In Haugasund there stands a church, and by the very churchyard wall to the north-west is Haraldr hárfagri's mound. To the west of the church lies King Haraldr's tombstone, which lay over his tomb in the mound, and the stone is thirteen and a half feet long and nearly two ells broad. King Haraldr's tomb was in the middle of the mound. One stone was put there at the head, and another at the foot, and the slab was laid on top, and it was heaped with stones round both sides underneath. The stones, which were then in the mound and have just been described, now stand there in the churchyard.<sup>46</sup>]

Snorri here gives such a detailed description of the location and layout of the burial site that it seems possible that he himself saw this location on one of his two trips to Norway. It is also possible that he received a very detailed account from someone, since presumably he had not been present for the moving of the stones from the burial and into the churchyard. Either way, he felt it important that a description of the original burial, and how it was at the time of the composition of *Heimskringla* be included. Obviously, the church was probably built there after the death of Haraldr,<sup>47</sup> but the association of the first king to unite 'all of Norway' with a church would have been an important aspect to the legitimization of his descendents through the idea of sacral Christian kingship, with all of the power and connections that association with Europe brings.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> *ÍF*, p. 147.

<sup>46</sup> *VSNR*, p. 86.

<sup>47</sup> Haraldr hárfagri died c. 931, there had been contact with Christianity and efforts by missionaries before, but no major headway was made in Christianizing Norway until the eleventh century that bishoprics were really being established.

<sup>48</sup> Rory McTurk, 'Scandinavian Sacral Kingship Revisited', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 24 (1994-7) pp. 19-32.

There are two passages that deal with King Hákon góði; the first is from chapter twenty-seven of *Hákonar saga Góða* and the other is from chapter thirty-two of the same saga. King Hákon was, according to the saga, a Christian.<sup>49</sup> He is the first king to be discussed who was brought up Christian, and throughout his saga he attempts to bring Christianity to the people of Norway, albeit unsuccessfully. In the first passage, Hákon buries the men who have died in a battle at Rastarkálfr, including his closest advisor Egill ullserkr:

Hákon konungr tók þar skip þau, er uppi hafði fjarat, er átt hofðu Eiríkssynir, ok lét graga áland upp. Þar lét Hákon konungr leggja Egil ullserk í skip ok með honum alla þá menn, er af þeira liði hofðu fallit, lét bera þar at jörð ok grjót. Hákon konungr lét ok fleiri skip upp setja ok bera á valinn, ok sér þá hauga en fyrir sunnan Fræðarberg... Hávir bautasteinar standa hjá haugi Egils ullserks.<sup>50</sup>

[King Hákon took the ships that had run aground there, which Eiríkr's sons had owned, and had them dragged up onto the shore. Then King Hákon had Egill ullserkr laid in a ship and with him all the men of their forces who had fallen, having earth and stones brought up. King Hákon also had more ships brought ashore and the fallen put onto them, and these mounds can still be seen to the south of Fræðarberg... Tall memorial stones stand near Egill ullserkr's grave-mound.<sup>51</sup>]

This passage is interesting for two reasons. First, it describes how a burial mound was created to cover a ship and the bodies of the fallen; secondly, it shows King Hákon burying mostly pagan men in a traditional pagan way. He made sure that the men who served and fought for him, pagan or Christian, were buried with honour. Hákon's role as an early transitional king between pagan and Christian, one who was not successful in converting the people of Norway but did start the move towards Christianity while also respecting (if not

<sup>49</sup> In chapter thirteen Hákon is described as, 'Hákon konungr var vel kristinn, er hann kom í Nóreg. En fyrir því at þar var land allt heiðit ok blótskapr mikill ok strómenni mart, en hann þóttisk liðs þurfa mjök ok alþýðuvinsæld, þá tók hann þat ráð at fara leyniliga með kristninni, helt sunndaga ok frjádaga fõstu. *ÍF*, p. 166; ['a good Christian when he came to Norway. But because that country was all heathen and there was a great deal of pagan worship and many powerful people, and he felt he was lacking support and popularity among the ordinary people, he decided to practise his Christianity in secret, observing Sundays and Friday fasts.' *VSNR*, p. 97].

<sup>50</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>51</sup> *VSNR*, pp. 107-108.

agreeing with or wishing to partake in) the ‘old ways’, is key to our understanding of the broader purposes for the inclusion of burial descriptions within *Heimskringla* as a whole. Central is the role that burial plays as a marker of an individual’s religious beliefs. This balancing act between pagan and Christian traditions is even more evident in the second passage from *Hákonar saga Góða*, during the death and burial of King Hákon himself in chapter thirty-two:

„En þótt mér verði lífs auðit,“ segir hann, „þá mun ek af landi fara ok til kristinna manna ok bæta þat, er ek hefi brotit við guð, en ef ek dey hér heiðni, þá veiti mér hér grøpt þann, er yðr sýnisk.“ Ok litlu síðar andaðisk Hákon konungr þar á hellunni, sem hann hafði fœddr verit. Hákon konungr var svá mjök harmaðr, at bæði vinir ok óvinir grétu dauða hans ok kǫlluðu, at eigi myndi jafngóðr konungr koma síðan í Nóreg. Vinir hans fluttu lík hans norðr á Sæheim á Norðr-Hǫrðaland ok urpu þar haug mikinn ok lǫðu þar í konung með alvæpni sitt ok inn bezta búnað sinn, en ekki fé annat. Mæltu þeir svá fyrir grepti hans sem heiðinna manna siðr var til, vísuðu honum til Valhallar.<sup>52</sup>

[‘And even if it be granted me to live,’ he says, ‘I will still go from this country to be among Christian people and atone for what I have done to offend God, but if I die here in a heathen place, then give me whatever burials you think best.’ And soon after King Hákon died there on the slab of rock where he had been born. King Hákon was lamented so much that both friends and enemies wept for his death and declared that never again would such a king come to Norway. His friends moved his body north to Sæheimr in Norðr-Hǫrðaland and raised a great mound there and laid the king in it with his arms and his best attire, but no other goods. They spoke over his burial as the custom of the heathen people was, directed him to Valhǫll.<sup>53</sup>]

In this passage it is clear that Hákon is still a Christian, despite having lived among his pagan followers, and that he wished to die among Christians but would accept what his people thought was best. It is even more interesting that this Christian king appears to have been

---

<sup>52</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 192-193.

<sup>53</sup> *VSNR*, p. 115.

given a minimalist pagan burial by his followers. They bury him in a mound and with the attire of a king, including his weapons, but it is specifically noted that nothing else was placed in the burial. As Christianity slowly made inroads into Scandinavia burial goods are one of the first things which start to disappear from burials. Thus, it appears that the author is also making sure that we see that Hákon's followers are making concessions to their leader's religion, possibly heralding their own or their descendants' conversions in the future by not ignoring the king's wishes outright. They do, however, make a point to speak 'over his burial as the custom of the heathen people was, directed him to Valhöll', thus also making sure enough was done to have a 'successful' pagan afterlife as well. In a way, it shows that legitimacy and power is not completely up to the individual, but also has a great deal to do with the will and wishes of the people over whom that individual reigned.

The final inhumation burial I wish to discuss here is one that does not take place within the linear timescale of *Heimskringla*, as set out by Snorri, but it is instead an old burial, one which Snorri discusses in order to make a religious and political point. Ólaf Tryggvason became a Christian while in exile after the death of his father King Tryggvi. In chapter thirty-one of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* Ólaf meets a hermit that foretells his future, including his conversion and the conversion of many others to Christianity, and is baptised along with his following.<sup>54</sup> It is then in chapter sixty-four that a mysterious man who only has one eye appears during a banquet being held by King Ólaf Tryggvason. This guest, whom the reader identifies clearly as Óðinn, talks with the king, answers questions, and tells him stories about the person after whom the farm they are at is named, namely the pagan King Ógvaldr. The mysterious man then says, 'Var hann þá hér heygðr skammt frá bænum ok settir upp bautasteinar, þeir er hér standa enn. En í annan stað skammt heðan var heygð

---

<sup>54</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 266-267; [*VSNR*, pp. 165-166].



kýrin.<sup>55</sup> [‘He (Qgvaldr) was buried in a mound a little way from the farm and memorial stones were set up that are still standing here. And in another place not far from here the cow was buried in a mound.’<sup>56</sup>] The cow that the man/Óðinn character mentions was apparently worshiped by Qgvaldr as a god. This could be seen as an allusion to how we are now supposed to see the pagans as absurd cow worshippers and not as noble characters. The fact that this Óðinn character is trying to make this absurd past noble and attractive to the converted king is significant. The chapter continues to discuss how the mysterious character keeps conversing with the king and how the bishop keeps guiding the king back to the right path of the evening; thus the bishop advises him to go to bed and when the visitor comes to speak with him in bed the bishop advises the king to go to sleep. It is only on his waking the next morning that Ólaf realizes that the mysterious man must have been Óðinn as he was telling these tales about the glorious old ways. It is never explicitly stated, but it is clear that this was meant to show one last temptation to go back to the old pagan religion. The character of Óðinn appearing to the king during his campaign of conversion in Norway has similarities with the temptation of Christ in the New Testament.<sup>57</sup> The converted king, guided by a bishop, resists and the groundwork is finally set for the centre piece of *Heimskringla*: the saga of Saint Ólaf Haraldsson and the conversion of the country by a saint.

There are four other passages which mention inhumation burial and they appear fairly evenly distributed through the sagas starting after the live burial of King Herlaugr and his brother, Hrollaugr, submitting to Haraldr hárfagri. Two are from *Haralds saga hárfagra*, chapters twenty-two<sup>58</sup> and forty-three<sup>59</sup>, both of which are very brief in their description of

---

<sup>55</sup> *ÍF* p. 313.

<sup>56</sup> *VSNR* p. 195.

<sup>57</sup> The temptation of Christ can be found in: Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Sigurðr jarl drap Melbrigða tǫnn, jarl skozkan, ok batt hǫfuð hans við slagálar sér ok laust á kykvavǫðva sínum á tǫnnina, er skagði ór hǫfðinu. Kom þar í blástr, ok fekk hann þar af bana, ok er hann heygðr á Ekkjalsbakka.’ *ÍF* p. 122; [‘Jarl Sigurðr slew Melbrigði tǫnn (Tooth), a Scottish earl, and tied his head to his saddle-strap, and his calf-muscle struck against the tooth which was jutting out from the head. It became infected and he died as a result, and he is buried in a mound on Ekkjalsbakki.’ *VSNR*, p. 71]

the burial and the verb is used in the first, while the noun is used in the second. The next is the only mention of inhumation burial in *Haralds saga Gráfeldar* and it appears in chapter nine.<sup>60</sup> Finally there is the very last mention of inhumation coming from chapter seventy-two of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*.<sup>61</sup> There are far fewer examples from the later sagas than there are from the mythic and early sagas; some of this will be due to the nature of individual sagas versus *Ynglinga saga* and its long timescale, while it may also reflect that Snorri as an author or compiler has less room to embellish the closer he gets to the conversion and the twelfth century.

### III.C. – Conclusions:

In this chapter we began by looking at the burial of Freyr and the introduction of the idea that the peace and prosperity of a ruler can be harnessed and kept within the realm by interring the body rather than burning it. This practice was taken to an extreme in the passage that was looked at next, that of the segmentation and quadrupal burial of King Hálfðan *svarti*. Here again, as with cremation, an extreme and notable example of burial is linked with the mythological by mirroring elements that also appear in *The Prose Edda*. This is followed by an example of a leader placing himself in a burial mound in preparation for the imminent arrival of the increasingly powerful leader, Haraldr *harfagri*. Next the two burials involving King Hákon were examined: i.e. the burial of his pagan followers and his own burial by his

---

<sup>59</sup> ‘Ok er hann kom til Túnsbergs, þá gengu þeir Óláfr ok Sigrøðr með lið sitt austr ór bænum á brekkuna ok fylkðu þar. Eiríkr hafði lið miklu meira, ok fekk hann sigr, en þeir Óláfr ok Sigrøðr fellu þar báðir, ok er þar haugr hvárs tveggja þeira á brekkunni, sem þeir lágu fallnir.’ *ÍF* p. 149; [‘And when he got to Túnsberg, then Óláfr and Sigrøðr took their troops eastwards out of the town onto the slope and formed up there. Eiríkr had a much larger force, and he gained victory, but Óláfr and Sigrøðr both fell there, and the mounds of each of the two of them are there on the slope, where they lay fallen.’ *VSNR*, p. 87].

<sup>60</sup> ‘En er þeir gengu á málstefnu, þá hljópu at menn Guðrøðar ok drápu Tryggva konung ok tólf menn með honum, ok liggir hann þar, sem nú er kallað Tryggvahreyrr.’ *ÍF* p. 214.; [‘And when they went into conference, then Guðrøðr’s men rushed up and killed King Tryggvi and twelve men with him, and he lies in the place that is now called Tryggvahreyrr.’ *VSNR*, p. 131].

<sup>61</sup> ‘Eptir dráp Járnkeggi var lík hans flutt út á Yrjar, ok liggir hann í Skeggjahaugi á Austrátt.’ *ÍF* p. 319; [‘After the slaying of Járnkeggi his body was transported out to Yrjar, and he lies in Skeggjahaugr on Austrátt.’ *VSNR*, p. 199].

pagan followers, a burial which was a little Christian and a little pagan. The final inhumation burial that was discussed involved Óðinn trying to tempt the newly converted Óláfr Tryggvason back to the old ways with the stories of a pagan past.

