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Giovanna Salvucci

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'THE KING IS DEAD':  
THE THANATOLOGY OF KINGS  
IN THE OLD NORSE SYNOPTIC  
HISTORIES OF NORWAY, 1035-1161.

Giovanna Salvucci

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This dissertation is my own work and contains nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration with others, except as specified in the text and acknowledgements.

This dissertation is under 80,000 words in length

Giovanna Salvucci

## ABSTRACT

The Old Norse Synoptic Histories of Norway can make a valuable contribution to thanatology (the study of attitudes towards death) and the history of medieval thought. This piece of research is an attempt to analyse how the new blend of Christian faith with ancient heroic ideals is reflected in accounts of the deaths of eleventh- and twelfth century Norwegian kings, as described in those Old Norse sagas that deal with the stories of medieval Scandinavian royalty.

The period covered in this study runs from 1035, the date of the accession to the Norwegian throne of Magnús góði, the son of St. Óláfr, to the death of Ingi Haraldsson in 1161. This period seems to have seen very important changes and to have been full of clashing ideas and attitudes, most of which were due to the conversion of Norway to Christianity in the immediately preceding period. The major texts covered are Theodoricus's *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium*, *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum*, *Morkinskinna*, Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*.

A comparison between these five major sources shows how their authors often convey their political judgements on kings by the ways in which they describe their deaths, and how they were involved in the cultural and religious environment of medieval Europe, in which the discussion about Purgatory was being developed and changes in burial customs were taking place.

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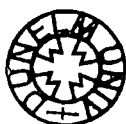
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This study is dedicated to my parents, Benedetto and Lorenza, who inspired me with a love of history and reading.



## ABBREVIATIONS

- Ágrip* = *Ágrip af Noregskonunga Sögum. A twelfth-century synoptic history of the Kings of Norway.* Ed. and Trans. M. J. Driscoll, Viking Society for Northern research, Text Series, University College London, 1995; *Ágrip af Noregskonunga Sögum*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson in *Íslenzk fornrit XXIX*, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1985. 1-54.
- ASC* = *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel.* Ed. John Earle and Charles Plummer, revised ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon 1952. trans Dorothy Whitelock in *English Historical Documents I, c. 500 - 1042*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955. 135-235; G.N. Garmonsway. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.* London: Dent, 1953. rpt. 1992.
- Flat* = *Flateyjarbok: En samling af norske konge-sagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler.* 3 vols. Ed. Guðbrandur Vigfusson and C. R. Unger. Christiania [Oslo]: P. T. Mallings forlagsboghandel, 1860–1868.
- For* = *Formáli.* In *Heimskringla.* Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVI, 1941. V-VII.
- Fsk* = *Fagrskinna.* Ed. Bjarni Einarsson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska Fornritafélag, XXIX, 1985. 55-373; trans. Alison Finlay, as *Fagrskinna, a Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Hákkerð* = *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs.* In *Heimskringla.* Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVIII, 1951. 347-372.
- Hharð* = *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar.* In *Heimskringla.* Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVIII, 1951. 68-202.
- Hómísl* = *The Icelandic Homily Book: Perg. 15 4° in the Royal Library, Stockholm.* Ed. and ed. facs. Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen. Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1993.
- Hsk* = *Heimskringla.* Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. 3 vols. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVI-XXVIII, 1941-51.

- Hsona* = *Haraldssona saga*.—In—*Heimskringla*. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVIII, 1951. 303-346.
- Mberf* = *Magnúss saga berfoettr*. In *Heimskringla*. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVIII, 1951. 210-237.
- MblHg* = *Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla*. In *Heimskringla*. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVIII, 1951. 278-302.
- Mgóð* = *Magnúss saga góða*. In *Heimskringla*. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVIII, 1951. 3-67.
- Msk* = *Morkinskinna*. Ed. Finnur Jónsson. København: Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 53, 1932; trans. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade as *Morkinskinna. The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030-1157)*, *Islandica* LI, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000.
- Msona* = *Magnússona saga*. In *Heimskringla*. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVIII, 1951. 238-277.
- Ólhelg* = *Óláfs saga helga*. In *Heimskringla*. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVII, 1945.
- Ólkyrr* = *Óláfs saga kyrra*. In *Heimskringla*. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVIII, 1951. 203-209.
- Theod.* = *Theodrici Monachi Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium*. In *Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ: Latinske kildeskifter til Norges historie i middelalderen*. Ed. Gustav Storm. Kristiania, 1880. 1-68; trans. David and Ian McDougall as *Theodoricus Monachus. Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagensium, An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998.
- Yngl* = *Ynglingasaga*. In *Heimskringla*. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, XXVI. 1941, 9-83.

## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Old Norse Literature and Thanatology

*Thanatos* is the Greek word for 'death', and thanatology, which was originally a branch of philosophy but gradually extended into the fields of historiography and anthropology around 1960, is the study of death, human attitudes towards it, mortuary rites and customs, and beliefs about the afterlife. The underlying motivation which stimulated historiographers to study death was the search for a unifying factor, a particular vantage-point from which to analyse the history of thought.

Death is the final test of life, a transition in the light of which the events in the history of one's life appear most highly concentrated (Prosperi 392-393). Precisely because it is definitive and universal, death reveals what is most valuable to a man. Life is at its most meaningful at the moment of death, and this makes us more sensitive to our most important values – those which remain meaningful even in the light of death. As Huntington and Metcalf (25) have clearly explained "life becomes transparent against the background of death, and fundamental social and cultural issues are revealed." The concentration of emotions and values that death brings about, both for the dying person and for those who live on, is expressed in many societies through a concentration of rites, taboos and religious beliefs, which it is often difficult to interpret.

