

The Cult of St. Ólafr in the Eleventh Century and Kievan Rus'

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The sources relating to the emergence of the cult of King Ólafr Haraldsson (d. 1030) of Norway are in decidedly short supply. Essentially we rely on two types of sources in reconstructing the historical background to Ólafr's *translatio*, or local canonisation, in 1031 and the development of his cult in the eleventh century: contemporary skaldic poetry on one hand and Norwegian and Icelandic writings of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries on the other hand. There are eleventh-century sources for Ólafr's cult from outside Scandinavia but those are, with one notable exception, of greater assistance in assessing the cult's popularity abroad than its early development in Norway.

Snorri Sturluson's account in the *Separate Saga of Ólafr Haraldsson*, composed ca. 1220 and incorporated into *Heimskringla* ca. 1230, has traditionally been consulted regarding the immediate events which led to St. Ólafr canonisation.¹ The saga tells that the king's corporal remains were translated into St. Clement's church in Trondheim on August 3, 1031. Present at this ceremony were King Canute's substitute rulers in Norway, King Sven and his mother Álfifa. However, the saga also states that the *translatio* took place on the initiative of Grímkell, an English missionary bishop who had been in Ólafr's retinue, and Einar úambarskelfir, a powerful magnate from the region of Trondelag. Snorri also

relates that Grímkell and Einar were acting on the insistence of the people of Trondelag who had come to regret their part in the downfall of King Ólafr.

The account in *Ólafs saga helga* should be treated with some circumspection. This applies particularly to Einar Þambarskelfir's role in securing the canonisation. It is often assumed that Norwegian chieftains were instrumental in promoting Ólafr's sanctity; the assumption is that they recognised the propaganda value of the cult in rallying support against Danish rule.² But it should be noted that *Ólafs saga helga* alone mentions Norwegian chieftains backing Ólafr's canonisation and here their participation is limited to the single figure of Einar Þambarskelfir. Interestingly, sagas composed earlier than *Ólafs saga helga* are silent about the involvement of Norwegian magnates in general and Einar in particular. *Fagrskinna*, usually dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century, tells that an English bishop by the name of Sigurðr (and not Grímkell) oversaw the canonisation in the presence of Sven and Álfifa.³ The *Legendary saga of St. Ólafr* (*Helgisaga Ólafs helga*) from the turn of the thirteenth century stresses the miraculous signs that led to the acknowledgment of the king's sanctity: twice his coffin emerged from the earth on its own accord.⁴ Considering that both *Fagrskinna* and the *Legendary saga* are probably of Norwegian provenance, it is curious that neither has anything to report about the role of Norwegian chieftains in the official recognition of Ólafr's cult. In addition, two Norwegian compositions of the late twelfth century, Theodoricus's monachus' *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* and *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* make no such claim. Indeed neither work describes Ólafr's *translatio*.

Einar Þambarskelfir's role in the proceedings is most likely the result of Snorri Sturluson's elaboration. Einar is an important figure in *Ólafs saga helga* as well as the following sagas in *Heimskringla*. *Magnús saga góða* and *Haraldr saga harðráða*. Einar is first mentioned in *Ólafs saga helga* when Earl Eiríkr Hákonarson of Lade pardons him for having supported the fallen King Ólafr Tryggvason (d. 1000).⁵ Earl Eiríkr and his brother, Sveinn, marry him to Bergljót, their sister, and grant him extensive lands in the Trondelag region. Later Einar allies himself with the earls of Lade against King Ólafr and when King Canute succeeds in ousting the king from Norway, he becomes the most powerful magnate in Trondelag. Einar, however, is absent from Norway when the magnates confront Ólafr at Stiklastaðir

and about five years later he joins them in bringing back the young Magnús from Rus'. Einar's colourful career comes to a violent end when he falls out with Haraldr *harðráði* ca. 1050 and is killed along with his sons in Nidaros.⁶

It is not difficult to envisage how Snorri came to associate Einar with the official recognition of St. Ólafr's sanctity. The *Legendary saga* (which Snorri knew) mentions that Einar was present at the *translatio* where he memorably insults Queen Álfifa, a scene which Snorri only alludes to in his saga. While the *Legendary saga* tells nothing of Einar's prior involvement in the proceedings, it was probably this scene that provided Snorri with the incentive to place Einar at the centre of Ólafr's canonisation.⁷ By this he establishes a neat link between his exile and re-emergence on the political stage. Thus the section in *Heimskringla* tells us more about Snorri's narrative than it does about the involvement of Norwegian chieftains in establishing Ólafr's cult.