The main aim of the chapter was again to look at the way in which the text addresses the issues of kingship, legitimacy, and religion through the lens of burial practice. When looking at cremation, an inherently pagan practice, we saw how the attitude changed as the narrative got closer to the conversion, and thus the inevitable end of the practice all together. With inhumation burial the issue is slightly complicated by the fact that the root practice of interring a body in the ground is that the basis of accepted practice by Christians; therefore other aspects of inhumation had to be highlighted to make a religious point. Inhumation burials in *Heimskringla*, unlike cremations, are not viewed differently as the text approaches christianization, but instead they change to suit the new religion. Furthermore, the text is putting pagan inhumation forward as way of keeping the power that was present in the living leader continuing on in the realm even after their death.

The historiography stresses Christianity as a central narrative point of *Heimskringla*; if approached from the perspective of establishing a model of sacral Christian kingship, then the burials fit into the narrative as illustrative of the march to Christianization. However, inhumation burials show clear connections with the pagan past, and reflect on the qualities of good/bad leaders as well. Such reflections seem separable from the Christian narrative, or at the very least make our understanding of the narrative more complex than a simple conversion narrative. Hákon in particular highlights the ambiguity of the sources of legitimacy; to what extent is legitimacy dependant on religion or instead on political authority and consensus? Again there seems to be a discussion going on in the text about whether or not there are other sources and forms of legitimacy, tied to non-sacral claimants for control over Norway. Royal and dynastic legitimacy does not seem exclusively connected

to the burials of Christian kings. Rather, non-Christian kings and dynastic lines, in conforming to an idealised pagan form of inhumation, can be presented as legitimate and tapping into alternative sources of authority for that legitimacy, one physically connected to the land, and symbolically to its people. Further, the legitimacy of these kings/rulers is not tied down to the extent to which they foreshadow Christianity, but rather to the wishes of their people and their ability to provide prosperity for their people. If the separation of good kingship and sacral kingship is maintained, it becomes possible to read some of Snorri's episodic descriptions either as political comments on the nature of authority and kingship, or at least as clever, parodic comments on the nature of Christian, sacral kingship.

## **Chapter IV: Pagan Period Hall Burnings in *Heimskringla***

### **IV.A. – Introduction:**

In this section I shall discuss the practice of burning rulers in their halls as a form of death and burial, as well as giving some brief conclusions on how it fits into the overall discussion of this thesis. Hall burning as a method by which to kill a chieftain or king, and his following, is a trope that appears throughout mediaeval Scandinavian literature; having said that, it is a rare form of killing that is always used as a way to emphasise the social and political impact of the events being depicted. Importantly for this study of the burial of kings and leaders there is never another form of burial discussed for the victims who die in a hall burning. There are twelve examples of death by hall burning in the first six sagas of *Heimskringla*.<sup>1</sup> There are two further examples of attempted killing through hall burning and they will be discussed briefly at the end of the analysis. I have intentionally not included the references to town or settlement burning or general harrying of the countryside as these are simply acts of war rather than directed killing of specific individuals. Hall burnings are a more specific event; while they are usually a part of a conflict, they are also stand-alone events. They are a crucial descriptive element in the way in which a named king or leader dies in the text, something that is not the case with town or settlement burning and harrying.

It is also important at this point to briefly discuss what exactly is meant by a ‘hall’<sup>2</sup> and why this definition might have an affect on how we interpret the passages presented below. F. Herschend, as summarized by Lars Larsson, put forward five criteria that a building of the late Iron Age and Viking Age should follow to be classed as a hall rather than a large

---

<sup>1</sup> The *Prologue* and the fourteen total examples of hall burning in the following six sagas are discussed: *Ynglinga saga*, chapters fourteen, thirty-one, thirty-six, thirty-nine, forty, and forty-three; *Hálfadana saga Svarta*, chapter five; *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, chapters two, twelve, twenty-nine, and thirty-four; *Haralds saga gráfeldar*, chapter five; and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, chapters forty-three and sixty-two.

<sup>2</sup> There are a number of words used in the text in relations to these buildings, it is through the context that many are more easily identified as being a ‘hall’ rather than any other building. Some of the words used in the prose are as follows: *hús*, ‘house’; *höll*, ‘hall’; a private residence is usually referred to as a *skáli*. For some of the poetical words and phrases see the discussion of *Ynglinga saga*, chapter 31.

dwelling: ‘(1) they are part of a large farm; (2) originally, they consisted of one room with a minimum number of posts; (3) they are singled out by their position on the farm; (4) the hearth was not used for cooking or crafts; (5) the objects found in the building are different from those found in the dwelling section of the main house on the farm.’<sup>3</sup> Larsson notes further elements which can be used to define a hall: there are ‘more entrances than a standard house would have, a prominent location and monumental graves in the vicinity.’<sup>4</sup> The physical building of the hall was also of visual and practical use to leaders and their time in power. It was ‘the venue for shows of respect with declamation of skaldic poetry, stories about heroes, and the recitation of genealogies.’<sup>5</sup> Through events, such as feasts and religious celebrations, ritual drinking and the exchanging of gifts, the hall became very important in keeping the peace between warriors, sub-kings or jarls, and the high king.<sup>6</sup> A good ruler would be wealthy and generous with that wealth. Part of having wealth was the visual representation through not only the clothing, jewellery, and fine objects the leader surrounded himself with, but also the building in which those accoutrements were housed. These criteria fit nicely with the overall aim of this study to look at the kings and leaders who would have been able to build and preside in such buildings because of their vital part in the political and religious life of the community.<sup>7</sup>

In the corpus of Old Norse-Icelandic literature the hall, and the role it plays in the act of good leadership, is described on a few occasions. The quintessential ‘hall’, and one that is

---

<sup>3</sup> Lars Larsson, ‘A ceremonial building as a ‘home for the gods’?: Central buildings in the central place of Uppåkra’, O. Grim and A. Pesch, eds., *The Gudme-Gudhem phenomenon : papers presented at a workshop organized by the Centre for Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology (ZBSA), Schleswig, April 26th and 27th, 2010*, Vol. 6 (2011) p. 199.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 199.

<sup>5</sup> Gro Steinsland, ‘Introduction: Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes’, in *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes* (Leiden, 2011) p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.7.

<sup>7</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the role of the Mead-hall and its geographical role in Östergötland, Sweden, in the period AD 375-1000 see: Martin Rundkvist, *Mead-halls of the Eastern Geats: Elite Settlements and Political Geography AD 375 – 1000 in Östergötland, Sweden* (Stockholm, 2011). For an archaeological survey of a Norwegian chieftain’s farm, and the main building in particular, see: Frands Herschend and Dorthe Kaldal Mikkelsen, ‘The main building at Borg (I:1)’, *Borg in Lofoten: A chieftain’s farm in North Norway*, Gerd Stamsø Munch, Olav Sverre Johansen, and Else Roesdahl, eds., (Trondheim, 2003) pp. 41-76.

closely linked with the themes of death and burial, is Valhalla, the hall of the slain in Asgard.

In *The Prose Edda* the otherworldly hall is described in this way in Jesse L. Byock's translation:

When he entered the fortress, he saw a hall. It was so high that he could scarcely see over it, and golden shields covered its roof like shingles. As Thjodolf of Hvin says, Valhalla [Hall of the Slain] was roofed with shields: On their backs they let shine / hall shingles of Svafnir [Odin], / when bombarded with stones, / those resourceful men. Gylfi saw a man in the doorway of the hall. He was juggling short swords and had seven in the air at once. The man spoke first, asking the visitor's name. Gylfi named himself Gangleri, saying he had travelled over trackless paths. He asked for a night's lodging and inquired who owned the hall. The man answered that it belonged to their king. 'I can take you to see him; then you can ask him his name yourself.' The man then turned and went ahead into the hall. Gylfi followed him and immediately the door closed after him. He saw many living areas there and groups of people. Some were playing games, some were drinking, and some had weapons and were fighting. He looked around, and it seemed to him that much of what he was seeing was incredible. Then he said: 'All doorways / before entering / gaze into carefully; / one never knows / where on the benches / enemies are sitting.' He saw three thrones, each one higher than the other. Three men sat there, one in each seat. He asked the name of their ruler. The man guiding him replied that the king was in the lowest of the high seats; he was called High. Next came the one called Just-as-High, while the one highest up was called Third...<sup>8</sup>

Valhalla is presented with all the elements of the perfect hall. It is the location for the best warriors to gather and enjoy the fruits of their labours through the favour of the king or leader. They are fed, given drink, entertained, and given the chance to test both their mental and physical abilities. The purpose of the hall for the lord was to provide for and preside over his men and honoured guests. From the high-seat he would survey the events and greet those arriving. Valhalla is situated in just the same way as was set out in Larsson's archaeological criteria for a hall and also appears in the archaeological record. It is set within a settlement,

---

<sup>8</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans., Jesse L. Byock (London, 2005) pp. 10-11.

usually with some elements of fortification<sup>9</sup>, and located prominently within that settlement; it is described as having many doors, benches, a long fire, and a high-seat for the leader who owned the hall. In the case of Valhalla, there is no need to be in close proximity to ancestral burials because the hall is filled with the very ancestors with whom the living were attempting to associate themselves on earth. The ideal hall was a symbol of security, prosperity, and good leadership.<sup>10</sup> The destruction of that symbol is more than just the loss of a building; it is connected to the images of Valhalla, the afterlife, kingship, religion, and Ragnarøk, the end of the world.<sup>11</sup>

The following examination seeks to address some important questions regarding these hall burnings: Are hall burnings non-burials, or, are they burials because the body has been disposed of? How does this slightly ambiguous death and burial then reflect on the events of the text and the political discussion that is going on under the surface? Is there political significance behind when there is or is not a burial described in the text, and if so where do these twelve examples fall? The *Prologus* to *Heimskringla* discusses the early age of cremation, a practice that was consistently decreasing after c.1000 for reasons connected with the influence of Christianity;<sup>12</sup> do these burials fit with that overall decrease in cremation burial, and if they do not, should they be discussed as a separate form of body disposal altogether? Can we discern any defining characteristics that can be found in all the hall burnings? I shall answer, at least partially, many of these questions through the textual analysis of the individual passages. One thing can be stated with confidence from the outset: hall burnings are either perpetrated by relatives of the leader within a domestic dispute, or

---

<sup>9</sup> Rundkvist, *Mead-halls of the Eastern Geats*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the hall as a symbol of peace and the connections with Ragnarøk see: Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'The Hall in Norse Literature', in *Borg in Lofoten: A chieftain's farm in North Norway*, Gerd Stamsø Munch, Olav Sverre Johansen, and Else Roesdahl, eds., (Trondheim, 2003) pp. 265-272.

<sup>11</sup> According to *The Prose Edda*, Asgard, the home of the gods, and the hall Valhalla will be destroyed during Ragnarøk, however after all is done: 'Vidar and Vali survive, as neither the flood nor Surt's fire destroyed them, and they will inhabit Idavoll, the place where Asgard was earlier.' Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, p. 77.

<sup>12</sup> Because of the slow process of conversion there is no exact date for the decrease in the popularity of cremation.



they are part of an external campaign by one leader into the realm of another.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to previous chapters, this unique form of burial appears more closely linked to representations of bad rulership, as opposed to good rulership.

#### IV.B. – Internecine Conflicts Resulting in Hall Burning:

To begin, I will examine the hall burnings that were committed as part of an internal conflict between close relatives within a realm. The first hall burning of this type that I shall discuss, as well as the first in *Heimskringla*, appears in chapter fourteen of *Ynglinga saga*. The king under discussion is Vísburr, the seventh king to appear in the saga. The text says:

Vísburr tók arf eptir Vanlanda, fǫður sinn. Hann gekk at eiga dóttur Auða ins auðga ok gaf henni at mundi þrjá stórbœi ok gullmen. Þau áttu tvá sonu, Gísl ok Qndur. En Vísburr lét hana eina ok fekk annarrar konu, en hon fór til fǫður síns með sonu sína. Vísburr átti son, er Dómaldi hét. Stjúpmóðir Dómalda lét síða at honum ógæfu. En er synir Vísburs váru tólf vetra ok þrettán, fóru þeir á fund hans ok heimtu mund móður sinnar, en hann vildi eigi gjalda. Þá mæltu þeir, at gullmenit skyldi verða at bana inum bezta manni í ætt hans, ok fóru íbrot ok heim. Þá var enn fengit at seið ok siðit til þess, at þeir skyldi mega drepa fǫður sinn. Þá sagði Hulð vǫlva þeim, at hon myndi svá síða ok þat með, at ættvíg skyldi ávallt vera í ætt þeira Ynglinga síðan. Þeir játtu því. Eptir þat sǫmnðu þeir liði ok kómu at Vísbur um nótt á óvart ok brenndu hann inni. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: Ok Vísburs / vilja byrgi / sævar niðr / svelga knátti, / þás meinþjóf / markar ǫttu / setrs verjendr / á sinn fǫður, / ok allvald / í arinkjóli / glóða garmr / glymjandi beit.<sup>14</sup>

[Vísburrr took over the inheritance after his father Vanlandi. He got the daughter of Auði inn auðgi (the Wealthy) in marriage, and gave her as bride-price<sup>15</sup> three large estates and a gold

<sup>13</sup> Although, as will be seen later, this is not a situation where there are defined roles (i.e the invader is not always the one doing the burning); some leaders commit a hall burning in their own lands as a way to stop an outside invasion or to pave the way for their own outward expansion.