In order to describe human attitudes towards death and dying, historians and anthropologists have analysed archaeological and iconographic sources, as well as

epitaphs, sermons, notes in parish registers and wills. However, according to Vovelle (*Pertinence et ambiguïté* 295), it is above all through literary sources that it is possible to analyse the collective feelings of a society about death. Literature is a means of promulgating images, clichés, and memories, and the literary language is also the essential means of transmission for mythology. It is for this reason that literature is not only useful, but represents an essential source for the study of mental attitudes towards death (Vovelle, *Pertinence et ambiguïté* 300).

I think that Old Norse literature can make a valuable contribution to thanatology and the history of medieval thought, as it has also done in the field of anthropology during the last few decades. With its focus primarily on the social life of medieval Iceland, but also to some extent on Germanic society in general, Old Norse literature functions as a witness, not only in the texts of the sagas of Icelanders, but throughout the broad and highly original corpus of Old Norse prose. Anthropological interest has concentrated mainly on the political environment in which the prose texts were written: the almost stateless organization of Icelandic society, its tardy conversion to Christianity, and the fact that "no other people undergoing the throes of extreme cultural and religious change managed to preserve so *much* of the genuine or near genuine poetry of their 'preliterate' ancestors" (Wax 16).

Moreover, because it covers a period that extends over four centuries, from the beginning of the *Landnámaöld* (the Age of Land-taking, ca. 870) to the end of the *Sturlungaöld* (The Age of Sturlungs) in 1264, this literature "provides access not only to a single past but to processes of continuous change" (Durrenberger IX). As Gísli Pálsson asserts, "despite their limitations as ethnographic and

historical documents, the sagas are a rich source of information," while the saga writers themselves can be considered as "anthropological informants." (Gisli Pálsson 24). Quite apart from its literary merits, Old Norse literature can give a broad overview of Nordic heathen society and the process of its Christianisation. Eddic and skaldic poetry, and especially the sagas, describe medieval Nordic attitudes towards life and ideals, how people related to their contemporaries, and therefore the social rules, organisation of work, rites and customs by which they lived. And just as this literature can throw light on a way of living, it can also be a very important source for social attitudes towards death and dying.

Among the first twentieth-century articles to explore the customs associated with death and the dead in Old Norse religion and literature are those by Helge Rosén, "Om dödsrike och dödsbruk i fornnordisk religion" (1918), Sune Lindqvist, "Snorres oppgifter om hednatidens gravskick och gravar" (1920), Albany Major, "Ship Burials in Scandinavian Lands and the Beliefs that Underlie Them" (1924), and Hans-Joachim Klare, "Die Toten in der altnordischen Literatur" (1933). Later, Folke Ström's study *On the Sacral Origin of the Germanic Death Penalties* (1942) dealt with the various forms of capital punishment described by Tacitus, Saxo Grammaticus, Jordanes, Paulus Diaconus, Adam of Bremen and, above all, by the *Íslendinga sögur*. In his view, "at least the family sagas and the tales of the kings give us a completely realistic picture of the legal conditions during the last phase of heathendom, and ... they consequently throw a valuable light on pre-Christian institutions and legal customs." (22).

In 1943 Hilda R. Ellis-Davidson published her large monograph *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature*, a survey of

funeral customs, grave mounds, the funeral ship, shamanism, beliefs about the underworld etc., based on archaeological and literary sources. She also dealt with death in her following books *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (1964) and *The Viking Road to Byzantium* (1976); in the latter she argued in favour of an influence from eastern culture on Viking funeral practices (pp. 300-330). There are also sections relevant to beliefs and practices connected with death in three other books by her: *Pagan Scandinavia* (1967), which is perhaps rather overconfident in interpreting the beliefs of prehistoric societies from archaeological evidence alone; *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe* (1988), where she seeks to link the pre-Christian beliefs and practices of the Germanic and Celtic peoples from about 500 BC onwards; and *The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe* (1993), which includes a section on the cult of the dead. All her books concentrate on pre-Christian beliefs.

Reidar Christiansen used information from Norwegian folklore to write his *The Dead and the Living* (1946), in which he analysed traditional mortuary rites and customs and attempted to ascertain whether they are derived from the Christian religion or from ancient heathen beliefs. The following year Folke Ström published another excellent monograph related to death, entitled *Den döendes makt och Oden i trädet*, on the myths of Odin and their relation to the power of the dead.

E.O.G. Turville-Petre devoted to death ch. 15 of his *Myth and Religion of the North* (1964), while the theme of death and mythology has recently been considered by Margaret Clunies Ross in ch. 7 of her work *Prolonged Echoes 1: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, which also contains a survey of

the literature on this subject. The transition from heathen myths to Christian religion and the changes in human attitudes towards death that it brought about have been analysed by Einar Ól. Sveinsson in his *The Age of Sturlungs. Icelandic Civilization in the thirteenth century* (1953), and in Helgi Pétursson's article "Úr trúarsögu forn-Íslendinga" (1960).