Unlike in the case of Einar Þambarskelfir, King Sven's (and by implication his mother's) association with the cult appears to be attested in a contemporary source: in *Glælognskviða*, a skaldic poem in ten strophes that Snorri Sturluson attributes to Þórarinn loftunga, one-time court poet of King Canute.⁸ Snorri tells that Þórarinn had composed *Glælognskviða* for Sven while the young king still ruled in Norway⁹ and thus the poem can be dated between 1031/1032 and 1035. Two aspects are especially noteworthy regarding *Glælognskviða* as a source for St. Ólafr's cult in its early years. The first is the depiction of a shrine-based cult that has already become a centre of pilgrimage. The second is the fact that King Sven is sole object of attention in an opening stanza that tells of the splendid retinue which followed him from Denmark to Norway. However, the rest of the poem is dedicated to St. Ólafr and his supernatural powers and Sven is only addressed again in the concluding stanza (which is possibly defective): he should pray to the saintly king so that he may be allowed to rule Norway in peace and prosperity.

Steffan Hellberg has argued that Svein Álfifuson was not the recipient of *Glælognskviða* and hence that there is no basis for associating the Danish king with the cult.¹⁰ Rather Ólafr's sanctity was recognised and promoted by English missionaries without the involvement of Canute's substitute rulers in Norway. Snorri was simply mistaken when he assumed that the first stanza went together with the following nine stanzas. Those stanzas, Hellberg suggests, were composed

on the occasion of later translations of St. Ólafr which, according to the sagas, took place in the reigns of King Magnús góði (1035-1047), Haraldr harðráði (1046-1066) or even possibly Ólafr kyrri (1066/69-1093). Although this hypothesis appears attractive problems still remain. The most 'objective' method of dating *Glælognskviða*, the examination of Christian loanwords in the poem, is inconclusive, as Hellberg himself readily admits.¹¹ This then leaves several objections for an early dating of the poem's ten stanzas.

First, the mature state of the cult as portrayed in *Glælognskviða* is surprising: the shrine is a centre of pilgrimage and, apparently, a set of miracles is already in place. This description, one could argue, squares more comfortably with a later stage in the development of the cult. Around 1070, for instance, when Adam of Bremen reports that people came to visit Ólafr's tomb from distant lands.¹² However it is probably over optimistic to view the poem as an objective presentation of St. Ólafr's cult in the 1030s. Rather *Glælognskviða* offers an idealised picture of a cult of a royal saint. Þórarinn loftunga who, as mentioned, had been at the court of Canute in England must certainly have been familiar with the essence of cults of this kind.

Another objection to Sven being the recipient of the poem stems from the unlikelihood of a Danish king promoting or identifying himself with a cult of a former political enemy, an enemy that King Canute for one probably considered an usurper who had received his just awards at the battle of Stiklastaðir. Eric Hoffmann has drawn a parallel here with Canute's promotion of St. Edmund of East-Anglia, martyred by a Viking war-band in 869.¹³ As Hellberg points out, this comparison is not particularly appropriate. Unlike that of St. Ólafr, St. Edmund's cult had undergone a century of development when Canute began supporting it in the second decade of the eleventh century.¹⁴ A comparison with the cult of St. Edward the martyr (d. 979) is probably more appropriate.¹⁵ It is generally thought that King Ethelred II promoted the cult in order to placate those who believed that he had been, albeit indirectly, responsible for Edward's murder.¹⁶ Another possible parallel here is provided by the cults of martyred Merovingian bishops that were supported by their former enemies in the hope of reconciling warring factions.¹⁷ Moreover, the possibility should not be discounted that Sven and Álfifa were simply reacting to a popular and spontaneous

eneration of a fallen king. It should be remembered that the cults of two Scandinavian princely martyrs, that of King Knud of Odense (d. 1086)¹⁸ and Earl Magnús of Orkney (d. 1116/17)¹⁹, arose during the reigns of rulers that were less than supportive of them.

Hellberg also points out similarities between the religious imagery of *Glælognskviða* (or *Ólafskviða* as he refers to stanzas 2-10) and phrases found in the earliest liturgy on St. Ólafr, preserved in English manuscripts from around the middle of the eleventh century.²⁰ This common material, Hellberg argues, probably derived from the lost *Translatio Sancti Olavi*, a work which Theodoricus monachus apparently alludes to in the following passage:

Quomodo vero mox omnipotens Deus merita martyris sui Olavi declaraverit caecis visum reddendo et multa commoda aegris mortalibus impendendo, et qualiter episcopus Grimkel – qui fuit filius fratris Sigwardi episcopi, quem Olavus filius Tryggva secum adduxerat de Angli – post annum et quinque dies beatum corpus e terra levaverit et in loco decenter ornato reposuerit in Nidrosiensi metropolis, quo statim peracta pugna transvectum fuerat, quia haec omnia a nonnullis memoriae tradita sunt, nos notis immorari superfluum ducimus.²¹

It has been related by several how almighty God soon made known the merits of his martyr Ólafr, by restoring sight to the blind and bestowing manifold comforts on the infirm, and how, after a year and five days, Bishop Grimkell (who was the nephew of Bishop Sigeward, whom Ólafr Tryggvason had brought with him from England) had Ólafr's body exhumed and laid in a fitly adorned place in the metropolitan city of Nidaróss, where it had been conveyed immediately after the battle was finished. But because all these things have been recorded by several, I regard it as unnecessary to dwell on matters which are already known.²²