<sup>14</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla I*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, in *Íslensk Fornrit XXVI* (Reykjavík, 1941) [Here after referred to as *ÍF*] pp. 30-31.

<sup>15</sup> The word in the Old Norse-Icelandic is *mundr*, the name given to a sum of money that is instrumental in the legal proceedings of a marriage; without it the marriage is not legally binding nor recognized by the community. The translators of this edition have chosen to use 'bride-price' to describe what is going on here, however there are more layers to the word. Firstly, in the marriage agreement the rightly termed Bride-price is paid to the family of the bride. However, on the wedding night the *mundr* becomes the personal property of the bride and hers to control, thus becoming more like a 'morning-gift' (which in later legislation becomes a separate term, *morgun-gjöf*). If the marriage was legal and the couple eventually separates, as in this case, the woman

necklace. They had two sons, Gísl and Qndurr. But Vísburr abandoned her and took another wife, while she went to her father with her sons. Vísburr had a son called Dómalði. Dómalði's stepmother brought misfortune on him with a spell. And when Vísburr's sons were twelve and thirteen years old, they went to see him and claimed their mother's bride-price, but he would not pay it. Then they said that the gold necklace should cause the death of the best man in his family; they left and went home. Then more black magic was brought into play, and a spell cast that would enable them to kill their father. Then the witch Hulð told them that she would bring this about by spells, and along with it that there would always be killing of kindred in the line of the Ynglingar after that. They agreed to this. After that they gathered a troop and took Vísburr by surprise at night and burned him in his house. So says Þjóðólfr: [poetry begins] And Vísburr's / vault of wishes / the sea's kinsman / swallowed up, / when the throne-defenders / the thieving scourge / of forests set / on their father; / and in his hearth-ship<sup>16</sup> / the hound of embers, / growling, bit / the governor.<sup>17]</sup>

The case of Vísburr and his sons is used to set up future events through the act of rejecting and refusing the legal and family rights of his sons. Vísburr's selfish actions not only cause the deaths of his followers and himself, but also many of his descendants, such as Agni, son of Dagr, who was hanged to death with the gold necklace.<sup>18</sup> The initial conflict and the resultant hall burning form a key shift in the narrative, a shift which is carried through a number of chapters thus showing the effect such an event could have. However, there is an

---

maintains the right to all her personal property including what was given as *mundr*. Therefore it might be more accurate to translate the use of *mundr* later in the passage as 'morning-gift' instead of 'bride-price', however the use of the same definition does help make it clear that what the sons are asking for is indeed the estates and necklace mentioned at the beginning of the passage. For more on the nuances of the term *mundr* see the entry in: Cleasby, Richard, and Vigfusson, Gudbrand, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1957) pp. 437-438.

<sup>16</sup> See later discussion of the relationship between halls and ships, in section IV.B pp. 10-12

<sup>17</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla Volume I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, trans by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, 2011) [Here after referred to as *VSNR*] pp. 17-18.

<sup>18</sup> *VSNR*, pp. 21-22: 'King Agni went harrying through Lappland and took control of it, and took a huge amount of plunder. He captured and took with him Skjálf, Frosti's daughter, and her brother Logi... He put up his tents in the meadow to the south. There was a wood there then. King Agni then owned the gold neck-ring that had belonged to Vísburr. King Agni proceeded to marry Skjálf. She asked the king to hold a funeral feast for her father... And when King Agni got drunk, Skjálf told him to watch out for the neck-ring he was wearing round his neck. He took hold of it and fastened it securely around his neck before he went to sleep. But the tent was standing near the wood with a high tree above it... And when King Agni was asleep Skjálf took a thick cord and fastened it under the neck-ring. Her men took down the tent-poles and threw a loop of the cord up into the branches of the tree, then pulled on it, so that the king was hanging almost against the branches, and that was the death of him.'

added element to this hall burning not present in many of the others, and that is the role magic plays. While magic is not uncommon in *Ynglinga saga*, it is not a factor in the success of any of the other hall burnings discussed in this section, although the act of practising magic does lead to a family conflict that results in a hall burning.<sup>19</sup> In this passage a woman called Hulð, who also appears in chapter thirteen of *Ynglinga saga*, is the ‘wise-woman/witch’ [völva] who performs the black magic [seiðr] to allow the patricide to take place. Jacob Grimm cites Hulð as deriving from or related to the ancient Germanic name ‘Holda’ or ‘Holle’. As Grimm notes, the name is very old and appears throughout many European cultures as one associated with a mother goddess figure.<sup>20</sup> She is linked with the air and being able to ‘ride on the winds’<sup>21</sup> and shape shift, thus she is often connected with witches, who are later said to be a part of her host.<sup>22</sup> Jan de Vries translates Hulð as *hexe* ‘witch’, and there are connotations of secrecy and mystery.<sup>23</sup> The inclusion of Hulð, therefore, marks the burning of Vísburr out as more significant than some of the others because it becomes the mythical and magical root for so many of the continuing conflicts that shape the narrative in *Heimskringla* as a whole.<sup>24</sup>

The other family-conflict-induced hall burnings are the final two in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, chapters twenty-nine and thirty-four respectively. Both of these involve the sons of Haraldr attempting to gain power within the realms of their father through the destruction of another’s seat of power and life. The first of these involves two of Harald’s illegitimate sons wanting to seize land because their father is not giving them the territory and power they

<sup>19</sup> See the discussion of the death of Rognvaldr at the hands of his brother Eiríkr Blóðøx, pp. 75-77.

<sup>20</sup> Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans by James Steven Stallybrass, Vol. 1 (London, 1882) pp. 265-267. For a more exhaustive discussion of the name and its role in European mythologies and folk tales see the full entry for the name: pp. 265-272.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 268. In chapter thirteen of *Ynglinga saga* she is credited with being able to transport people from far off lands through magic; presumably through the air?

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 268-269.

<sup>23</sup> Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leiden, 1977), p. 266.

<sup>24</sup> This is also noted by Diana Whaley: ‘Sometimes a vital thread will be highlighted directly in the narrative, as when eternal fratricide among the Ynglingar is predicted by the seeress Hulð...’, Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991) p. 99.

believe they should have: ‘Þá fóru til á einu vári Hálfðan háleggr ok Guðrøðr ljómi með mikla sveit manna ok kómu á óvart Rognvaldi Mørajarli ok tóku hús á honum ok brenndu hann inni við sex tigu manna.’<sup>25</sup> [‘Then one spring Hálfðan háleggr and Guðrøðr ljómi approached with a large troop of men and came unexpectedly to Rognvaldr Mørajarl and surrounded his house and burned him in it with sixty men.’<sup>26</sup>] This event is partially a comment on Haraldr and his numerous legitimate and illegitimate children. It highlights the problem of what a leader should do when he had multiple grown sons, but was not ready to start handing over the reins of power. The sons, because they had no real power base, needed to find a way to demonstrate to their father that they were displeased with the situation and wished to be taken seriously as powerful leaders who could be a threat and thus should be appeased. By killing and destroying the seat of power of a jarl who was their father’s right-hand man, and whom they thought of as beneath them, they were asserting their dominance. The hall burning marks the point at which Harald’s sons begin to become a problem for him and his realm.

The burning depicted in chapter thirty-four is a sanctioned and praised attack and killing of one of Harald’s legitimate sons, Rognvaldr, by another legitimate son, Eiríkr Blóðøx, who is more favoured: ‘En er Haraldr konungr heyrði þetta sagt, þá með hans ráði fór Eiríkr blóðøx til Upplanda ok kom á Haðaland. Hann brenndi inni Rognvald, bróður sinn, með átta tigu seiðmanna, ok var þat verk lofat mjök.’<sup>27</sup> [‘And then, when King Haraldr heard this said, on his instruction Eiríkr blóðøx went to Upplönd and reached Haðaland. He burned his brother Rognvaldr in his house with eighty magicians, and this deed was greatly praised.’<sup>28</sup>] Eiríkr is the only son whom Haraldr wishes to take over the realm after him, and this demonstrates a turning point in his political power under his father. Eiríkr is able to

---

<sup>25</sup> *ÍF*, p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> *VSNR*, p. 75.

<sup>27</sup> *ÍF*, p. 139.

<sup>28</sup> *VSNR*, p. 81.

commit fratricide with the full support of his father, thus gaining more land and power while also clearing away any other possible claimants to the throne. In this passage there is also an element of the supernatural,<sup>29</sup> or the fight against it, because there are eighty magicians [*seiðmanna*] in the hall along with Rognvaldr at the time of its burning. Haraldr was trying to get rid of all the magicians at that time and thus the destruction of a large group of them and his son, who had been taught and influenced by them, would have been very welcome. It is noted at the end of the passage that the ‘deed’ was praised, something that is not stated about any other hall burning, making it not only stand out as different from the other internal conflicts but also the descriptions of the external or invasion-based conflicts discussed below.

Some brief conclusions about the internecine conflicts resulting in hall burnings: as will become clear in the following section, there are fewer hall burnings of this familial type than there are of the external ones. This can be seen as suggesting two important conclusions; firstly, that the killing of a member of one’s own family through possibly dubious methods might have been perceived as ignoble and counterproductive because it demonstrates vulnerability, the destruction of wealth, and instability in a ruling family, such as in the cases of Haraldr and his sons. And secondly, internecine conflicts tended to be sorted out through other forms of combat or bribery. However, returning to one of the core questions of this section, are these acts of destruction also acts of burial? I believe that they are precisely because they are connected through familial ties. It was the duty of the family to bury their dead either through cremation or inhumation; therefore, a hall burning accelerates the process of generational change by combining the death of a leader and his followers with the disposal of his body. It is this final point that I think will become increasingly clear when we turn to the external or invasion based conflicts.

---

<sup>29</sup> This is different from the previous mention of magic because it does not play an active role in the hall burning. With *Vísburr* magic was used so that it would be possible for his sons to kill him; in this example there is no mention of magic actually taking place, only that people declared that they were capable of performing it and some believed them.

#### IV.C. – External or Invasion based Conflicts Resulting in Hall Burning:

Now I discuss each of the hall burnings committed as a result of external conflicts or attempts to invade other leader's realms. The second hall burning to appear in *Heimskringla*, which is in chapter thirty-one of *Ynglinga saga*, suggests that they do not always have to be the turning points of internal conflicts. Rather, a hall burning death can indicate also important events involving parties from other kingdoms manoeuvring for more power. The text reads:

Sölvi hét sækonungr, sonr Høgna í Njarðey, er þá herjaði í Austrveg. Hann átti ríki á Jótlandi. Hann helt liði sínu til Svíþjóðar. Þá var Eysteinn konungr á veizlu í heraði því, er Lófund heitir. Þar kom Sölvi konungr á óvart um nótt ok tók hús á konungi ok brenndi hann inni með nirð sína alla. Þá ferr Sölvi til Sigtúna ok beiðir sér konungnafns ok viðtöku, en Svíar samna her ok vilja verja land sitt, ok varð þar orrosta svá mikil, at þat er sagt, at eigi sleit á ellifu dægum. Þar fekk Sölvi konungr sigr, ok var hann þá konungr yfir Svíaveldi langa hríð til þess er Svíar sviku hann, ok var hann þar drepinn. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: Veitk Eysteins / enda folginn / lokins lífs / á Lófund, / ok sikling / með Svíum kvöðu / jókza menn / inni brenna. / Ok bitsótt / í brandnói / hliðar þangs / á hilmi rann, / þás timbrfastr / toptar nokkvi, / flotna fullr, / of fylki brann.<sup>30</sup>

[There was a sea-king called Sölvi, son of Høgni on Njarðey, who was raiding in the Baltic then. He held rule in Jutland. He went with his company to Svíþjóð. King Eysteinn was then at a feast in the district called Lófund. King Sölvi came there unexpectedly at night and seized the King's house and burned him inside it with all his following. Then Sölvi went to Sigtúnir and demanded the title of king and to be accepted as king, but the Svíar mustered an army and intended to defend their land, and a battle took place, so great that it was said that it did not stop for eleven days. There King Sölvi gained victory, and he was then king over Svíþjóð for a long time until the Svíar betrayed him, and he was killed there. So says Þjóðólfr: I know the end / of Eysteinn's life / was doomed to lie / at Lófund, / and among the Svíar, / they say, the king / by Jutish men / was burned inside. / And the biting scourge / of slope-seaweed / in

---

<sup>30</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 60-61.

his flame-vessel / found the king, / when the stout-built / ship  
of the home-site, / full of crew, around / the ruler burned.<sup>31]</sup>

In this passage an invading force comes to wipe out the old dynasty and take power over all the land it controlled. Sólvi is described as a ‘sea-king’ [*sækonungr*], which is described in the previous chapter as being a man who ‘réðu liði miklu ok áttu engi lǫnd’<sup>32</sup> ‘commanded large troops and had no lands’<sup>33</sup> and ‘er hann svaf aldri undir sótkum ási ok drakk aldir at arinshorni’<sup>34</sup> ‘never slept under a sooty beam and never drank in the hearth corner...’<sup>35</sup>, meaning that he is a leader of a large number of men but without the land and geographical base of a king or jarl. His actions are dictated by a need to have land for himself, but also for his followers; there is only so much wealth that can be maintained on board a ship.