The attitudes towards death and dying displayed by the narratives and characters of various sagas have been explored by a number of scholars. These include Mario Gabrieli, "Il dolore e la morte nella letteratura nordica dei sec. XII e XIII" (1967), which includes a translation of *Sólarljóð* into Italian. Hermann Pálsson, "Death in Autumn. Tragic Elements in Early Icelandic Fiction" (1974) deals with the various patterns that can be seen in saga-narratives of the killing of the hero, especially *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. Bjarni Einarsson, "The last hour of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld as described in Hallfreðarsaga" (1981) compares two versions of the same episode, and reveals how a partly heathen death episode was turned into a Christian one. Úlfar Bragason, in his "Hetjudauði Sturlu Sighvatssonar" (1986) and "The Art of Dying: Three Death Scenes in *Íslendinga saga*" (1991), demonstrates through an analysis of *Íslendinga saga* how the description of a character's death implies an interpretation of his life. Margaret Cormack's "Saints and Sinners: Reflections on death in some Icelandic sagas" (1993) analyses some deaths that display hagiographic and religious patterns; and Diana Whaley's "Heroic Death in the Early Nordic World" (1994) discusses the nature of the heroic death.

A precise and complete catalogue of the representation of death in the *Íslendinga sögur* can be found in the work of Bernhard Gottschling, *Die*

*Todesdarstellungen in den Islendingasögur*. He analyses the theme of death as it is displayed in tales of killings, ambushes, battles, diseases, natural disasters, etc. The same precise and accurate method of analysis has been used by Alexandra Pesch in her *Brunaöld, haugsöld, kirkjuöld: Untersuchungen zu den archäologisch überprüfbaren Aussagen in der Heimskringla des Snorri Sturluson* (1996), a study of the burial customs reflected in Snorri Sturluson's synoptic histories of the kings of Norway.

Many other scholars have of course dealt tangentially with death within the ambit of Scandinavian studies, especially those who were writing about the anthropology and social organisation of medieval Scandinavia: the law codes, the development and resolution of feuds, and so on. For all of them, Old Norse literature has represented an essential and authoritative source of information.

## 1.2. Objectives and Aims

Thomas (*Préface* 8) asserts that death is the backcloth of most narratives, because its dramatic intensity is a source of inspiration for literature. For this reason, the process of analysing death and dying through literature and the confrontation of characters who are alternately actors and victims corresponds to a real 'act of knowledge' of the writer and his/her days: if this is true for the novelist or poet it must be doubly so for the chronicler and historian.

This piece of research is an attempt to analyse the accounts of the deaths of eleventh- and twelfth century Norwegian kings through the synoptic histories of Norway.<sup>1</sup> As Hertz has clearly illustrated in his work *Death and the Right Hand*

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the main sources see the following paragraph.

(154), the king's person "is such a natural symbol of the authority and perpetuity of the political order that it becomes a problematic symbol once the man dies and his body begins to rot." But the way in which a king dies, his last words and his attitude towards death also become important pieces of evidence for social and ethical sensibility. In this perspective, the study of death in the synoptic histories of Norway can certainly represent an important contribution to the understanding of medieval Scandinavian society and to thanatology in general.

The period covered in this study runs from Magnús góði Óláfsson's accession to the Norwegian throne in 1035 to Ingi Haraldsson's death in 1161. I have chosen these terminal dates because before the accession of Magnús góði the narrative seems to be dominated by the largely hagiographic material associated with St. Óláfr, while the period before that is increasingly dominated by motifs derived from legend and folktale the further back in time one goes. Genuine 'political-moral' commentary can therefore be argued to begin with the discussion of Magnús. At the latter end of the period, Snorri and *Fagrskinna* continue their accounts up to the Battle of Ré in 1177, and *Ágrip* and *Morkinskinna* probably did so originally, but since the ends of both are lost, it becomes difficult to make comparisons between the sources in this period (in which, in any case, the only royal death is that of Hákon herðibreiðr in 1162). Moreover, the period 1161-1177 is dominated by the figure of Magnús Erlingsson, and since he was the enemy of King Sverrir, the founder of the dynasty that was still ruling Norway when the synoptic historians were at work, it may have been difficult for them to give a view of him that was not coloured by the political expediency of the present. However, neither of these narratives relates how Magnús Erlingsson died.

With this research I am not trying to produce a piece of anthropological or political history; my main aim will be to discover, through the methods of literary analysis, coherent and consistent attitudes in what the thirteenth-century historians have written, rather than to adjudicate on the historical facts or the social conditions that actually existed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The five major sources taken into account for this study were not contemporary with the events they describe and were written over quite a short period in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Although this fact may have important implications for the discussion of changing ideals and rituals about death and dying, it inevitably implies a synchronic approach to the subject. Indeed, the attitudes evident in the sources, which are mediated by their authors, may not always be the same as those that were current at the time of the historical events, so that a literary analysis of the texts can not allow a diachronic approach to the subject, except in relation to the increased internecine violence of the later period (ch. 7 and 8), which the authors themselves tended to emphasise, or to the change of burial customs, which is directly witnessed by the texts (see below p. 51).

It is for this reason that the chronological layout of this study is not meant to trace chronological developments on the ideas towards death and dying, but to analyse the agreements and divergences between the sources in their descriptions of the death of each king, together with their processes of selection, arrangement and rationalisation of material drawn from the works that they themselves used as sources.