But apart from this passage the content of the *Translatio* is unclear. True, it is perhaps significant that the poem *Geisli* (ca. 1152) and the *Legendary saga* contain similar motifs, especially regarding Ólafr's posthumous miracles, which ultimately may derive from *Translatio Sancti Olavi*.²³ Nevertheless the problem remains that the dating of this hypothetical work is wholly uncertain; it may indeed have been composed *prior* to the ten stanzas of Þórarinn's *Glælognskviða*. Accordingly, it is hazardous to argue for a later date for this poem by pointing out apparent echoes between it and the eleventh-century liturgy on the Norwegian saint.

This aside it is worth noting that the *Legendary saga* and *Fagrskinna* both involve Sven and his mother in the canonisation without, however, resorting to *Glælognskviða* as a point of reference. If, as postulated by Hellberg and Holtsmark, the *Legendary saga* made use of the *Translatio*, then one must assume that Sven and

Álfifa also figured in this lost work. In other words, their association with Ólafr's cult is attested by a tradition that seems to be independent of *Glælognskviða*. Perhaps it was precisely because the two figured in the *Translatio* that Norwegian works of the late twelfth century, namely *Historia Antiquitate* and *Passio*, were less than keen on describing this event.

On balance I believe there is scant reason to conclude that King Sven and Álfifa were not the secular figures that oversaw King Ólafr's *translatio* into St. Clement's church in 1031. Still, there can be little doubt that it was first in the reigns of Magnús góði and Haraldr harðráði that the royal authority really took interest in promoting both Ólafr's sanctity and the town of Nidaros as the centre of his cult. For the reign of the former king we have Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Erfdrápa* (ca. 1040) which shows, or at least implies, that St Ólafr's feast was observed throughout the kingdom.²⁴ It is also interesting that Magnús, during his brief rule in Denmark had coins minted in Hedeby in his father's honour.²⁵

This raises the question of motif(s): why did Magnús and Haraldr believe it was in their interest to promote the cult of their father and half-brother respectively? From the start it must be recognised that the sources are silent on this matter and the best we can hope to achieve is to infer likely motifs from the general historical context. In this respect the notion of dynastic legitimation constitutes the most obvious incentive for Ólafr's Norwegian successors to support his sanctity. In a similar way as the Viking Kings Ólafr Tryggvason and Ólafr Haraldsson had used Christianity to cast a veneer of legitimacy over their claim to rule Norway, thus Magnús and Haraldr strengthened their kingship by identifying their rule with the memory of St. Ólafr. This possible dimension has been explored by Erich Hoffmann in his valuable study of royal cults of Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England.²⁶

For Magnús, and Haraldr in particular, it is likely that the cult was important in strengthening Norwegian identity vis-à-vis their two main opponents: the Danish king and (in the case of Haraldr) the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen. Haraldr was determined to exert his control over ecclesiastical matters within Norway and hence his policy of fending off German influence in the shape of Hamburg-Bremen (which at this point in time was in close contact with the

Danish king, Sven Estrithson).²⁷ For Haraldr the budding cult of St. Ólafr may not only have enhanced his legitimacy on the throne but, just as importantly, it provided him with a religious platform and prestige which aided him in his stand-off with Hamburg-Bremen. If the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen referred to the glorious precedent of Ansgar in its claim to ecclesiastical overlordship in Norway, the Norwegian king could point to his intimate association with the first native saints' cult in Scandinavia. All this may explain Adam of Bremen's bitter and hostile tone when he tells of King Haraldr's sacreligious treatment of Ólafr's cult. Having described Trondheim as an important centre of pilgrimage, Adam discredits Haraldr's association with the cult of his half-brother:

*Videbat haec ille derelictus a Deo, nihilque compunctus oblationes quoque ac thesauros, qui summa fidelium devotione collati sunt ad tumulum fratris, ipse Haroldus unca manu corrodens militibus dispersit. Pro quibus causis archiepiscopus zelo Dei tactus legatos suos direxit ad eundem regem, tyrannicas presumptiones eius litteris increpans...*²⁸

*Although this man whom God had forsaken beheld these wonders, he was nothing moved. With clawed hands this Harold grasped at and dispersed to his benchmen the offerings, and in particular the treasure, which the supreme devotion of the faithful had collected at his brother's tomb. For these reasons the archbishop, inflamed with zeal for God, sent his legates to the king, rebuking him by letter for his tyrannical presumption.*²⁹