Crucially the imagery in the poetry describing the burning of the hall of the King Eysteinn is described through seafaring kennings. The kennings all make strong connections between the hall and the ship. The connection being made between the kings of the waves and those of the land is clear when the hall is referred to as a ‘flame-vessel’ [*brandnór*]<sup>36</sup>, or ‘ship of the home-site’ [*toptar nǫkkvi*], the trees are referred to as ‘slope-seaweed’ [*hlíðar þangs*] or even the way in which his followers are described as Eysteinn’s ‘crew’ [*flotnar*]. The hall and the ship are both forums of power and leadership. Through the ship the wealth is brought into the community, and then through the hall that wealth is distributed, shown, and enjoyed by the leader and his loyal men. Indeed, the allusion being made between the hall and a ship brings to mind other connections with burial practices. Ship burials have become one of the most iconic pagan period burial practices, particularly thanks to large finds such as the Oseberg and Gokstad ship burials in Norway; but how could they be connected with a

---

<sup>31</sup> *VSNR*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>32</sup> *ÍF*, p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> *VSNR*, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> *ÍF*, p. 60.

<sup>35</sup> *VSNR*, p. 33.

<sup>36</sup> For another instance of the hall being described as a ship see the previously quoted *Ynglinga saga*, chapter fourteen discussing the death of King Vísburr; ‘hearth-ship’ [*arinkjóll*].

hall burning? Archaeological evidence indicates that people were buried in ships, possibly burned in them,<sup>37</sup> and that burial mounds were definitely shaped and marked out in the form of ships.<sup>38</sup> As we can also see from archaeology, many of these burials would have been located near major, possibly royal, farms which would have had a building that functioned as a hall. Furthermore, the hall's primary function as a feasting and political centre would have meant that it played an important role in funeral feasts and the transfer of power from one generation to another. Thus, ritually, ship burials and halls may have been linked through their adjacent role in the death customs. The allusions in the poem to the hall as a ship may therefore be making reference to ship burials; the symbolism of the metaphor may consequently have as much to do with the act of burying those killed as it was meant to conjure impressions of royalty and leadership.

The following examples in which hall burning is a result of the actions of external forces as the key players are all directly connected to each other within the narrative. They form a distinct section and the narrative stretches over a number of chapters in *Ynglinga saga*. In this grouping four halls are burnt, but nine kings are killed. Three of the burnings were ordered by King Ingjaldr, including the one in which he himself was killed. The fourth one was perpetrated by the followers of Óláfr, the son of King Ingjaldr.

In chapter thirty-six of *Ynglinga saga*, Ingjaldr is made king of Uppsálir after his father Qnundr<sup>39</sup> dies in a landslide. At that time the land of the Svear is ruled by a number of kings, but the highest of those was the king at Uppsálir. First it is stated that:

Hann [Ingjaldr] lét búa sal einn, engum mun minna eða  
övegligra en Uppsálr var, er hann kallaði sjau konunga sal. Þar  
váru í gǫr sjau hásæti. Ingjaldr konungr sendi menn um alla

<sup>37</sup> See discussion of the death and burial through burning ship on the ocean of King Haki, chapter twenty-three of *Ynglinga saga*. See pp. 35-39.

<sup>38</sup> For more on the connections between ships, ship settings, and burials, as well as the idea that death is a journey, see: Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Religions Old and New', in Sawyer, Peter, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings* (Oxford, 1997) pp. 216-218.

<sup>39</sup> *VSNR*, p.36.



Svíþjóð ok bauð til sín konungum ok jörlum ok öðrum merkismónum. Til þess erfis kom Algautr konungr, mágr Ingjalds, ok til þess erfis kom Algautr konungr, mágr Ingjalds, ok Yngvarr konungr af Fjaðryndalandi ok synir hans tveir, Agnarr ok Álfr, Sporsnjallr konungr af Næríki, Sigverkr konungr af Áttundalandi. Granmarr konungr af Suðrmannalandi var eigi kominn. Þar var sex konungum skipat í inn nýja sal. Var þá eitt hásæti autt, þat er Ingjaldr konungr hafði búa látit... Ok er menn váru drukknir um kveldit, þá mælti Ingjaldr konungr til Fólkvíðar ok Hulvíðar, sona Svipdags, at þeir skyldu vápnask ok lið þeira, sem ætlat var um kveldit. Þeir gengu út ok til ins nýja sals, báru þar eld at, ok því næst tók salrinn at loga, ok brunnu þar inni sex konungar ok lið þeira allt, ok þeir, er út leituðu, þá váru skjótt drepnir. Eptir þetta lagði Ingjaldr konungr undir sik öll þessi ríki, er konungar höfðu átt, ok tók skatta af.<sup>40</sup>

[He (Ingjaldr) had a hall built, in no way smaller or less splendid than Uppsali was, and called it the Hall of Seven Kings. In it seven high seats were prepared. King Ingjaldr sent men all over Svíþjóð and invited kings and jarls and other important people. To this commemorative feast came King Algautr, Ingjaldr's father-in-law, and King Yngvarr of Fjaðryndaland and his two sons, Agnarr and Álfr, King Sporsnjallr of Næríki and King Sigverkr of Áttundaland. King Granmarr of Suðrmannaland did not come. The six kings were assigned seats there in the new hall. There was thus one of the high seats that King Ingjaldr had had prepared left empty... And in the evening when people were drunk, Ingjaldr told Fólkvíðr and Hulvíðr, the sons of Svipdagr, to arm themselves and their men as had been planned that evening. They went out to the new hall and set fire to it, and soon the hall burst into flames, and six kings and their followers were burned there, and those who tried to get out were quickly killed. After that King Ingjaldr took control of all the kingdoms that these kings had ruled, and took tribute from them.<sup>41</sup>]

In this case Ingjaldr was attempting to add to his own kingdom by taking out the rival sub-kings. Even though Ingjaldr perpetrates the killings in his own realm, his intent is to invade and take over the lands of the seven kings invited, and he succeeds in six out of the seven. The poignancy of the action is all the greater because the hall burning is executed as part of a

<sup>40</sup> *ÍF*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>41</sup> *VSNR*, p. 37.

funeral feast for Qnundr, Ingjaldr's father.<sup>42</sup> While the feast had been organized to celebrate Ingjaldr's father, the six kings end up also participating in their own funeral feast and burial by being present. When a leader dies, great care goes into the preparation for burial and of the burial grounds. In this case I believe that that preparation is put into the feasting hall which is prepared for the funeral feast. The hall is in keeping with the other buildings of Uppsalar, thus making it worthy of so many leaders and not as obvious to those arriving that it was built to be destroyed. Special high seats are prepared for each king. High seats are an element that we find as key parts of the visual representation of a leader in contexts of both life and death. Examples of this connection between the high seat and the leader can be found in both the literary depictions of burials<sup>43</sup> and the archaeology.<sup>44</sup> The references to high seats or chairs in a burial context are of particular importance as these are well distributed in the saga literature. The sitting position represents a thought process where the individual being buried, while

---

<sup>42</sup> The feasting element is one that runs through many of the examples I have, and will be, discussing and it shall be explored in more detail later.

<sup>43</sup> Other literary depictions: In *Eyrbyggja saga* the leader dies while seated in the high seat and must be removed from the house through special means: 'It was evening when he reached home, and he sat down on the high-seat without uttering a word to anybody. He ate nothing all evening and stayed in his seat when the rest of the household went to bed. In the morning, when they got up Thorolf was still sitting there, dead.' Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Eyrbyggja Saga* (London, 1989) p. 92; and particularly this passage from *Grettir's Saga*, " ' Out on the headland stands a grave-mound,' said Audun. 'In it was laid Kar the Old, Thorfinn's father. At first, father and son owned a single farm on the island, but after Kar died he returned from the dead and started walking, so much so that in the end he drove away all those farmers who owned lands here. Now Thorfinn alone owns the whole island, and no harm from these happenings comes to those under Thorfinn's protection.' Grettir said that he had done well in telling him. 'I will return here in the morning, so have some digging tools ready.' 'I suggest', said Audun, 'that you not concern yourself with this, because you will gain nothing but Thorfinn's hatred.' Grettir said he was prepared to risk that. The night passed, and Grettir arrived early next morning. The digging tools were there, ready. The farmer accompanied him to the grave-mound, and Grettir started breaking in. He worked hard at it, without stopping until he reached a row of timber. The day was almost over as he tore his way through the wooden rafters. Audun kept trying to discourage him from entering the mound. Grettir asked him to hold the rope, 'because I want to find out what lives down here'. Grettir then descended into the mound. It was dark inside, and not altogether sweet-smelling. He had to feel around to get an idea of what was inside. He found some horse bones, and next bumped into the back-posts of a seat. He realized that a man was sitting there in the chair. There was a great pile of gold and silver all mixed together. There was also a chest full of silver under the man's feet." Jesse Byock, trans., *Grettir's Saga* (Oxford, 2009) chap. 18, pp. 51-52; Even in Ibn Fadlān's account of the burial of a leader of the Rus being seated is mentioned: 'Then they carried him into a tent placed in the ship, seated him on the wadded and quilted covering, supported him with the pillows, and, bringing strong drink, fruits, and basil, placed them all beside him.' Angus A. Somerville, and R. Andrew McDonald, eds., *The Viking age: a reader* (Toronto, 2010) p. 108; and finally, 'They raised a burial mound for Gunnar and placed him in it sitting up.' Robert Cook, trans., *Njal's Saga* (London, 2001) p. 129.

<sup>44</sup> For example, the burial Ka. 294-7, Kaupang, Norway, discussed by Neil Price, in which there are four individuals buried in a ship, one of whom is sitting at the rear of the ship as if steering. Price, Neil, 'Passing into Poetry: Viking-Age Mortuary Drama and the Origins of Norse Mythology', *Medieval Archaeology* Vol. 54 (2010), pp. 127-131.

physically dead, is also still alive in some way. It is a powerful image of being buried as they were in life, thus connecting both their time in this world with their time in the afterlife directly. This connects neatly with the depictions of individuals going straight from life into burial through the simultaneous act of death and burial that a hall burning represents.

Ingjaldr is also involved in a further two hall burnings which emphasise the same themes as that of chapter thirty-six. After his success at the funeral feast for his father, Ingjaldr then goes on to kill the seventh king who had not come to his father's funeral feast by burning him in his hall while he is having a feast.

Um haustit eptir fór Granmarr konungr ok Hjörvarr konungr, mágr hans, at taka veizlu í ey þeiri, er Sili heitir, at búum sínum. Ok þá er þeir váru at veizlunni, kóm þar Ingjaldr konungr með her sinn á einni nótt ok tók hús á þeim ok brenndi þáinni með öllu liði sínu. Eptir þat lagði hann undir sik ríki þat allt, er átt hofðu konungar, ok setti yfir hofðingja.<sup>45</sup>

[The following autumn King Granmarr and his son-in-law King Hjörvarðr went to receive a banquet on the island that is called Sili, on their estates. And when they were at the banquet, King Ingjaldr arrived there with his army one night and seized the building they were in and burned them inside in with all their followers. After that he took power over all the kingdom that the kings had held, and set rulers over it.<sup>46</sup>]

As in the previous passage, a banquet is the setting for this hall burning, but in this case Ingjaldr has left his own realm to commit the burning. Then, in chapter forty, the nephew of the seventh king comes to take his revenge on Ingjaldr,

Ívarr inn víðfaðmi kom á Skáni eptir fall Guðrøðar, fǫðurbróður síns, ok dró þegar her mikinn saman, fór síðan upp á Svíþjóð. Ása in illráða var áðr farin á fund fǫður síns. Ingjaldr konungr var þá staddr á Ræningi at veizlu, er hann spuri, at herr Ívars konungs var þar nær kominn. Þóttisk Ingjaldr engan styrk hafa til at berjask við Ívar. Honum þótti ok sá sýnn kostur, ef hann legðisk á flótta, at hvaðanæva mundu fjandmenn hans at drífa. Tóku þau Ása þat ráð, er frægt er

<sup>45</sup> *ÍF*, p. 70.