The comparison between the five major sources discussed in this piece of research will show how their authors often convey their political judgements on

kings by the ways in which they describe the causes of their deaths, by their portrayal of the attitudes towards dying that the kings themselves adopt, their anxiety about the afterlife, their dying words and burial places, and the epitaphs on them spoken by their supporters.

This analysis will be all the more valuable because the synoptic historians lived in different social environments: thus Theodoricus was certainly a monk and *Ágrip's* author probably one, while Snorri and the author of *Fagrskinna* came from secular backgrounds, in Snorri's case from one that was highly aristocratic and intensely political.

The period these authors describe in their works seems to have seen very important changes and to have been full of clashing ideas and attitudes, from the heroic ethics of the eddic and skaldic poems and the *Íslendinga sögur* to the aggressive pragmatism found during the Age of the Sturlungs. Most of all, this is the period that immediately follows the Christianisation of Norway and Iceland, a period in which the Church was trying to introduce new rites, new ceremonies, new symbols and, above all, a new eschatology. The main symbol of the new faith was Christ Crucified, i.e. Christ at the moment of his death, and kings were changing (to paraphrase the title of Sverre Bagge's well-known work), from "Gang leaders" into "God's anointed". Literature could not be indifferent to the new meanings that inevitably became attached to the deaths of kings as a result of this change. As Bagge asserts (*The Political Thought* 17) "early medieval political thought concentrated on the king's person, Germanic and later feudal thought on the personal relationship between the king and his men, Christian thought on the king as God's representative and his moral duties as a consequence of this." The

Old Norse synoptic histories of Norway run through all these varying ideas and allow them to emerge from time to time in their accounts of the deaths of kings, as elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Another change was emerging during this period as a result of a wide-ranging discussion on the continent about the geography of the afterlife and the existence of a third world between Heaven and Hell. Shortly after the period of the Synoptic historians, this discussion was to lead to the official recognition of Purgatory at the Second Lyon Council in 1274, and this would in turn cause a profound change in popular attitudes towards death, sin and the afterlife, providing a link between the dead and the living, so that the actions of the living could have a direct effect on the quality of afterlife experienced by the dead. The threat of punishment after death was also to become a powerful instrument for the Church, especially when the concept of Purgatory made gradations of it possible (Le Goff, *La nascita* 107).

This was also a time in which burial places were changing, and important people, especially kings and bishops, began to be buried *ad sanctos*, i.e. inside churches in which saints were buried. Very interesting evidence both for the development of this custom and for the increasing power of the Church in political matters can be found in the Synoptic histories.

Finally, the eleventh and twelfth century is the period dealt with in *Morkinskinna* which, of all the medieval histories of the kings of Norway, is the

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<sup>2</sup> On the relationship between Old Norse histories of the kings of Norway and the idea of kingship in twelfth- and thirteenth century Europe see Ármann Jakobsson (*Í leit að konungi* 89-154). On sacral kingship and the discussion about whether it existed among early Germanic peoples or is of medieval origin, see also McTurk (*Sacral Kingship*) and (*Scandinavian Sacral Kingship*); Lönnroth (*Dómaldi's death*); Baetke; Gunnes.

one which seems most interested in the afterlife of its royal characters. The comparison between *Morkinskinna* and the other sources that deal with the same historical period, and the analysis of their attitudes towards death and dying, will offer a body of research material that has not hitherto been taken into account by contemporary thanatology except for a few sporadic references.

### 1.3. The sources

The sources that have been taken into account for this study are those Old Norse sagas that deal with the stories of medieval Scandinavian royalty, i.e. the kings' sagas (*Konungasögur*), that cover the period of Norwegian history from the accession of Magnús góði to Ingi Haraldsson's death (1035 to 1161).

The whole period is covered in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and in *Fagrskinna*. *Morkinskinna* begins at some time in the later 1020's with the offer by King Yaroslav of Russia to foster the child Magnús góði, and it breaks off during the capture of Eysteinn Haraldsson gilla in 1157, though in its full form it probably went on to the year 1177. The manuscript of *Ágrip af Nóregis konunga sögum* breaks off after the accession of Ingi Haraldsson gilla (1136), leaving out, unfortunately, the deaths of all three sons of Haraldr gilli. Another important source considered in this study is the Latin *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* by Theodoricus Monachus, who deliberately ends his work at the year 1130 with the decision to be silent about the abominable events that took place in the following period (see below, pp. 131-2).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Occasional reference has also been made to other sources in order to make an event clear or to convey a different tradition of the same episode. Thus for the account of Magnús góði's reign (ch. 2), I have also used the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and Saxo

The most ancient of these sources are those referred to by Turville Petre (*Origins* 169-175) as the "Norwegian synoptics", i.e. the histories of Norway written in a Norwegian environment, namely *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* and *Ágrip*.

The *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* had been transmitted only through five known manuscripts dating from the seventeenth century, which are copies of a lost codex.<sup>4</sup> According to its *incipit* (*Theod.* p. 3) and *explicit* (*Theod* cap. 24, p. 68), it was written by a monk called Theodoricus - probably a latinisation of the name Þórir - in the years around 1180, and it is dedicated to Eysteinn Erlendsson, who was Archbishop of Niðaróss from 1161 until 1188.<sup>5</sup> As is common in the prologues of medieval works, Theodoricus is very specific about the sources he claims to have used; he refers to oral tales and ancient Icelandic poems, but also to a *\*Catalogus regum Norwagiensium* that might have been a Norwegian book.<sup>6</sup> The most important feature of this work for this study, however, is that it was probably written in a religious environment, either

Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*; on the reign of Haraldr harðráði (ch. 3), I shall refer to *Hemings þátrr Áslákssonar* and *Orkneyinga Saga*; and during the account of the fall of Magnús berfœtr I shall also use the version in the *Chronicle of Man and the Isles*.