The important role of Anglo-Saxon missionaries in the conversion of Norway is well attested³⁰ and the influence they undoubtedly exerted on the establishment and early development of St. Ólafr's cult has been duly noted.³¹ Royal cults were two-a-penny in Anglo-Saxon England and accordingly Bishop Grímkell and other English ecclesiastics working in Norway in the first half of the twelfth century were well suited to attend and promote such cults. However, it should be noted that comparisons between the Norwegian cult and Anglo-Saxon royal cults of the tenth and eleventh centuries are not entirely straightforward. Clearly the ecclesiastical and political situation in the two kingdoms in this period was very different. Norway, unlike England, was a recently converted country where ecclesiastical organisation was only beginning to take shape. Moreover English cults, such as that of St. Edmund of East-Anglia and St. Edward, emerged within a monastic context, a context that was entirely absent from eleventh-century Norway.³² Thus if comparisons are to be made between St. Ólafr's cult and foreign

royal cults it is more illuminating, I believe, to look in the direction of principalities which were in a similar state of ecclesiastical and political development to Norway.

King Magnús and Haraldr would almost certainly have been familiar with the Rus' martyr-cults of the princes Boris and Gleb which emerged in the fourth decade of the eleventh century. The possibility of a connection between the cult of St. Ólafr and the Rus' saints has not escaped the attention of scholars in the field of Old-Rus' studies. After all we have a rune-stone that refers to a church in Novgorod dedicated to St. Ólafr³³ and he also appears in an early twelfth-century Rus' litany along with St. Magnús of Orkney and Knud of Odense.³⁴ This has led to speculations that St. Ólafr's cult inspired Grand-Prince Yaroslav of Kiev to promote the sanctity of his half-brothers, Boris and Gleb.³⁵ However, the opposite route of influence is equally plausible.

There were, of course, notable ties between the Norwegian royal dynasty and the Riurik dynasty in the first half of the eleventh century. King Ólafr, for instance, had spent his time in exile between 1028 and 1030 at the Rus' court. As Ólafr returned to Norway he left behind his young son Magnús who stayed there until 1035 when he was brought back to Norway to succeed his father on the throne. Haraldr Sigurðarson also had had dealings with the Kievan court.³⁶ The Old-Norse sources tell that he became a high-ranking figure in Yaroslav's army and it is known that he participated in the Byzantine expedition to Sicily as a member of the Russo-Varangian corps. In addition, around 1044 Haraldr married Elisabeth (Ellizif), the grand prince's daughter, thus formally sealing the ties between the princely dynasties of Norway and Kievan Rus'. Haraldr had been at Jaroslav's court on two occasions. He probably arrived in 1031 and stayed for few years. In the early 1040s he was back and only returned to Norway in 1045. Thus when Haraldr came to power in Norway 1046 he was considerably better acquainted with Kievan rulership than, for instance, that of Anglo-Saxon England.

Haraldr's exposure to the political scene in the East has led to speculations over the extent to which this may have influenced his political outlook. Particular attention has been paid to his uncompromising stance towards outside interference in ecclesiastical matters, most succinctly expressed in his dealings with Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen in the 1050s. It has been suggested that in these dealings Haraldr was influenced by the eastern (ultimately Byzantine) concept of

omnipotent kingship that involved the right of the ruler to enjoy total control over the Church.³⁷ His interest in gaining control of Denmark has also been seen as an attempt to establish a principality in the Russian or Byzantine mould which would have left him in control of a large portion of trade between Western Europe and the East.³⁸ In light of these (admittedly not always convincing) speculations it is surely justifiable to place Haraldr's patronage of his half-brother's cult within a similar eastern context, particularly as his reign from 1046 to 1066 represent a critical period in the cult's development.

The emergence of the cult of Boris and Gleb has been a hotly debated subject in Old-Rus' studies.³⁹ To some extent the student in this field is confronted with similar problems to those relating to the origin of St. Ólaf's cult. In both cases the historian must attempt to explain how a princely cult could emerge and thrive in a newly converted society. A society, moreover, where ecclesiastical organization was in a rudimentary state under the tutelage of a recently converted secular authority.

The cult of Boris and Gleb arose from an inter-dynastic conflict that followed Grand-Prince Vladimir's death in 1015.⁴⁰ Vladimir had left numerous sons behind him (begotten with nearly as many wives) but the oldest, Prince Sviatopolk, inherited the Kievan throne and he immediately took steps to secure his position by eliminating possible contenders from within his nearest relatives. For this purpose he recruited assassins to murder his rivals. Among them were his half-brothers, the Princes Boris of Murom and Gleb of Rostov. However, in 1019 Sviatopolk himself was killed by Yaroslav of Novgorod, another of Vladimir's sons. The Kievan realm was then shared by Yaroslav and his half-brother Mstislav until 1036 when the former assumed sole rulership.