<sup>46</sup> *VSNR*, pp. 39-40.

orðit, at þau gerðu fólk allt dauðadrukkit, síðan létu þau leggja eld í hollina. Brann þar hollin ok allt fólk, þat er inni var, með Ingjaldr konungi. Svá segir Þjóðólfr: Ok Ingjald / ífjörvan trað / reyks rǫsuðr / á Ræingi, / þás húspjófr / hyrjar leistung / goðkynning / í gognum steig. / Ok sá yrðr / allri þjóðu / sanngörvastr / með Svíum þótti, / es hann sjalfr / sínu fjrví / fræknu fyrstr / of fara vildi.<sup>47</sup>

[Ívarr inn víðfaðmi came to Skáni after the death of his uncle Guðrøðr and at once assembled a great army, then went up to Svíþjóð. Ása in illráða (the Evil) had already gone to see her father. King Ingjaldr was present at a feast at Ræningr when he found out that King Ívarr's army had arrived nearby. Ingjaldr did not consider that he had the power to fight against Ívarr. He also felt it a clear possibility that if he took to flight his enemies would throng against him from every side. So he and Ása took this course, as has become famous, that they made all the people dead drunk and then set fire to the hall. The hall, and all the people who were inside, were burned along with King Ingjaldr. So says Þjóðólfr: And Ingjaldr, / alive, was trampled / by the smoke-raiser / at Ræningr, / when the house-thief / through those kin / to the gods stepped / with stockinged feet. / And that death was / deemed by all / among the Svíar / the most fitting, / that he should / himself be first / to finish / his fierce life.<sup>48</sup>]

In this passage the theme of feasting and hall burnings which has run through all of this group thus far, reaches its peak. When faced with utter destruction and humiliation in battle, Ingjaldr decides to end his life and the lives of his men on his own terms rather than submitting or being slaughtered.<sup>49</sup> The final hall burning in this sub-grouping is in chapter forty-three of *Ynglinga saga* in which Ingjald's son, Óláfr is killed. After the death of Ingjaldr, Óláfr is forced to flee along with any surviving supporters. Eventually they all end up in Vermland:

Gerðisk þar hallæri mikit ok sultr. Kenndu þeir þat konungi sínum, svá sem Svíar eru vanir at kenna konungi bæði ár ok hallæri. Óláfr konungr var lítill blótmaðr. Þat líkaði Svíum illa

<sup>47</sup> *IF*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>48</sup> *VSNR*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>49</sup> Some similarities can be seen between this death and 'burial' and that of King Herlaugr, which is discussed in Chapter III, as both foresee the imminent defeat and decide to accept it but only on their own terms. See pp. 59-60.

ok þótti þaðan mundu standa hallærit. Drógu Svíar þá her saman, gerðu fǫr at Óláfi konungi ok tóku hús á honum ok brenndu hab inni ok gáfu hann Óðni og blétu honum til árs sér. Þat var við Væni.<sup>50</sup>

[A great dearth and famine set in there. They blamed it on their king, according to the custom of the Svíar of holding the king responsible for both good and bad seasons. King Óláfr was not in the habit of sacrificing. The Svíar were dissatisfied with that and thought it was the cause of the famine. Then the Svíar mustered an army, made an expedition against King Óláfr, seized his house and burned him in it, dedicating him to Óðinn and sacrificing him for a good season. That was by Væni.<sup>51</sup>]

In this passage it seems to be showing that the religious and social needs of the people may not have been being maintained by the king. The people blame the king's lack of actions for the famine, and so they get rid of the 'bad' king while also offering the king's life to Óðinn in recompense for the lack of sacrificing by Ólaf. Interestingly, it goes on to state that 'Those who were wiser among the Svíar then realised that the cause of the dearth was that the population was too large for the land to sustain, and the king was not responsible.'<sup>52</sup>

Continuing on to the other hall burnings enacted by an outside force to gain power and land, the seventh and eighth examples, both located in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, chapters two and twelve respectively, are less visually descriptive than the death of King Eysteinn in the first passage discussed in this section, but equally significant to the overall discussion. In chapter two it is stated that:

Ok verða eigi varðmenn fyrr varir við en lið var komit fyrir þá stofu, er inni var Hogni Káruson, ok svá þá. er Guðbrandr svaf í, ok lögðu eld í hváratveggju. En Eysteinnssynir kómusk út með sína menn ok bǫrðusk um hríð ok fellu þar báðir, Hogni ok Fróði. Eptir fall þessa fjögurra hǫfðingja eignaðisk Haraldr konungr með krapt ok framkvæmð Guthorms, frænda síns, Þótn ok Raumaríki, Vingulmǫrk, allan inn nørðra hlut.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *ÍF*, p. 74.

<sup>51</sup> *VSNR*, p. 42.

<sup>52</sup> *VSNR*, p. 42.

<sup>53</sup> *ÍF*, p. 95.

[And the watchmen noticed nothing until the army had arrived before the chamber<sup>54</sup> that Hogni Káruson was in, and also the one that Guðbrandr was sleeping in, and they set fire to both. But the sons of Eysteinn came out with their men and fought for a while, and both fell there, Hogni and Fróði. After the fall of these four leaders King Haraldr, by the strength and efficiency of his kinsman Guthormr, became master of Hringaríki and Heiðmörk, Guðbrandsdalir and Haðaland, Þótn and Raumaríki, Vingulmörk, the whole of the more northerly part.<sup>55</sup>]

Later, in chapter twelve it is stated that: ‘Hann hafði njósn af Vemundi konungi ok kom um nótt þar, sem heitir Naustdalr. Var Vémundr konungr þar á veizlu. Rognvaldr jarl tók hús á þeim ok brenndi konung inni með níu tigu manna.’<sup>56</sup> [‘He got information about King Vémundr and reached the place called Naustdalr at night. King Vémundr was attending a banquet there. Jarl Rognvaldr captured their house and burned the king in it with ninety men.’<sup>57</sup>] Both of these hall burnings are key in Haraldr’s campaign to be king over ‘all’ of Norway.<sup>58</sup> Haraldr came to power in southwest Norway fairly young but, as is clear from the beginning of his saga, he intended to do whatever was necessary to gain power over as much of Norway as possible.<sup>59</sup> He was helped along this path by the collapse of the Danish empire

---

<sup>54</sup> The word used in the Old Norse-Icelandic is *stofa*, meaning a ‘stove-room’, which is a smaller room attached to the main hall building, sometimes used as a sitting room as it was small and warm, but also used as a sleeping chamber away from the main benches. I have chosen to use this passage as part of my discussion of hall burning because the reference is to a room that would have been a part of the larger building and because the followers of the men are mentioned; therefore, there must have been a larger room with benches as part of the same building for them. For more on the various floor plans of these buildings see: Foote, Peter, and Wilson, David M., *The Viking Achievement: the society and culture of early medieval Scandinavia* (London, 1970) pp. 149-158; Else Roesdahl and David M. Wilson, ‘Chapter 2. Terminology’, and Frands Herschend and Dorthe Kaldal Mikkelsen, ‘Chapter 6A. The main building at Borg (I:1)’, *Borg in Lofoten: A chieftain’s farm in North Norway*, Gerd Stamsø Munch, Olav Sverre Johansen, and Else Roesdahl, eds., (Trondheim, 2003) respectively pp. 19-20 and pp. 41-76.

<sup>55</sup> *VSNR*, p. 54.

<sup>56</sup> *ÍF*, p. 107.

<sup>57</sup> *VSNR*, p. 61.

<sup>58</sup> Harald is noted in *Heimskringla* as being ‘sole ruler of all Norway’ in chapter 20 of *Haralds saga in hárfagra*.

<sup>59</sup> According to the saga literature, Harald Hafldanarson, hárfagra, ruled from 870 to the very early 930’s. His power base seems to have been in Western Norway and, even though he is known as the unifier of the Norwegian kingdom, he probably did not control all of Norway at his height. There was probably still a great deal of Danish control in southeast during his reign. Aside from the saga and skaldic sources, there is not much more information about Harald. For more on this time period and Harald see: Sverre Bagge, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway, c. 900 – 1350* (Copenhagen, 2010) pp. 25-29; Peter Foote, and Wilson, David M., *The Viking Achievement: the society and culture of early medieval Scandinavia* (London,

during his reign, eventually gaining power over much of Norway.<sup>60</sup> These two burnings appear to be purely political actions taken to gain power and land through the easiest means possible. Similarly, the burning of Jarl Sigurðr in chapter five of *Haralds saga gráfeldar* is a political move by one group wishing to gain more power in a region. The text says:

Kom þá Grjótgarðr til móts við þá, kómu ofanverða nótt á Qgló, þar sem Sigurðr jarl var á veizlu, lögðu þar eld í hús ok brenndu bæinn ok jarl inni með öllu liði sínu, fóru braut árdegis um morgininn út eptir firði ok svá suðr á Mæri ok dvöldusk þar langa hríð.<sup>61</sup>

[Then Grjótgarðr came to meet them; they came in the latter part of the night to Qgló, where Jarl Sigurðr was at a banquet, set fire to the building and burned the farm and the jarl inside it with all his following, going away early the next morning out along the fiord and south to Mærr, and stayed there for a long time.<sup>62</sup>]

The destruction of the hall and jarl seems to have been enough politically in this situation that they did not need to stay in the immediate area, but could move on to a new location.

The final hall burning that I wish to discuss in this section is not brought about by active warfare, but a passive invasion through marriage proposals. In chapter forty-three of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* two kings come to ask for Queen Sigríðr's hand in marriage, who was a widow at the time. The two kings were King Harald inn grenski and King Vissavaldr of Garðaríki. This is what happened after both had arrived:

Þeim var skipat konungunum í eina stofu mikla ok forna ok öllu liði þeira. Eptir því var allr búnaðr stofunnar. En drykk skorti þar eigi um kveldit svá áfenginn, at allir váru fulldrukknir ok hofuðverðir ok útverðir sofnuðu. Þá lét Sigríðr dróttning um nóttina veita þeim atgöngu bæði með eldi ok vápnum. Brann þar stofan ok þeir menn, sem inni váru, en þeir váru drepnir, er út kómusk. Sigríðr sagði þat, at svá skyldi hon

---

1970) pp. 41-43; and, Sawyer, Brigit and Peter, *Medieval Scandinavia: from conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500* (Minneapolis, 1993) pp. 54-55.

<sup>60</sup> Brigit and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: from conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500* (Minneapolis, 1993) p. 54.

<sup>61</sup> *ÍF*, p. 207.

<sup>62</sup> *VSNR*, p. 126.

leiða smákonungum at fara af qðrum lqndum til þess at biðja hennar.<sup>63</sup>

[The kings were assigned with their men to a large and ancient apartment. All the furniture of the apartment was in keeping. And there was plenty of drinking during the evening, so strong that everyone was completely drunk and the bodyguards and the watchmen outside fell asleep. Then Queen Sigríðr had an attack made on them during the night with both fire and weapons. The apartment there burned and the people that were inside, but those who got out were killed. Sigríðr said that thus would she make petty kings stop going from other countries to ask to marry her.<sup>64</sup>]

Sigríðr is a powerful woman with lands and an income of her own, which she valued more highly than any other land. She is described as being ‘in vitrasta kona ok forspá um marga hluti’,<sup>65</sup> [‘the wisest of women and prophetic about many things.’<sup>66</sup>] The freedom and power she had was not something she was willing to give up to marry again. To her, a proposal of marriage might very well have seemed to be an attempt by the kings to invade her lands and take them and her person for their greater glory. And, taking into consideration her violent reaction to such requests, we can easily see that she did take such proposals as a direct threat to her lifestyle and power, and she made sure that she sent a clear message to any other kings who thought they might be able to convince her to marry them.<sup>67</sup>

The hall burnings that have been classed as the result of external or invasion-based conflicts are more numerous and in most cases more descriptive. This final point is of particular importance because they give the reader a greater understanding of the thought process behind depicting such events. These hall burnings are similar to the internecine

---

<sup>63</sup> *ÍF*, p. 288-289.

<sup>64</sup> *VSNR*, p. 179.

<sup>65</sup> *ÍF*, p. 287.

<sup>66</sup> *VSNR*, p. 178.

<sup>67</sup> Sigríðr is not the only female character in saga literature to commit a hall burning, for example from the end of the ‘Lay of Atli’ in *The Poetic Edda*: ‘With a sword-point she gave the bed blood to drink, / with a hand bent on death she loosed the dog; / hurled before the hall doors a flaming brand; wakening the house-servants, / that bride made them pay for her brothers. // She gave to the fire all who were in there, / who after the death of Gunnar and Hogni had come from Mirkheim; / the ancient timbers fell, the temples went up in smoke, / the home of Budli’s descendants, the sheild-maids inside / burnt up, their lives stopped, they sank into the hot fire.’ *The Poetic Edda*, trans., Larrington, Carolyne (Oxford, 1999) p. 216.



conflicts in that they are again the only form of body disposal mentioned and they mark turning points in the political narratives being described.

#### IV.D. – Cases of Hall Burnings Where the Leader Escapes Alive:

Two cases of hall burnings stand out from all those examined above. In these the leader who is the target of the hall burning manages to escape alive while their following does not. The first of these is in *Hálfðanar saga Svarta*, chapter five, in which Haki the berserker, who is already gravely wounded, escapes from the burning hall to chase after the men who had come to take the woman he had just stolen; ‘Síðan gengu þeir til svefnbúrs þess, er Haki svaf í, ok brutu upp, tóku í brot Ragnhildi ok Guthorm, bróður hennar, ok allt fé þat, sem þar var, en þeir brenndu skálann ok alla menn, þá er inni váru.’<sup>68</sup> [‘Then they went to the sleeping chamber that Haki slept in and broke into it, carried off Ragnhildr and her brother Guthorm and all the wealth that was there, and they burned the hall and all the men that were in it.’<sup>69</sup>] Haki commits suicide when he realizes he cannot retrieve her by leaning onto the point of his sword while it is braced against the ice on a frozen lake. His followers then bury him in a mound beside the lake.<sup>70</sup> The other is the final mention in these six sagas of any hall being burnt, appearing in chapter sixty-two of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*. In this instance, Óláfr is attempting to burn people who were skilled in witchcraft when one of the most skilled of them, Eyvindr, manages to get out of the burning hall without anyone noticing;

Óláfr konungr lét skipa þessum mönnum öllum í eina stofu ok lét þar vel um búask, lét gera þeim þar veizlu ok fá þeim sterkan drykk. Ok þá er þeir váru drukknir, lét Óláfr leggja eld í stofuna, ok brann stofa sú ok allt þat fólk, er þar var inni, nema Eyvindr kelda komisk út um ljórann ok svá í brot.<sup>71</sup>

[King Óláfr had all these people put into an apartment and had it well furnished, had a banquet provided for them and strong

<sup>68</sup> *ÍF*, p. 89.