<sup>4</sup> AM 98 fol.; Det kongelige bibliotek, Copenhagen, Kalls samling, no. 600; Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Ms. lat. fol. 356; Det kongelige bibliotek, Copenhagen, Thotts samling, no. 1541 4to; Universitetsbiblioteket, Uppsala, Ms. De la Gardie no. 32.

<sup>5</sup> See Foote (*Introduction* ix); Cormack (*Theodoricus* 643); Bagge (*Theodoricus Monachus*). Some scholars have suggested that Theodoricus can be identified with Archbishop Þórir of Niðaróss (1205-1214) or Bishop Þórir of Hamarr (ca. 1189/90-1196), each of whom spent some time at St. Victor's in Paris, see Cormack (*Theodoricus* 643).

<sup>6</sup> Theodoricus could have known one or both of the lost works on Norwegian history written by the Icelanders Sæmundr (dead by 1133) and Ari (1068-1148). As regards the discussion about Theodoricus' sources see Andersson (*Kings' Sagas* 201-211); Knirk (363); Turville-Petre (*Origins* 170). It is theoretically possible that his *\*Catalogus* might have been *Ynglingatal*, but since he claims not to have any direct sources for kings before Haraldr hárfagri, this actually seems unlikely, so presumably it was a learned prose source. It may also be worth noting, though that Theodoricus also cites two very recent European chroniclers, Hugh of St. Victor (died 1141) and Sigebert of Gembloux (died 1112), but both on events of the ninth century, apparently without worrying about the fact that they lived long after the events on which he cites them as authorities.

Benedictine, as Foote hypothesises ('Introduction' ix-xi), or Augustinian, as Bagge suggests (*Theodoricus Monachus, passim*). In any case, Theodoricus had obviously received a good education, and through the use of his learned digressions he seems to compare the events that took place in Norway with those of Christian Europe. As Bagge asserts in the above-mentioned article, "Theodoricus wants to place Norwegian history within the framework of universal or sacred history, the more so as the country was entering the mainstream of this history just in the period on which he wrote." Theodoricus shows a deep concern for peace and justice in public affairs, and a tendency to criticise vanity and ambition in individuals, and thus demonstrates that the great European prototypes of good and bad kings have their Norwegian equivalents. Whether because of his monastic environment, his classical education, or the simple fact that he was writing in Latin, Theodoricus is also the only one of these sources that displays an extensive use of euphemisms related to death. While the others merely say that a king *andaðisk, fell* or *lét líf sitt*, Theodoricus writes that he *ex hac luce subtractus est* ('was removed from the light of this world') or *rebus humanis decessit* ('departed from human affairs').

The source that modern scholars have called *Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sögum* ('Summary of the histories of the kings of Norway') was probably written in Norway, although it is preserved in a single Icelandic manuscript (AM 325 II 4to) dating from the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The work itself appears to have been written ca. 1190 by a cleric who, according to Driscoll (xii), sided with Ingi

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<sup>7</sup> On *Ágrip's* authorship and date of composition see Driscoll (ix-xii); Turville-Petre (*Origins* 172-173); Bjarni Einarsson (5-6).

Haraldsson (see below ch. 8), and "intended to convince the populace that the descendants of the kings who had collaborated with the church were more worthy of their support than the Birkibeinar and their followers." As with Theodoricus' *Historia*, the sources of *Ágrip* have been much debated, but it has been recognised that Theodoricus' work itself was among the most important of them.<sup>8</sup>

Although Theodoricus and *Ágrip* are both very valuable because of their early date, the most fully developed sources about the kings of Norway are *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*. *Morkinskinna* ('rotten parchment') was acquired by the Royal Library of Copenhagen, where it became manuscript GkS 1009 fol., and was given its name by Torfæus (Þormóður Torfason) after he had borrowed it in 1682 and used it as a source for his own *Historia Rerum Norvegicarum* (Andersson, *Morkinskinna* 5). The manuscript was copied at the end of the thirteenth century, and in its present form it consists of thirty-seven leaves. The original manuscript was probably about one third larger than what survives, and is thought to have been written in Iceland ca. 1220. Another version of the text found in *Morkinskinna* appears in the late-thirteenth-century compilation *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* (AM 66 and GkS 1010 fol.), which was based on texts of *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*, among other sources. A third, dating from around 1387, can be found in the compilation known as *Flateyjarbók* (GkS 1005 fol.), which has also transmitted the poem *Konunga-tal* ('the count of kings') and the texts of various *þættir* ('short stories') which are not in the '*Morkinskinna*' manuscript itself.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Turville-Pètre (*Origins* 171); Driscoll (xiii-xvii); Andersson (*Kings' Sagas* 201-211).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Andersson (*King's sagas* 217-219); Andersson and Gade (*Morkinskinna* 5-7; 66-69); Louis-Jensen (*Kongesagastudier* 62-108).