It is generally accepted that Grand-Prince Yaroslav began promoting the cult of Boris and Gleb in the 1020s, an interpretation primarily based on the so-called *Narrative, Passion and Encomium of Boris and Gleb*.⁴¹ According to this text, the graves of the princes, located near the Church of St. Basil in Vyshegorod (in the vicinity of Kiev), were neglected during Sviatopolk's reign. However, pillars of fire and burning candles at their places of burial testified to their saintly status. When Yaroslav had ousted Sviatopolk from the principality, "he began to inquire about the bodies of the saintly ones, how and where they were placed." Yaroslav

buries them with appropriate honours and immediately miracles begin to occur. When the grand prince hears of this he

...praised God and the holy martyrs; he then summoned the Metropolitan and joyfully told him. Hearing this, the Archbishop lifted his praise to the Lord, and gave the Prince good and pious counsel, that he should build a church of surpassing beauty and holiness. The advice pleased the Prince, and he erected a great church with five cupolas, decorated throughout with frescoes, and he adorned it with all manners of finery. And the Metropolitan John and Prince Jaroslav and the entire clergy and the people came with crosses, and they translated the saints and consecrated the church. And they established the twenty-fourth of the month of July as a feast day for celebration. It is the day on which the most blessed Boris was slain; and on that very day the church was consecrated and the saints were translated.⁴²

This passage, which could date from as early as Yaroslav's reign and as late as the mid twelfth century, describes a translation jointly overseen in 1039 by the metropolitan and the grand prince. Thus when Haraldr harðrái visited Yaroslav in the early 1040s the promotion of the cults of Boris and Gleb had already commenced. It is worth noting that the church mentioned in the passage was erected at the grave-site of Boris and Gleb and, if the saga evidence is believed, Haraldr had a church built in Norway at the site where Ólafr had lain the year following his death at Stiklastaðir.⁴³

Of course it cannot be conclusively shown that the cults of Boris and Gleb influenced Haraldr in his promotion of St. Ólafr's cult. Such an influence appears not implausible considering the contacts he enjoyed with Yaroslav during a period when the latter had established himself as the sole ruler of Kievan Rus' and had begun to take interest in the cults of his half-brothers. As noted the Anglo-Saxon input in the emergence of the Norwegian cult has frequently been emphasised. The Englishmen working in Norway were familiar with the idea of royal sanctity and the value of such cults in strengthening religious life and promoting deals of Christian kingship. However, it is worth asking whether from the royal perspective the model for the cult of St. Ólafr should not rather be sought in Kievan Rus', a political identity which both Magnús and Haraldr were certainly better acquainted with than England. The hypothesis can be put forward that it was the combination of Anglo-Saxon and Rus' influence explains, at least to a degree, the prominence of St. Ólafr's cult in the late eleventh-century Norway. In this context it is interesting to observe that Ladislaus of Hungary (1077-95) visited Kiev in 1072

and it has been convincingly argued that this event inspired the king to have his father, King Stephen, canonized in 1083. Like the royal dynasty of Norway, the Hungarian dynasty had close links with the ruling house of Kievan Rus'.⁴⁴

The kingdom of Norway and the principality of Kievan Rus' had a number of features in common in the eleventh century. Most significantly both had been converted (meaning the adoption of the religion by the secular ruler) to Christianity at the close of the tenth century and in both lands we have secular leaders combining their traditional role as leaders of war-bands with new notions associated with Christian rulership.⁴⁵ The continuing existence of the two dominions as independent political units was also far from assured. Since the latter half of the tenth century the kings of Denmark had made claims to Norway while local separatism, headed by powerful magnates, was still not a feature of the past. The Kievan realm was also under frequent external pressure as shown by the fluctuating borders of the principality, particularly in the tenth century. The unification of Norway, or at least the concept of a unified Norway under one king, was forged in the reign of the two missionary Ólafs. Similarly, the Kievan realm emerged as a relatively compact unit in the reigns of Grand-Prince Vladimir I (ca. 980-1015) and Yaroslav the Wise (1019-1054). Christianity was the cohesive element that these rulers brought to their respective dominions.

But there were also obvious differences between these two political identities. Most notably in the eleventh century the question of succession within the Rurik dynasty was a much more complex affair than it was in Norway. In Kievan Rus' the princes of the ruling house would jostle for power by establishing their authority in the various urban centres of the principality, Kiev itself of course being the most important. Although the succession to the Norwegian crown was hardly more regulated than in Kievan Rus', the kinsmen of St. Ólafr ascended to the throne in a relatively orderly fashion, at least until the early twelfth century.