<sup>69</sup> *VSNR*, pp.50-51

<sup>70</sup> *VSNR*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>71</sup> *ÍF*, p. 311.

drink given them. And when they had got drunk, Óláfr had the building set fire to, and the apartment was burned and all the people who were in it, except that Eyvindr kelda got out through an opening in the roof and so got away.<sup>72]</sup>

However, he does not live long as he is eventually taken prisoner and killed with many other ‘sorcerers’ by Óláfr in the following chapter. These two examples show that a hall burning is not always successful, but the vast majority are.

#### IV.E. – General Discussion and Conclusions:

The destruction of the hall as a means of negating the power of an individual in the late Iron Age and early Middle ages is a point that has been frequently noted in various fields including history, archaeology and anthropology.<sup>73</sup> By adding this knowledge to a discussion of how a royal or noble body is disposed of in *Heimskringla* in general, we can begin to see how important both the political body and geographical centre were, as well as how that idea continued in the literature of Scandinavia into the High and late Mediaeval period. The hall is a key element in this discussion; it is the place where a community gathers in times of pleasure, plenty, war, and famine. A hall is a place of political and religious manoeuvrings, a multi-functional building that sits at the heart of a group of people, with the king or jarl sitting in the high-seat. The hall would have been where people met for feasts.<sup>74</sup> The destruction of a hall when empty is a strong political statement in its own right, but by adding the simultaneous destruction of a leader, his following, and maybe even his heirs to that, it becomes something more.

If we take the first type of hall burning deaths which I have identified above, those resulting from internal family conflicts, there is a hint of a possible deeper meaning beyond just wiping away the old generation so a new one can take power. Concerns over correct

---

<sup>72</sup> *VSNR*, p. 194.

<sup>73</sup> Such as Lotte Hedeager, Lars Larsson, and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen.

<sup>74</sup> Lars Jørgensen, p. 81: ‘Fragments of Frankish drinking glasses from the area around the central halls [at Tissø] confirm that this was where the feasts were held.’

burial, the responsibility of the family, may be reflected in these inter-familial hall burnings. Coupled with the fact that there is never another form of burial/disposal of the body mentioned for these deaths other than the burning, we can easily assume that the bodies were completely destroyed and thus there was no need nor was there any intention of further funerary performance. Whether the perpetrator is killing a member of their own family, or trying to get the attention of a family member, such as in the cases of the sons of Haraldr hárfagri, they are also disposing of the body through one of the accepted pagan funerary techniques: burning. The targets are also burnt possibly with their men, weapons, and other possessions, thus ticking those boxes on the check list of proper burial that is set out in the *Prologue*. However there is also an element of defamation involved in the destruction of their relatives' hall, which 'was the centre of the human micro-cosmos, the symbol of stability and good leadership.'<sup>75</sup> As is pointed out in *Njal's saga* by Skarpheðinn,

The men who attacked Gunnar were chieftains of such integrity that they would rather have turned back than burn him in his house. But these men will attack us with fire if they can't do it in any other way, for they'll do anything to finish us off. They must realize, and it's not unlikely, that if we get away it will be their death. Besides, I'm not eager to let myself be suffocated like a fox in his hole.<sup>76</sup>

Burning some one alive is seen as a cowardly act by people desperate to completely get rid of a person or group of people, whilst the final line of Skarpheðinn's speech also tells us of the social implications of being burned in one's own home. He associates himself and the death that they face as being no better than the death of a pest in a hole. In *Njal's saga* this is used to keep a balance between how the audience feels about the two parties involved in the burning, making sure that we understand that an evil deed has been done and should be punished without losing all sympathy for those who have been killed.<sup>77</sup> A key difference

---

<sup>75</sup> Lotte Hedeager, *Iron Age Myth and Materiality: An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400 – 1000*, (Abingdon, 2011) p. 147.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Cook, trans., *Njal's Saga* (London, 2001) chapter 128, p. 218.

<sup>77</sup> Richard F. Allen, *Fire and Iron: Critical Approaches to 'Njáls saga'* (London, 1971) pp. 110-114.

between *Njal's saga* and the hall burnings in *Heimskringla* is that the bodies of Njal and his household are recovered and moved to the church, whereas in Snorri's text there is no mention of the recovery of any remains of the kings and leaders. However, the comparison does serve to demonstrate the two possible ways being burned alive could be interpreted by the audience; either as an act by cowardly men on a good man, or as a statement of the base nature of the person or people being burned.

As for the burnings by invading forces, it may be more a case of wanting to make sure that all of the possible claimants and followers are killed in one event. Having the leader, centre of politics and the major players all in one place, and on a number of occasions partaking in a feast, makes the act of a takeover much easier. As Hedeager notes, 'the hall with the high seat served as the geographical and ideological centre of leadership, it is understandable that, as the literature tells us, earls and kings could oppress and ruin each other by simply destroying their opponent's hall.'<sup>78</sup> Add the death and destruction of the body and the removal of the dynasty could be easily done in one event. There is also the ritualised aspect of warfare to take into account, and part of that ritual was based around the ideas and ideals embodied in the hall, such as gift-giving, loyalty, and martial prowess. Thus by destroying it the opposing forces were negating those ideals while also showing a certain amount of cowardice on their own part.

These hall burnings also echo the descriptions in other sagas of the afterlife, particularly the feasting and hall elements. Feasts are mentioned in seven out of the twelve successful hall burnings, as well as in both of the ones where the leader escapes alive. Feasting, halls and death are all also closely linked through the descriptions in the sagas of religious events and the afterlife. For example at the beginning of *Eyrbyggja saga* we are told that everyone had to pay a tax to support the 'temple-priest', but that the chief must pay for

---

<sup>78</sup> Lotte Hedeager, *Iron Age Myth and Materiality: An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400 – 1000*, (Abingdon, 2011) 147.

the temple upkeep and hold feasts and sacrifices therein.<sup>79</sup> The ‘temple’ is also described in similar terms to a hall, making allusions to Valhalla, the seat of the gods and the hall of the dead, and noting the importance of feasting in connection with religious events.<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, it has also been noted by historians and archaeologists like Foote and Wilson that the so called hogback tombstones that are found in Britain have a striking resemblance to halls.<sup>81</sup> With their textured, almost shingled, roofs and curved walls the thought is that they are meant to represent not the halls of the living but the halls of the dead. While these have no direct relevance to the discussion at hand per se, they do emphasise the connection being made in the culture which produced them between the hall and the dead. And, as has become clear through archaeology, what we know as the hall really served a much wider and more varied role in early Scandinavian society than previously thought. The sagas give a good sense of this through the importance that they put on the destruction of a hall and leader.

In conclusion, what can we understand, about the hall burnings mentioned in the first six sagas of *Heimskringla*? It is evident from their positioning at turning points in the narratives as well as their innate political nature that they are serving as both the record of a death and to draw attention to particular events. Hall burnings stand out as the only form of death where there is absolutely no other form of burial mentioned for those involved. As can be seen in the sections on Cremation and Inhumation burial there are many different ways in which kings and leaders die, but there is no other type of death that does not have any mention of further burial. This coupled with the funerary language and allusions to specific

---

<sup>79</sup> ‘Every farmer had to pay tax to the temple. Another of their duties was to support the temple priest in his missions, just as farmers nowadays have to support their chieftains. It was the priest’s business to see to the temple and maintain it properly at his own expense, as well as hold sacrificial feasts.’ Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Eyrbyggja Saga* (London, 1989) p. 29.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Thorolf established a great farm at Hofsvag which he called Hofstad, and had a large temple built there with its door in one of the side walls near the gable. Just inside the door stood the high-seat pillars with the so-called holy nails fixed in them, and beyond that point the whole building was considered a sanctuary. Inside the main temple was a structure built much like the choir in churches nowadays, and in the middle a raised platform like an altar. On this platform lay a solid gold ring weighing twenty ounces, upon which people had to swear oaths.’ Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Eyrbyggja Saga* (London, 1989) p. 29.

<sup>81</sup> Foote, and Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: the society and culture of early medieval Scandinavia* (London, 1970) p. 152.

elements of burial in the descriptions makes it clear that they have become a form of burial at the same time as they are the death of an individual. A hall burning has many of the elements of both a cremation burial, through fire and the inclusion of rich objects, and an inhumation burial, through the allusions to ship burials and high seats among others. There is usually also feasting involved in hall burnings, which makes sense as when better to attempt to kill the king or leader and his following than when they are all together and most likely drinking heavily, as in the cases of Ingjaldr and Sigríðr among others? However, it is equally notable that many of these feasts might well have been celebratory and meant to show the power, wealth and prowess of the doomed leader adding poignancy to their death. So, although a hall burning is not nearly as common a form of body disposal as cremation or inhumation, it may be more important to the narrative and political statements being made in *Heimskringla*.

## **Conclusion:**

This thesis has explored textual depictions of the burial of leaders in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*. Central to my argument has been the close connection between representations of burial and the broader qualities of good/bad kingship, and the relationship between kingship, Christianity, and legitimacy. Snorri himself encourages his readers to concentrate on burial, since his universal history is introduced by a *Prologus* dividing the ages of man into distinct phases marked out by forms of burial which is then reinforced in the early chapters of *Ynglinga saga*. My focus has been upon the representations of burial in the pagan period – covered in the first six sagas of the text – because such representations, covering as they do the distant pagan past, allowed Snorri considerable licence to comment on the qualities of good and bad rulership. I have explored cremation burials and inhumation burials, noting the convergences and ambiguities within Snorri's accounts of such practices, and I have raised in particular the tensions between 'correct' Christian practices and pagan practices, and how to assess kingly qualities of certain individuals based on their burial rites. My final chapter has made a strong case for viewing hall burning as a distinct form of burial in its own right, albeit one with clear associations of bad kingship and improper forms of legitimacy, especially with regards to the presence of non-Christian magic in hall burnings.

Snorri's text was produced in the midst of a broader political climate characterised by competing claims for legitimacy and authority, in a period traditionally seen as formative in the creation of the Norwegian state, buttressed on a developing notion of sacralised, Christian kingship. Within the context of civil wars, competition between alternative forms and sources of legitimacy, and the relationship between kingship and divine sources of authority – pagan or Christian – have been identified as central to our understanding of the period. Added to this is competition more broadly for the sovereignty of Snorri's native Iceland, with the

Norwegian kings claiming a ‘special relationship’ with the Icelanders, which had its roots ultimately in trade disputes between the two regions.

How does my discussion of death and burial practice in the first six sagas contribute to historians’ understanding of *Heimskringla*? I think in a few key ways. Most obviously, I have drawn attention to the complex and multifaceted meanings buried within descriptions of burial practice. Despite their episodic nature, Snorri’s accounts of burial practices function as key devices within his text communicating meaning and commentary. Pagan burial practices, in particular, provided Snorri fertile material and scope with which to craft his political narrative and religious commentary within a semi-neutral context. Placed within a framework of Christianization, Snorri used these early representations of burial both to tell a story of the conversion process, but also to reflect on aspects of that story, and the relationship between Christianity and legitimate royal authority. Further, and developing out of this, Snorri uses representations of burial practice to sketch the outlines of good and bad kingship. The virtues of a good king/ruler seem, perhaps unsurprisingly, linked with notions of prosperity, peace, and well-being. Bad rulers/kings, on the other hand, whose qualities emerged most clearly in my discussion of hall burnings, are, again unsurprisingly, associated with famine, internecine conflict, instability, and magic. That such a schema should be developed by Snorri is understandable; not only are these universal qualities of good rulership, but qualities which were particularly apposite in the context of early thirteenth-century Norway.

What is of particular interest is the degree to which a Christianised kingship represents the only legitimate form of royal authority so far as Snorri is concerned. Whilst the Christian conversion narrative is essential for understanding some of the changes in general attitudes towards burial practice, seen most clearly in the cremation chapter, it nevertheless remains significant that at times, good kingship and Christian burial practice appear separable, even after contact with Christianity. This was seen most strongly in the account of



*Jarl Hákon*, who was a good ruler despite being a pagan. Indeed, in many points of the discussion, Snorri seems to suggest that power and legitimacy resides in the land itself, and with the people who populate it. King Hákon's burial is a telling example of this, where the imposition and exercise of Christian kingship on the part of Hákon must be balanced by the wishes and beliefs of those subject to such an authority. We can add to our schematic model of good kingship the value of consensus, here. Elsewhere, Snorri displays a similar attention to themes of political and cultural consensus. Hálfðan *svarti*'s quadri-sected burial, with its intertextual allusions to Ymir, serves to remind a potential Norwegian royal audience that the royal dynastic line has its roots in the land itself. Attention to physical land and the physicality of power may help to explain why the textual representation of inhumation is far less problematic from a Christian perspective than is cremation. What all this may imply is that Snorri's *Heimskringla* presents a subtle commentary on the changing nature of Norwegian royal authority; he aims in part to legitimise Christian kingship by appropriating aspects of the pagan past to the current royal line, but he also aims to ensure this kingship remembers the expectations of its subjects, as handed down through the tradition of the pagan past.