A distinctive characteristic of *Morkinskinna* compared with the other sources discussed in this study is the presence in it of the *þættir*, which have been the subject of a long discussion among scholars, some of whom have regarded them as later interpolations into the main text.<sup>10</sup> Contrary to this, Ármann Jakobsson has recently demonstrated that, far from being clumsy and irrelevant interpolations, the *þættir* are there to serve the author's central purpose, i.e. to illuminate his main characters in a variety of ways.<sup>11</sup> Just as Theodoricus's learned digressions were apparently meant to compare Norwegian kings to the emperors and heroes of a distant and ancient past, the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna* make the kings measure themselves against more familiar contemporary human beings who were probably more famous in Iceland at that time than remote emperors like Julian the Apostate or heroes like Pallas (for these two examples, see *Theod.* chs. 8, 18).

Another important feature of *Morkinskinna* is its extensive use of skaldic verses, which were probably very familiar to its author and attracted his interest (Andersson, *Morkinskinna* 56-57). The extensive use of the different literary genres of *þáttr* and skaldic verse in the *Morkinskinna* text has caused much debate among scholars about their sources, and if we regarded them as being of different authorship it might cause interpretative problems as regards *Morkinskinna*'s views about the lives, deeds and deaths of its characters, since the *þættir*, the verses and the main text might all reflect different viewpoints. But so far as the present work is concerned, such a transmission of different traditions has just the opposite

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<sup>10</sup> For a review of scholarship on the *þættir* in *Morkinskinna* see Ármann Jakobsson (*King and Subject* 103-104); Andersson and Gade (*Morkinskinna* 13-14).

<sup>11</sup> For Ármann Jakobsson's works on *Morkinskinna* see below, Bibliography.

effect: it enriches the text as a source for the study of political and moral attitudes. Indeed, *Morkinskinna* is probably the source that has revealed most about attitudes towards death and dying, and the changing rituals and beliefs attached to them.

*Fagrskinna* ('fair parchment', probably so-called to distinguish it from the *Morkinskinna* manuscript, or vice versa) is conventionally dated to ca. 1225. Only one leaf remains of the original codex (NRA 51, in Oslo), because the two Norwegian vellums to which Árni Magnússon refers in a note were destroyed in the Copenhagen fire of 1728, and are only preserved in late-seventeenth-century paper copies.<sup>12</sup> The palaeographic evidence suggests that NRA 51 was written in or near Niðaróss, but the author of *Fagrskinna* might have been an Icelander working in Norway (Finlay 15-16) and in close connection with the Norwegian court (Bagge, *Society and Politics* 19). *Ágrip* and *Morkinskinna* were certainly among the sources used by the author of *Fagrskinna*, while "most of the material found in *Fagrskinna* is also in *Heimskringla*, often, because Snorri used either *Fagrskinna* itself or its sources, in almost the same words." (Finlay 17).

Probably written in the 1220's or early 1230's, *Heimskringla* is far and away the most studied among the Old Norse histories of Norway.<sup>13</sup> It comprises a Prologue, the *Ynglinga saga* (which deals with Norwegian prehistory), and fifteen sagas of the kings of Norway, from the reign of Hálfðan svarti (ca. 850) to that of Magnús Erlingsson (with Snorri's account ending in 1177). *Heimskringla* takes its name from the opening words of its oldest manuscript, known as *Kringla*, which dated from before 1270 but was destroyed in the fire in the University Library in

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<sup>12</sup> See Finlay (35-37); Bjarni Einarsson (177).

Copenhagen in 1728. Only one leaf of this manuscript survived (Lbs Frag 82), but its text has been transmitted in later transcriptions.<sup>14</sup> *Heimskringla* has been attributed with some certainty to Snorri Sturluson, a powerful chieftain who was born in Iceland in 1179 and was killed in 1241. Snorri visited Norway twice, in 1218-20 and in 1237-39, and as a result of his political activity was in frequent contact with the Norwegian court.<sup>15</sup> In his prologue to *Heimskringla*, Snorri wrote that his sources were poetic genealogies, skaldic poems and the testimony of Ari fróði, and his own sources, i.e. things that he had been told by wise old people. Snorri seems to emphasize these sources because they contain, in particular, information about the deaths of the kings they deal with. His comment on the lay of Þjóðólfr about King Rögnvaldr, the *Ynglingatal* ('Enumeration of the Yngling kings'), is actually the following: "*Í því kvæði eru nefndir þrír tigir langfeðga hans ok sagt frá dauða hvers þeira ok legstað*" (For p. 4).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he stresses the same quality of the lay of Eyvindr skáldaspillir, the *Háleygjatal* ('Enumeration of the Hálogaland Chieftains'), in which the ancestors of the jarl Hákon are enumerated: "*Sagt er þar ok frá dauða hvers þeira ok haugstað*" (For p. 4).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The literature on *Heimskringla* is extensive and diverse, and there are many editions of it, as well as translations into various languages. Among the most important monographs of recent times are Ciklamini (*Snorri Sturluson*); Bagge (*Society and Politics*); Whaley (*Heimskringla*).

<sup>14</sup> Incomplete versions of *Heimskringla* are also found in five other major manuscripts: AM 39 fol., dated to around 1300; AM 45 fol. "*Codex Frisianus*" and AM 47 fol. "*Eirspennill*", both dated to the beginning of the fourteenth century; *Jöfraskinna* and *Gullinskinna*, which apart from a few leaves and fragments survive only in copies dating from the end of the seventeenth century. Cf. Whaley (*Heimskringla* 41-47); Andersson and Gade (*Morkinskinna* 8-9).