It is therefore interesting to see how the princes of Kiev and kings of Norway went out of their way to associate their *personal* rule with the princely cults of their kinsmen. In Kievan Rus' Yaroslav's son, Iziaslav erected a church in Vyshegorod in honour of Boris and Gleb while his brothers in turn translated the saints' relics in 1072. Finally, in 1115, Vladimir Monomakh, translated Boris and Gleb into an impressive new church.⁴⁶ In Norway King Magnús translated

the relics of his father from Clement's church to a foundation dedicated to the saint. Later in the reign of Haraldr the relics were moved to a new stone church located near the place where King Ólafr's corporal remains had first been buried.⁴⁷ The last translation was undertaken in the reign of Ólafr kyrri who built "a basilica in honour of the Holy Trinity in the metropolitan city of Niðaróss, where the body of the blessed martyr Ólafr now rests..."⁴⁸ These translations suggests that the Rus' martyrs and St. Ólafr were not only used to legitimize the two dynasties in their entirety but also the individual association of these rulers with their saintly predecessors.⁴⁹

The sanctity of King Ólafr Haraldsson of Norway and the Rus' princes Boris and Gleb did not rest on their role as missionaries (although Ólafr's contribution in this respect had of course been of great importance). Rather their sanctity was founded on the manner in which they died and the miracles they performed thereafter. In eleventh-century Kievan writings the conversion was attributed to Grand-Prince Vladimir I whereas twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic and Norwegian works present King Ólafr Tryggvason as the pivotal figure. One would have thought that both rulers were obvious candidates for sainthood in the mould of St. Stephen, the king responsible for the conversion of the Magyars.

There is no evidence to suggest that Ólafr Tryggvason attracted a popular cult in the medieval period. In the latter part of the twelfth century, however, some Icelandic and Norwegian ecclesiastics did consider the missionary king worthy of such veneration. The unknown author of *Historia Norvegiae* refers to Ólafr as *beatus* and clearly places him on par with his saintly namesake. Inger Ekrem's argument that the work was written in order to bolster the prestige of the newly founded archbishopric of Nidaros should be taken here into account.⁵⁰ This would explain the emphasis on Ólafr Tryggvason's saintly status: the tradition that the king had converted the North Atlantic settlements – Iceland, Orkney and Greenland – was well known and, of course, Nidaros claimed ecclesiastical authority over these Norse colonies.

In the same period (ca. 1180) an Icelandic monk, Oddr Snorrason, wrote a saga of the first missionary king for the purpose, at least partly, of promoting Ólafr Tryggvason as a figure worthy of sainthood. The Latin original of the

work has been lost but it has been preserved in Old-Norse translations from the early thirteenth century. Oddr presents the king as the apostle of the North and, indeed, the structure of his work owes much to the sagas of the apostles that had been translated into Icelandic in the course of the twelfth century.⁵¹ It has even been suggested that Oddr composed his saga in order to secure a canonisation of Ólafr Tryggvason, who according to Ari's *Íslendingabóke*, had played a pivotal role in the conversion of Iceland.⁵² If that was the case Oddr's efforts were doomed to failure for the simple reason that Ólafr was neither popularly venerated nor was there a tradition of him performing posthumous miracles. Oddr indeed acknowledges as much:

Allom er þat kænnt. at eptir lifit skein iartegnom. en helge O. konungr. en inn fregsti O. konungr Try. s. var monnum ecke kænir i iartegna gerð eptir lifit. þo trvum ver hann dýrligan mann ok agetan oc gudʒ vin. úotti hann ollum olíkr i atgervi meðan hann lifðe. þott eptir lifit veri þat eigi berat hverr krapta madr hann var. oc ecke skolom vær forvinnaz gudʒ leynda lvi.⁵³

Every one knows that after his life St. Ólafr shone with many miracles but the illustrious Ólafr Tryggvason was not known to have performed miracles after his death. Nevertheless we believe him to be a glorious man and a good friend of God. While he lived he was different in bearing from every one else although after his life it was not revealed of what power he possessed and we should not be curious about God's hidden things. (My own translations)

In eleventh-century Kievan Rus' we find a similar ambivalent attitude towards the saintly status of Grand-Prince Vladimir. Thus the *Russian Primary Chronicle* contains the following passage:

It is indeed marvellous what benefits Vladimir conferred upon the land of Rus by its conversion. But we, though Christians, do not render him honor in proportion to this benefaction. For if he had not converted us we should now be prey to the crafts of the devil, even if our ancestors perished. If we had been zealous for him, and had offered our prayers to God in his behalf upon the day of his death, the God, beholding our zeal, would have glorified him.⁵⁴

These words clearly imply that had the people of Rus' shown proper posthumous veneration towards Vladimir he, in turn, would have graced their newly converted land with miracles. As with Ólafr Tryggvason, there is no evidence of an organised

(or popular) cult of Vladimir in the eleventh century (or indeed the following century) and the most likely explanation for this is the absence of posthumous miracles.⁵⁵

Nevertheless in Ilarion's (later metropolitan of Kiev) *Sermon of Law and Grace*, composed in the reign of Yaroslav around the middle of the eleventh century, Vladimir's saintly attributes are clearly emphasised. The work contains an encomium to Vladimir where Ilarion presents the argument for his sanctity 'almost like a lawyer in court.'⁵⁶ But however elegantly Ilarion presents his case, posthumous miracles are notably absent from his account. However, Ilarion sidesteps this issue by presenting Yaroslav's continuation of Vladimir's Christian works as a kind of miracle in its own right.⁵⁷ Ilarion's sentiments are echoed in the Laurentian version of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* which tells that "his father [i.e. Jaroslav's] Vladimir ploughed and harrowed the soil when he enlightened Rus through baptism, while this prince sowed the hearts of the faithful with the written word, and we in turn reap the harvest..."⁵⁸ Here one is reminded of how Oddr Snorrason emphasises Ólafr Tryggvason as an essential precursor to St. Ólafr. This, in a sense, is presented as Ólafr Tryggvason's great posthumous miracle:

Sua ær at virða sem Ólafr konungur hinn fyrri æfnaði oc setti grunduollinn cristinnar með sinu starfi. En hinn síðarri Ólafr reisti ueggi Oc Ólafr T. s. setti uin garðin En hinn helgi Ólafr pryddi bann oc aucaði með miclum avexti.⁵⁹

Behold how the first Ólafr with his own effort, laid and enriched the foundations of Christianity. But the latter Ólafr [i.e. St. Ólafr Haraldsson] built walls and Ólafr Tryggvason planted the vine-yard which the saintly Ólafr enlarged and enriched with great dividends (My own translation).

Thus we have seen ecclesiastical writers arguing that Ólafr Tryggvason and Vladimir I are worthy of saintly status because they were the first to bring Christianity to their respective lands. However, the arguments brought forward are somewhat theoretical and strained and, moreover, they are presented in the absence of any (as far as we can tell) popular veneration of enthusiasm for the sanctity of these missionary rulers. Nevertheless, the two cases are relevant to our understanding of the cults of St. Ólafr and the Rus' princes Boris and Gleb, because they underline two pivotal factors in the establishment of saints' cults

among the newly converted: the power of the miraculous and the attraction of martyrdom.

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Notes

¹ Heimskringla II: 401-409.

² Erich Hoffmann, *Die heiligen Könige bei den Angelsachsen und den skandinavischen Völkern. Königsheiliger und Königshaus*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins 69, Neumünster 1975: 81; J. Rainford, *Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway, and the development of skaldic style (ca. 1015 – ca. 1153)*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Oxford 1994: 78.

³ Fagrskinna: 183.

⁴ Olafs saga helga: 206.

⁵ Heimskringla II: 27.

⁶ Heimskringla III: 123-125.

⁷ On the possible textual background to the translation scene in the *Legendary saga* see Jonna Louis-Jensen, “‘Syvende og ottende brudstykke.’ Fragmentet AM 325 IV 4to”, *Opuscula IV*, Bibliotheca Arnemagnaeana XXX: 31-60, at pp. 53-59.

⁸ Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning AI: 324-327.

⁹ Heimskringla II: 406.

¹⁰ Staffan Hellberg, “Kring tilkomsten av *Glaegonskríða*”, *Arkiv for nordiske filologi* 99 (1984): 14-48.

¹¹ Hellberg: 45.

¹² Magistri Adam Bremensis IV 33: 267-268.

¹³ Hoffmann: 208.

¹⁴ Hellberg: 21.

¹⁵ Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge 1989: 227-233.

¹⁶ David Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford 1989: 17-23.

¹⁷ Paul Fouracre & Richard A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography*, Manchester medieval sources series, Manchester /New York 1996: 21-22.

¹⁸ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*: 62-71.

¹⁹ Barbara E. Crawford, “The Cult of St. Magnus in Shetland” in B.E. Crawford (ed.): *Essays in Shetland History: Heiðursrit til T.M.Y. Manson 1904, 9th February 1984*, Lerwick 1984: 65-81.

²⁰ Hellberg: 22-24.

²¹ Monumenta Historica Norwegiae: 43-44.

²² Theodoricus Monachus: 32-33.

²³ Anne Holtsmark, “Sankt Olavs liv og mirakler”, in *Studier i norrøn diktning*, Oslo 1956: 121-133.

²⁴ Den norsk-islandske skjaldediktning AI: 245.

²⁵ C.J. Becker, “Magnus den Godes Hedebymønter og slaget på Lyrskov hede”, *Nordisk numismatisk unions medlemsblad* (1983): 42-47.

²⁶ Hoffmann: 58-89.