Of course, *Heimskringla* is a complex, subtle text, and one which defies simple characterisation. It must be remembered that Snorri is well educated and travelled, and his text displays a degree of flair, humour, and wit which make ascriptions of purpose difficult to maintain. Given the episodic nature of his account of the pagan period, it is worth entertaining the idea that Snorri is providing interesting and amusing stories through which he can display his learning, and poke a bit of fun at the world around him. In this vein, the inherent ambiguity within much of Snorri's text remains the basic lesson to take from *Heimskringla*. And as a testament to this, it is worth concluding with one final story, and one which brings the pagan period to a close, and epitomises all the ambiguity and uncertainty

over kingship, authority, and religion. I am speaking, of course, of the ‘non-burial’ of Óláfr Tryggvason. Chapters 111-112 of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* records that during a battle at sea:

...Óláfr konungr sjálfir ok þeir Kolbjörn báðir hljópu þá fyrir borð ok á sitt borð hvárr... Óláfr konungr brá yfir sik skildinum ok steypðisk í kaf... En sú Vinðasnekkjan, er menn Ástriðar vátu á, rori brot ok aptr undir Vinðland, ok ver þat þegar ræða margra manna, at Óláfr konungr myndi steipt hafa af sér brynjunni í kaf ok kafat út undan langskipunum, lagzk síðan til Vinðasnekkjunnar ok hefði menn Ástriðar flutt hann til lands. Ok eru þar margar frásagnir um ferðir Óláfs konungs gǫrvar síðan af sumum mǫnnum... En hvernug sem þat hefir verit, þá kom Óláfr konungr Tryggvason aldri síðan til ríkis í Nóregi...<sup>1</sup>

[...King Óláfr himself and Kolbjörn with him both then leapt overboard, and each on opposite side... King Óláfr brought his shield over his head and plunged into the water... But the cruiser of Vinðr that Ástriðr’s men were on rowed away and back off Vinðland, and there was already a report by many people that King Óláfr must have thrown off his coat of mail in the water and dived away from the longships, afterwards swimming to the Vinðr’s cruiser, and that Ástriðr’s men had taken him ashore. And there have been many stories made since about these travels of King Óláfr’s by some people...But however it may have been, King Óláfr never after came to power in Norway...<sup>2</sup>]

Here then, after Snorri has returned throughout six sagas to the theme of burials, the final ‘burial’ of the pagan period never happens. That this lack of burial is in connection with the man who tried to convert Norway, but did not succeed, and directly before the saga that describes the coming of St Óláfr to the throne,<sup>3</sup> is perhaps the closest we will get to Snorri’s statement on kingship and religion.

<sup>1</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla I*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk Fornrit XXVI* (Reykjavík, 1941) pp. 366-368.

<sup>2</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla Volume I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, trans by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, 2011) pp. 229-230.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that there is a gap of fifteen years between the death of Óláfr Tryggvason and the beginning of the reign of St Óláfr.



Hálfðanar saga Svarta	Chapter	Death	Cremation	Inhumation	Mound	Stones	Objects	Hall	Sacrifice	Ship	Exposure
	5	X		X	X						
	" "	X	Followers of ↑					Followers of ↑			
	9	X		4X	4X						
Haralds saga Hárfagra	Chapter	Death	Cremation	Inhumation	Mound	Stones	Objects	Hall	Sacrifice	Ship	Exposure
	1	X									
45	2	2X						X			
	" "	X									
	7	2X									
	" "	8X									
	8	X		X	X		X				
50	10	2X									
	11	2X									
	12	X						X			
	" "	X									
	14	X									
55	18	3X									
	22	X		X	X						
	25	X	X								
	28	2X									
	29	X						X			
60	30	X									
	32	X									
	33	X									
	34	X						X			
	" "	X									
65	35	X									
	41	X									
	42	X		X	X	X					
	43	2X		2X	2X						
Hákonar saga Góða	Chapter	Death	Cremation	Inhumation	Mound	Stones	Objects	Hall	Sacrifice	Ship	Exposure
	4	X									
70	4	6X									
	12	X (dog)									
	19	X									
	26	X									
	27	↑		X	X	X				X	
75	32	X		X	X		X (armor)				

Haralds saga Gráfeldar	Chapter	Death	Cremation	Inhumation	Mound	Stones	Objects	Hall	Sacrifice	Ship	Exposure
80	5	X						X			
	9	X		X							
	10	X									
	11	X (Swed)									
	14	X									
	15	X									
	16	X									
Óláfs saga Tryggvason	Chapter	Death	Cremation	Inhumation	Mound	Stones	Objects	Hall	Sacrifice	Ship	Exposure
85	6	X									
	14	X									
	15	X									
	20	X									
	27	X									
	29	X									
	34	X									
90	35	2X									
	41	X									
	" "	18X									
	42	X									
	" "	X							X		
	43	2X						X			
	49	X									
95	" "	X	X (chap. 50)								
	" "	X									
	62	Attempted/X	Followers					Followers			
	63	X									X
	64	X told by Óðín		X	X	X					
	69	X									
	72	" "		X	X						
105	76	X									
	78	X									
	80	X									
	87	X									
	111-112	X									
Totals:	90	≈162	8	26	25	5	5	≈12	3	2	2

## **Bibliography:**

### **Primary Sources:**

Adam of Bremen, *The History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Francis J. Tschan (New York, 2002).

Andersson, Theodore M., and Gade, Kari Ellen, trans. with intro. and notes, *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030-1157)* (Ithaca, 2000).

*A History of Norway and The Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr*, trans. Devra Kunin, *Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series Volume XIII* (London, 2001).

*Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sǫgum. Fagrskinna – Nóregs konunga tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, *Íslenzk Fornrit XXIX* (Reykjavík, 1985).

*Ágrip af Nóregskonungasǫgum: A Twelfth-Century Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway*, ed. and trans. M.J. Driscoll, *Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series Volume X*, gen. eds. Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London, 2008).

Jesse L. Byock, trans., *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* (London, 1998).

Jesse Byock, trans., *Grettir's Saga* (Oxford, 2009).

Robert Cook, trans., *Njal's Saga* (London, 2001).

*Fagrskinna, A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway: A Translation with Introduction and Notes*, trans. Alison Finlay (Leiden, 2004).

Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Orkneyinga Saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney* (London, 1978).

Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, trans., *Eyrbyggja Saga* (London, 1989).

Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla I*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk Fornrit XXVI* (Reykjavík, 1941).

- *Heimskringla II*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk Fornrit XXVII* (Reykjavík, 1945).

- *Heimskringla III*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk Fornrit XXVIII* (Reykjavík, 1951).

Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, trans by Lee M. Hollander (Austin, 1964).

Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla Volume I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*, trans by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, 2011).

Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans., Jesse L. Byock (London, 2005).

Somerville, Angus A., and McDonald, R. Andrew, eds., *The Viking age: a reader* (Toronto, 2010).

Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium – An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*, trans. and ann. by David and Ian McDougall, *Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series Volume XI* (London, 1998).

*The Poetic Edda*, trans., Larrington, Carolyne (Oxford, 1999).

### Secondary Sources:

Abrams, Lesley, 'The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia', *Anglo-Saxon England* 24, ed. Michael Lapidge, et al., (1995) pp. 213-249.

Allen, Richard F., *Fire and Iron: Critical Approaches to 'Njáls saga'* (London, 1971).

Ambrosiani, Björn, and Clarke, Helen eds., *Investigations in the Black Earth: Early Investigations and Future Plans (Birka Studies, Volume I)*, (Stockholm, 1992).

Ambrosiani, Björn, and Clarke, Helen eds., *Excavations in the Black Earth 1990 (Birka Studies, Volume II)*, (Stockholm, 1995).

Andersson, Theodore M., *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey* (New Haven, 1964).

Andersson, Theodore M., *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Cambridge, 1967).

Andersson, Theodore M., 'The Conversion of Norway according to Oddr Snorrason and Snorri Sturluson', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* vol. 10 (1977) pp. 83-95.

Andersson, Theodore M., 'Ethics and Politics in *Hrafnkels Saga*', *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 60.2 (1988) pp. 293-309.

Andersson, Theodore M., 'The Politics of Snorri Sturluson', in *The journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 93, no. 1 (1994), pp. 55-78.

Andersson, Theodore M., 'The King of Iceland', *Speculum*, vol. 74, no. 4 (1999) pp. 923-934.

Andersson, Theodore M., 'The First Icelandic King's Saga: Oddr Snorrason's "Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar" or "The Oldest Saga of Saint Olaf?"', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 103, no. 2 (2004) pp. 139-155.

Andersson, Theodore M., *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180-1280)* (Ithaca, 2006).

Andersson, Theodore M., 'The Oral Sources of *Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla*', in *Saga-Book*, vol. XXXII (2008) pp. 5-38.

- Andersson, Theodore M., and Gade, Kari Ellen, 'Recent Old Norse-Icelandic Studies in the German-Speaking Countries', *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 63.1 (1991) pp. 66-102.
- Andrén, Andres, 'Behind *Heathendom*: Archaeological Studies of Old Norse Religion', *Scottish Archaeological Journal*, vol. 27.2 (2005) pp. 105-138.
- Bagge, Sverre, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's 'Heimskringla'* (Berkeley, 1991).
- Bagge, Sverre, 'The Norwegian Monarchy in the Thirteenth Century', Duggan, Anne J., ed., *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe* (London, 1993) pp. 159-177.
- Bagge, Sverre, 'Icelandic Uniqueness or a Common European Culture? The Case of the Kings' Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 69.4 (1997) pp. 418-442.
- Bagge, Sverre, 'The Making of a Missionary King: The Medieval Accounts of Olaf Tryggvason and the Conversion of Norway', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 105, no. 4 (2006) pp. 473-513.
- Bagge, Sverre, 'Christianization and State Formation in Early Medieval Norway', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 30:2 (2005) pp. 107-134.
- Bagge, Sverre, *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway, c. 900 – 1350* (Copenhagen, 2010).
- Bagge, Sverre, and Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide, 'Chapter 4: The Kingdom of Norway', ed. Nora Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c.900-1200* (Cambridge, 2007) pp. 121-166.
- Bagnoli, Martina, Holger A. Klein, C. Griffith Mann, and James Robinson, *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (London, 2010).
- Barber, Malcolm, *The Two Cities: Medieval Europe, 1050-1320* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, 2004).
- Barnes, Geraldine, and Margaret Clunies Ross, *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Saga Conference 2-7 July 2000, University of Sydney* (2000).
- Barrett, James H., ed., *Contact, Continuity, and Collapse: The Norse Colonization of the North Atlantic* (Turnhout, 2003).
- Berman, Melissa A., 'The Political Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 57.2 (1985) pp. 113-129.
- Binski, Paul, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London, 1996).
- Boulhosa, Patricia Pires, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway* (Leiden, 2005).
- Brink, Stefan, 'Christianisation and the Emergence of the Early Church in Scandinavia', Brink, Stefan, and Price, Neil, eds. *The Viking World* (London, 2012) pp. 621-628.



- Brink, Stefan, and Price, Neil, eds. *The Viking World* (London, 2012).
- Brink, Stefan, 'Law and Legal Customs in Viking Age Scandinavia', Jesch, Judith, ed., *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: an ethnographic perspective* (reprint, Woodbridge, 2012) pp. 87-127.
- Brown, Peter, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford, 2003).
- Burrows, Hannah, 'Rhyme and Reason: Lawspeaker-Poets in Medieval Iceland', *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 81.2 (2009) pp. 215-238.
- Byock, Jesse, 'Cultural Continuity, the Church, and the Concept of Independent Ages in Medieval Iceland', *Skandinavistik*, 15/1 (1985) pp. 1-14.
- Byock, Jesse L., *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power* (Berkeley, 1988).
- Byock, Jesse, Phillip Walker, Jon Erlandson, Per Holck, Davide Zori, Magnús Guðmundsson, and Mark Tveskov, 'A Viking-Age Valley in Iceland: The Mosfell Archaeological Project', *Medieval Archaeology: Journal of the Society for Medieval Archaeology*, Vol. XLIX, 2005, pp. 195-218.
- Chapman, Robert, '2. Working with the dead', Sayer, Duncan, and Williams, Howard, eds. *Mortuary practices and social identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in burial archaeology in honour of Heinrich Härke* (Exeter, 2009) pp. 23-37.
- Cleasby, Richard, and Vigfusson, Gudbrand, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1957).
- Clover, Carol J., and Lindow, John, eds., *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Ithaca, 1985).
- Crumlin-Pedersen, Ole, and Birgitte Munch Thye, eds., *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia: Papers from an International Research Seminar at the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen, 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> May 1994* (Copenhagen, 1995).
- Demidoff, Lene, 'The Poppo Legend', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, Volume 6 (1973) pp. 39-67.
- Dronke, Ursula, *Myth and Fiction in Early Norse Lands* (Aldershot, 1996).
- Duggan, Anne J., ed., *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe* (London, 1993).
- Ellis Davidson, Hilda, *The Road to Hel. A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge, 1943).
- Faulkes, Anthony, 'Pagan Sympathy: Attitudes to Heathendom in the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*', originally published in, ed. R. J. Glendinning and H. Bessason, *Edda: A Collection of Essays* (Manitoba, 1983) pp. 283-316.