<sup>15</sup> On the authorship of *Heimskringla* see Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (*Heimskringla* I, xxviii-xxix); Whaley (*Heimskringla* 13-19); Bagge (*Society and Politics* 11-14); Andersson (*Kings' sagas* 219) and Berger. For a biography of Snorri Sturluson see Sigurðr Nordal, Simon and Whaley (*Heimskringla* 29-37).

<sup>16</sup> Trans. Hollander (3): 'In this lay are mentioned thirty of his forebears, together with an account of how each of them died and where they were buried.'

<sup>17</sup> Trans. Hollander (3): 'And in it also we are told about the death of each of them and where his burial mound is.'

Snorri's interest in death is also revealed by a large parenthesis in his prologue dealing with the division of the pre-Christian past between the Age of Cremation (*brunaöld*) and the Age of Sepulchral Mounds (*haugsöld*). Even if, as Bagge asserts (*Society and Politics* 199), it is difficult to tell "whether this is a kind of learned periodization dating from Snorri's time, or it is a popular way of referring to the very distant past", it is nonetheless important to emphasize that the scholar Snorri, who was probably completely aware of the ecclesiastical periodisation of history, chooses a division based on death and burial customs. In this way he seems to stress that his method of analysing history will be closely linked to the history of death, and that the kings' lives will be always focussed in the stories of their deaths, enabling through their symbolism, to summarize and illustrate man's attitude towards his existence.

Snorri's sources for the history of the period considered in this study certainly included *Ágrip*, *Morkinskinna*, and the poem *Konunga-tal*, which had been composed for Jón Loptsson, Snorri's foster-father, who died in 1197. In *Hsona* (ch. 11) Snorri also makes it clear that he knew the lost work of the Icelander Eiríkr Oddsson which was called *\*Hryggjarstykki*. This was probably written in the 1160's and was also used by the writers of *Morkinskinna* (*Msk* p. 436, ll. 10-11) and *Fagrskinna*; but other synoptic works may have existed in Snorri's time and could have influenced his work, and he probably also used folktale and clerical writings to some extent.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For a survey of *Heimskringla*'s sources see Whaley (*Heimskringla* 63-82).

#### 1.4. The Synoptic Histories and Contemporary European Culture

The Old Norse histories of the kings of Norway are closely linked to the genre of saga, and "despite the foreign matter they embrace, the kings' sagas are presumably no less Icelandic in outlook than the native family sagas" (Andersson *Kings' Sagas* 227). They share many of the stylistic features of the *Íslendinga sögur*, such as the convention of providing a rapid sketch of the physical appearance and personality of a new character when he (or less often she) is first introduced, e.g.:

*Haralldr konvngr gilli var maþr vascligr oc liðmannligr. helldr har voxtom oc en vacrlixti synom. (Msk p. 400, ll. 15-17)<sup>19</sup>*

*Magnús var hverjum manni friðari, er þá var i Nóregi. Hann var maðr skapstórr ok grimmr, atgørvimaðr var hann mikill. (MblHg ch. 1)<sup>20</sup>*

The synoptic historian also resembles the saga writer in that he is neither creating a historical novel in the modern sense nor writing a strictly historical handbook (Steblin-Kamenskij 21). The nature of creativity in both genres is best expressed by the phrase "latent fiction", that is "fiction which the saga 'authors' permitted themselves while remaining within the limits of what was thought to be truth" (Steblin-Kamenskij 55). As in the sagas, the psychology of a character is revealed only through his or her words, deeds and relationships with others (Foote, *An Essay* 105), and the author's opinion about them is revealed in similarly indirect ways. It is typically expressed in the arrangement of source material, the reported opinions of a character's contemporaries on the events of his life, the outcome of

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<sup>19</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (358): 'King Haraldr gilli was a valiant and able man, rather tall and of handsome appearance.'

<sup>20</sup> Trans. Hollander (715): 'Magnús was handsomer than any man then living in Norway. He was a man of a haughty disposition, cruel, a great athlete.'

his actions, and particularly by his attitude towards death, on which I shall concentrate in this piece of research.

However, the fact that the family sagas and synoptic histories share many unique characteristics and represent a particular literary achievement does not prevent them from being deeply rooted in the European culture of their own time. As Clover asserts (60) "whatever its special properties, saga literature as a phenomenon rests firmly on the larger foundation of the Middle Ages", i.e. essentially the religious and clerical culture which had such a profound influence on continental literature and society of the same period. The study of attitudes towards death and dying in the sagas of kings can certainly contribute to an understanding of the great extent to which Iceland belonged to the medieval European cultural community. Above all, the religious and clerical culture that characterised it "enjoyed a kind of supremacy in giving the fundamental interpretation of the world and of life and death" (Bagge, *Icelandic Uniqueness* 440).

The most striking of all the ideas that will come to the fore in my analysis of the deaths of kings in the following chapters is the gradual emergence of the idea of Purgatory. This was the subject of much discussion among scholars and theologians during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and Purgatory was officially recognised by the Church at the Second Lyon Council in 1274 (Le Goff, *La nascita* 321).