- ²⁷ On this, see for example Arne Odd Johnsen, "Biskop Bjarnhard og kirkeforholdene i Norge under Harald Hardråde og Olav Kyrre" in P. Juvkam (ed.): *Björgvin bispistol: Frå Selja til Björgvin*, Tromsø 1968: 11-26.
- ²⁸ Magistri Adam Bremensis III 27: 159-160.
- ²⁹ *The History of the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen*: 127-128.
- ³⁰ Lesley Abrams, "The Anglo-Saxons and the Christianization of Scandinavia", *Anglo-Saxon England* 24 (1995): 213-249; cf. Fridtjov Birkeli, "Biskop Grimkell og Hellig-Olav", *Tidskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 51 (1980): 109-139.
- ³¹ Hoffmann: 58-89.
- ³² The cult of St. Ólafr in Nidaros did not have monastic dimension like the cults of St. Erik of Sweden (see Jarl Gallén, "Den engelska munkarna i Uppsala – et katedral kloster på 1100-talet." *Historisk tidskrift för Finland* 61 (1976): 1-21) and St. Knud of Odense (see P. King, "The Cathedral Priory of Odense in the Middle Ages", *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger* 7 (1966): 1-20).
- ³³ R.I. Page, *The Chronicles of the Vikings: Records, Memorials, Myths*, London 1995: 83-84.
- ³⁴ John H. Lind, "The Martyria of Odense and a Twelfth-Century Russian Prayer: The Question of Bohemian Influence on Russian Religious Literature", *The Slavonic and East European Review* 68 (1990): 1-21.
- ³⁵ F.A. Sciacca, "The Kievan Cult of Boris and Gleb: The Bulgarian Connection", in R.L. Lencek et al. (eds.): *Proceedings of the Symposium on Slavic Cultures: Bulgarian Contribution to Slavic Culture*, Sofia 1983: 58-71.
- ³⁶ For this and dates below see Henrik Birnbaum, "Yaroslav's Varangian Connection", *Scando-Slavica* 24 (1978): 5-25.
- ³⁷ Charles Joys, *Biskop og konge: Bispevalg i Norge 1000-1350*, Oslo 1948: 37-38.
- ³⁸ Per Sveas Andersen, *Samlingen av riket og kristningen av landet*, Handbok i Norges historie 2, Oslo 1977: 165.
- ³⁹ For a good introduction to the cult, see The Hagiography of Kievan Rus': x-xxxi. See also Gail Lenhoff, *The Martyred Princes Boris and Gleb: A Socio-Cultural Study of the Cult and the Texts*, Ohio 1989: 32-55.
- ⁴⁰ For the political background see Simon Franklin & Jonathan Shephard, *The Emergence of Rus 750-1250*, London/New York 1996: 183-208.
- ⁴¹ L. Müller, "Zur Frage nach dem Zeitpunkt der Kanonisierung der heiligen Boris und Gleb" in A.-E. N. Tachiaos, *The Legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius to Kiev and Moscow: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Millennium of the Conversion of Rus' to Christianity, Thessaloniki 26-28 November 1988*, Thessaloniki 1992: 321-339. "Most scholars believe that the cult developed in the 1020s, soon after Jaroslav became sole ruler in Kiev..." The Hagiography of Kievan Rus': xxvii.
- ⁴² The Hagiography of Kievan Rus': 211-213.
- ⁴³ Heimskringla III: 121.
- ⁴⁴ Gábor Klaniczay, "From Sacral Kingship to Self-Representation: Hungarian and European Royal Saints" in *The Uses of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early-Modern Europe*, transl. Susan Singerman, ed. K. Margolis, Cambridge 1990: 79-94; Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, transl. É. Pálmai, Cambridge 2002: 133.
- ⁴⁵ For an interesting to discussion of this aspect within the Kievan Rus' context, see Paul A. Hollingsworth, "Holy Men and the Transformation of Political Space in Medieval Rus'" in

- J. Howard-Johnston & P.A. Hayward (eds.): *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, Oxford 1999: 187-215.
- ⁴⁶ Hollingsworth: 202; M. Dimnik, "Sviatoslav and the Eparchy of Chernigov (1054-1076)", *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 34 (1992): 373-390.
- ⁴⁷ *Heimskringla* III: 121.
- ⁴⁸ Theodoricus monachus: 46.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. Axel Christophersen, "Olavskirke, Olavskult og Trondheims tidlige kirketopografi – problem og perspektiv", in S. Supphellen (ed.): *Kongsmenn og Krossmenn: Festskrift til Grethe Aurbén Blom*, Det kongelige norske videnskabers selskab, skrifter nr. 1, Trondheim 1992: 39-69.
- ⁵⁰ Inger Ekrem, "Historia Norwegiae og erkebispesetet i Nidaros," *Collegium Mediaevale* 11 (1998): 49-67.
- ⁵¹ Sverrir Tómasson, *Formálar Íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum: Rannsóknar bókmenntabefar*, Reykjavík 1988: 347-351.
- ⁵² Jan de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, vol. II, Berlin 1942 (reprinted 1967): 174-175.
- ⁵³ Saga Olafs Tryggvasonar: 1.
- ⁵⁴ Cross, "The Russian Primary Chronicle": 214.
- ⁵⁵ John Fennell, "The Canonization of Saint Vladimir" in K.C. Felmy et al. (eds.): *Tausend Jahre Christentum in Russland: Zur Millenium der Taufe der Kiever Rus'*, Göttingen 1988: 299-304.
- ⁵⁶ Sermons and Rhetoric: xxxiii.
- ⁵⁷ Sermons and Rhetoric: 23.
- ⁵⁸ The Russian Primary Chronicle: 137.
- ⁵⁹ Saga Olafs Tryggvasonar: 156.

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