- Faulkes, Anthony, and Perkins, Richard, eds., *Viking Revaluations: Viking Society Centenary Symposium 14-15 May 1992* (London, 1993).
- Fletcher, Richard, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity 371 – 1386 AD* (London, 1997).
- Forte, Angelo, Oram, Richard, and Pedersen, Frederik, *Viking Empires* (Cambridge, 2005).
- Friðriksson, Adolf, *Sagas and Popular Antiquarianism in Icelandic Archaeology* (Aldershot, 1994).
- Fitzhugh, William W., and Ward Elisabeth I., eds., *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga* (Washington D.C., 2000).
- Foote, Peter, and Wilson, David M., *The Viking Achievement: the society and culture of early medieval Scandinavia* (London, 1970).
- Gaskins, Richard, 'Visions of Sovereignty in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 23:3-4 (1998) pp. 173-188.
- Geary, Patrick J., *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1994).
- Ghosh, Shami, *King's Sagas and Norwegian History: Problems and Perspectives* (Leiden, 2011).
- Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds., *The Manuscripts of Iceland* (Reykjavík, 2004).
- Graham-Campbell, James, *The Viking World* (London, 1980).
- Gräslund, Anne-Sofie, *Birka IV The Burial Customs: A study of the graves on Björkö* (Uppsala, 1981).
- Gräslund, Anne-Sofie, 'New Perspectives on an Old Problem: Uppsala and the Christianization of Sweden', *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*, eds. Guyda Armstrong and Ian N. Wood (Turnhout, 2000) pp. 61-67.
- Gräslund, Anne-Sofie, 'From pagan to Christian – on the Conversion of Scandinavia', Lewis-Simpson, Shannon, ed., *Vinland Revisited: The Norse World at the Turn of the First Millennium* (St. John's, 2003) pp. 263-276.
- Grimm, Jacob, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans by James Steven Stallybrass, Vol. 1 (London, 1882).
- Grinsell, L. V., 'Barrow Treasure, in Fact, Tradition, and Legislation', *Folklore*, vol. 78, no. 1 (1967) pp. 1-38.
- Hadley, D. M., *Death in Medieval England: an archaeology* (Stroud, 2001).
- Halsall, Guy, *Early Medieval Cemeteries: An Introduction to Burial Archaeology in the Post-Roman West* (Skelmorlie, 1995).

- Halstad-McGuire, Erin, 'Sailing Home: Boat-Graves, Migrant Identities and Funerary Practice on the Viking Frontier', Elizabeth Anderson, et al. eds., *Memory, Mourning, Landscape* (Amsterdam, 2010) pp. 165-187.
- Hedeager, Lotte, 'Scandinavian 'Central Places' in a Cosmological Setting', eds. Birgitta Hardh and Lars Larsson, *Central Places in the Migration & Merovingian Periods: Papers from the 52<sup>nd</sup> Sachsensymposium, August 2001* (Stockholm, 2002) pp. 3-18.
- Hedeager, Lotte, *Iron Age Myth and Materiality: An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400 – 1000*, (Abingdon, 2011).
- Hermann, Pernille, 'Concepts of Memory and Approaches to the Past in Medieval Icelandic Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 81.3 (2009) pp. 287-308.
- Herschend, Frands, 'Ship grave hall passage – the Oseberg monument as compound meaning', Barnes, Geraldine, and Margaret Clunies Ross, *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Saga Conference 2-7 July 2000, University of Sydney* (2000) pp. 142-151.
- Holck, Per, 'The Skeleton from the Gokstad Ship: New Evaluation of an Old Find', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2009), pp. 40-49.
- Imsen, Steinar, ed., *The Norwegian Domination and the Norse World c.1100 – 1400* (Trondheim, 2010).
- Jakobsson, Ármann, 'The Individual and the Ideal: The Representation of Royalty in "Morkinskinna"', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 99, no. 1 (2000) pp. 71-86.
- Jakobsson, Ármann, 'Snorri and His Death: Youth, Violence, and Autobiography in Medieval Iceland', *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 75.3 (2003) pp. 317-340.
- Jesch, Judith, ed., *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: an ethnographic perspective* (reprint, Woodbridge, 2012).
- Jochens, Jenny M., 'The Politics of Reproduction: Medieval Norwegian Kingship', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 92, no. 2 (1987) pp. 327-349.
- Kalinke, Marianne E., "'Ynglinga Saga", Chapter 21: A Case of Once too Often', *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 50.1 (1978) pp. 72-75.
- Kennedy, John, *Translating the Sagas: Two Hundred Years of Challenge and Response* (Turnhout, 2007).
- Klaniczay, Gábor, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, trans. Éva Pálmai (Cambridge, 2002).
- Koht, Halvdon, *The Old Norse Sagas* (New York, 1971).

- Lars Larsson, 'The Iron Age ritual building at Uppåkra, southern Sweden', *Antiquity* 81 (2007) pp. 11-25.
- Lars Larsson, 'A ceremonial building as a 'home for the gods'?: Central buildings in the central place of Uppåkra', O. Grim and A. Pesch, eds., *The Gudme-Gudhem phenomenon : papers presented at a workshop organized by the Centre for Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology (ZBSA), Schleswig, April 26th and 27th, 2010*, Vol. 6 (2011).
- Lewis-Simpson, Shannon, ed., *Vinland Revisited: The Norse World at the Turn of the First Millennium* (St. John's, 2003).
- Lindow, John, 'Norse Mythology and the Lives of the Saints', *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 73.3 (2001) pp. 437-456.
- Lönnroth, Lars, 'The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (February, 1969) pp. 1-29.
- Lönnroth, Lars, 'The Vikings in History and Legend', Peter Sawyer, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings* (Oxford, 1997) pp. 225-249.
- Magnus, Bente, 'Dwellings and Settlements: Structure and Characteristics', Jesch, Judith, ed., *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: an ethnographic perspective* (reprint, Woodbridge, 2012) pp. 5-44.
- Miller, William Ian, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, 1990).
- Miller, William Ian, *Audun and the Polar Bear: Luck, Law, and Largesse in a Medieval Tale of Risky Business* (Leiden, 2008).
- Munch, Gerd Stamsø, Olav Sverre Johansen, and Else Roesdahl, eds., *Borg in Lofoten: A chieftain's farm in North Norway*, (Trondheim, 2003).
- Mundal, Else, and Wellendorf, Jonas, eds., *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing* (Copenhagen, 2008).
- Nedkvitne, Arnved, *The Social Consequences of Literacy in Medieval Scandinavia* (Turnhout, 2004).
- Nielsen, Karen Høilund, '6. Rituals to free the spirit – or what the cremation pyre told', Sayer, Duncan, and Williams, Howard, eds. *Mortuary practices and social identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in burial archaeology in honour of Heinrich Härke* (Exeter, 2009) pp. 81-103.
- Nordeide, Sæbjørg Walaker, and Steinar Gulliksen, 'First Generation Christians, Second Generation Radiocarbon Dates: The Cemetery at St. Clement's in Oslo', *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1, (2007), pp. 1-25.

- O'Connor, Ralph, 'History or fiction? Truth-claims and defensive narrators in Icelandic romance-sagas', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 15 (2005) pp. 101-169.
- O'Donoghue, Heather, *The Genesis of a Saga Narrative: Verse and Prose in 'Kormaks Saga'* (Oxford, 1991).
- O'Donoghue, Heather, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction*, (Malden, 2004).
- Ólason, Vésteinn, 'The Un/Grateful Dead – From Baldr to Bægifótr', Ross, Margaret Clunies, ed., *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society* (Odense, 2003) pp. 153-171.
- Orning, Hans Jacob, *Unpredictability and Presence: Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages*, trans., Alan Crozier (Leiden, 2008).
- Page, R. I., *Chronicles of the Vikings: records, memorials and myths* (London, 1995).
- Pálsson, Hermann, *Oral Tradition and Saga Writing* (Wien, 1999).
- Pearson, Mike Parker, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (Stroud, 1999).
- Price, Neil, 'Passing into Poetry: Viking-Age Mortuary Drama and the Origins of Norse Mythology', *Medieval Archaeology* Vol. 54 (2010), pp. 123-156.
- Price, Neil, 'Dying and the dead: Viking Age mortuary behaviour', Brink, Stefan, and Price, Neil, eds. *The Viking World* (London, 2012) pp. 257-273.
- Pulsiano, Phillip, ed., *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York, 1993).
- Quinn, Judy, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, eds., *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross* (Turnhout, 2007).
- Ranković, Slavica, Leidulf Melve, and Else Mundal eds., *Along the oral-written continuum: types of texts, relations, and their implications* (Turnhout, 2010).
- Roesdahl, Else, *The Vikings*, trans. by Susan M. Margeson and Kirsten Williams (Harmondsworth, 1992).
- Ross, Margaret Clunies, 'The Intellectual Complexion of the Icelandic Middle Ages: Toward a New Profile of Old Icelandic Saga Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 69.4 (1997) pp. 443-453.
- Ross, Margaret Clunies, ed., *Old Icelandic Literature and Society* (Cambridge, 2000).
- Ross, Margaret Clunies, *The Old Norse Poetic Translations of Thomas Percy: A New Edition and Commentary* (Turnhout, 2001).
- Ross, Margaret Clunies, ed., *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society* (Odense, 2003).

- Rundkvist, Martin, *Mead-halls of the Eastern Geats: Elite Settlements and Political Geography AD 375 – 1000 in Östergötland, Sweden* (Stockholm, 2011).
- Samson, Ross, ed., *Social Approaches to Viking Studies* (Glasgow, 1991).
- Sanmark, Alexandra, 'The Role of Secular Rulers in the Conversion of Sweden', *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, edited by Martin Carver (York, 2003) pp. 551-558.
- Sawyer, Brigit, 'Scandinavian Conversion Histories', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 12/13 (1988/1989) pp. 46-60.
- Sawyer, Brigit and Peter, 'Adam and the Eve of Scandinavian History', in *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe*, Paul Magdalino, ed. (London, 1992) pp. 37-51.
- Sawyer, Brigit and Peter, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500* (Minneapolis, 1993).
- Sawyer, Peter, 'The process of Scandinavian Christianization in the tenth and eleventh centuries', *The Christianization of Scandinavia: Report of a Symposium held at Kungälv, Sweden 4 -9 August 1985*, eds. Sawyer, Brigit and Peter, and Ian Wood, (Alingsås, 1987) pp. 68-87.
- Sawyer, Peter, 'Ethelred II, Olaf Tryggvason, and the Conversion of Norway', *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 59.3 (1987) pp. 299-307.
- Sawyer, Peter, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings* (Oxford, 2001).
- Sawyer, Peter, *Kings and Vikings: Scandinavia and Europe AD 700-1000* (London, 1998).
- Sayer, Duncan, and Williams, Howard, eds. *Mortuary practices and social identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in burial archaeology in honour of Heinrich Härke* (Exeter, 2009).
- Sayers, William, 'Ethics or Pragmatics; Fate or Chance; Heathen, Christian, or Godless World? (Hrafnkels saga)', *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 79.4 (2007) pp. 385-404.
- Skre, Dagfinn, 'Missionary Activity in Early Medieval Norway. Strategy, Organization and the Course of Events', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 23:1-2 (1998) pp. 1-19.
- Steinsland, Gro, et al, eds., *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes* (Leiden, 2011).
- Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht, *Saga and Society: An Introduction to Old Norse Literature*, translated by John Tucker (Odense, 1993).
- Thäte Eva S., '7. Barrows, roads and ridges – or where to bury the dead? The choice of burial grounds in late Iron Age Scandinavia', Sayer, Duncan, and Williams, Howard, eds. *Mortuary practices and social identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in burial archaeology in honour of Heinrich Härke* (Exeter, 2009) pp. 104-122.

- Tomasson, Richard F., 'The Literacy of the Icelanders', *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 47.1 (1975) pp. 66-93.
- Toorn, Maarten Cornelis van den, *Ethics and Moral in Icelandic Saga Literature* (Assen, 1955).
- Truville-Petre, G., *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford, 1953).
- Urbańczyk, Przemysław, 'The politics of Conversion in North Central Europe', *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, edited by Martin Carver (York, 2003) pp. 15-27.
- Waugh, Robin, 'Literacy, Royal Power, and King-Poet Relations in Old English and Old Norse Compositions', *Comparative Literature*, vol. 49, no. 4 (1997) pp. 289-315.
- Whaley, Diana, *Heimskringla: An Introduction* (London, 1991).
- White, Paul A., 'The Latin Men: The Norman Sources of the Scandinavian Kings' Sagas', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 98, no. 2 (1999) pp. 157-169.
- Williams, Howard, ed., *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies* (New York, 2003).
- Williams, Howard, and Duncan Sayer, '1. 'Halls of Mirrors': death and identity in medieval archaeology', Sayer, Duncan, and Williams, Howard, eds. *Mortuary practices and social identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in burial archaeology in honour of Heinrich Härke* (Exeter, 2009) pp. 1-22.
- Wood, Ian, 'Christians and pagans in ninth-century Scandinavia', in Sawyer, Brigit and Peter, and Ian Wood eds., *The Christianization of Scandinavia: Report of a Symposium held at Kungälv, Sweden 4 -9 August 1985* (Alingsås, 1987) pp. 36-67.

### **Unpublished Thesis:**

- Salvucci, Giovanna, "'The King is Dead': The Thanatology of Kings in the Old Norse Synoptic Histories of Norway, 1035-1161.' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Durham, 2005).