The most important study of the origins of the concept of Purgatory is *La naissance du Purgatoire*, by the French historiographer Jacques le Goff. He states (*La nascita* 8) that during the second and third centuries Christian thinkers started

to think that there might be a period between death and the final judgement, during which a soul could reach eternal salvation by means of a series of trials or punishments. At the beginning of the third century Tertullian recognised the Bosom of Abraham (the resting-place of Lazarus's soul that is mentioned in *Luke* 16) as a place of intermediate reception for the souls of the just before they were admitted to Heaven (*Tertulliani Adversus Marcionem* IV, 34). The fundamental elements of the idea of Purgatory could already be found in the Holy Scriptures. *2 Maccabees* 12, 41-45 envisages the possibility of making atonement for one's sins and the importance of receiving spiritual help from those who live on after one's death. *Matthew* 12, 31-32 implies the possibility of being absolved in the afterlife. Above all, *1 Corinthians* 3, 11-15 includes the idea of trial and purgation by fire, and of a proportionality between guilt and merit on the one side and punishment and reward on the other (Le Goff, *La nascita* 53). During the fourth and fifth centuries the possibility of purgatorial punishment for the atonement of sins was discussed by St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, Ambrosiaster, and by St. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), who is considered by Le Goff to be the "father of Purgatory".

In his *Confessions*, *The City of God* and *Enchiridion*, Augustine emphasises the importance of prayers for the dead in speeding up their admittance to Heaven. He says that it is useless to pray for the wicked because they are doomed to eternal fire. But those who have been neither wholly good nor wholly evil in their earthly lives will have to endure the purgatorial fire (*ignis purgatorius*); this will be very painful but not eternal, and will be experienced between death and resurrection.

Trials suffered in this life can start the process of purification, and salvation can also be sought through faith and charitable actions.<sup>21</sup>

In the sixth century St. Gregory the Great (d. 604) made an important contribution to the understanding of Purgatory in his work *Dialogorum Libri IV*. He used anecdotes and visions in acknowledging the existence of a purgatorial fire for the venial sins of those who lead charitable lives, and regards prayers, receiving communion and giving alms as important ways of securing the success of intercessions for their souls. St. Gregory (and Hugh of St. Victor after him) thought that the site of purgatorial punishments was located on earth.

According to Le Goff St. Gregory is also one of the first to make a political use of the afterlife, when he writes about the supposed damnation of Theodoric the Ostrogoth (d. 526) in ch. 31 of *Dialogorum Libri IV*.

The *Dialogues* of St. Gregory were translated into Old Norse at the end of the twelfth century, and had an important influence on the development of homiletic and hagiographic literature, and probably also on the spread in medieval Iceland of ideas connected with the fire of purgatory.<sup>22</sup>

*Petrus ait. Vita villda ek þat, hvart því ma rettliga trva, at hreinsonar elldr se eptir andlat.*

39. *Gregoriuvs dixit. (...). En þo ma því trva, at hreinsonar elldr se friðon fyrir nockvrrar inar smæri synþir, því at drottinn mællir sva: «Sa er mællir gvðlastan i gegn helgvum anda, þeim fyrirgefzt þat hvarki þessa heims ne annars.» I þesso atkvæði synir hann þat, at nockvrrar synþir fyrirgefaz i þessom heimi ok nockvrrar annars heims. (Heilagra Manna Sögur I, 252, ll. 7-22)<sup>23</sup>*

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Le Goff (*La nascita* 74-96); Binski (26-27).

<sup>22</sup> A few fragments of St. Gregory's *Dialogues* survive in: AM 677 4to, AM 921 IV 4to, NRA 71, 72, 72b, 76, 77 (Boyer, *Gregory* 241).

<sup>23</sup> 'Peter said: I would like to know whether we ought to believe that there is any fire of Purgatory after death. 39. Gregory said. (...). But yet we must believe that there is a Purgatory fire for certain small sins, because our Lord says: "he who speaks blasphemy against the holy Ghost will not be

In the corpus of Old Norse prose there are a few other occurrences of the word *hreinsanareldr*, corresponding to Latin *ignis purgatorius*, such as those in the *Icelandic Homily Book* (Stock. Perg. 4to no. 15). This dates from around 1200; its sources include the works of Augustine of Hippo and Gregory the Great (McDougall, *Homilies* 290):

*þeir scolo þat til hafa til synþa læsnaŕ oc verþléika við guþ. at þeir þoli vel hréinŕonar eld þan es guþ legr a hendr þeim her. oc brenir afþeim synþa sóttir. (Hómísl 29, 44r<sup>17-19</sup>)<sup>24</sup>*

*Nu scaut ec af þui dómisogo þessi i þetti mál. at þat es styrking mikil þeim mænom er fyr vanhéilso verþa eþa maNa missi. eþa fiárscaþa. nu er slíct hréinŕonar eldr her inan heims. oc brenir þat synþir at mænom þeim er sva verþa við sem iób. (Hómísl 43, 70v<sup>32-35</sup>)<sup>25</sup>*

*véit hver þa þegar sin hluta. hvárt han scal helvitis qualar hafa þær es aldrege scal þrióta. eþa scal han hafa hreinsanar eld neçqueria stund. (...). Afþui nefni ec heldr enar smæri til þes at hréinŕonar eldren megi af breNa an enar stéorri. at þær éinar ma hréinŕonar eldr en af<sup>6</sup> taca. er hinar smæri synþir ero callaþar. en hinar eongar er hæfoþ synþir ó. (Hómísl 43, 71v<sup>15-21</sup>)<sup>27</sup>*

These examples show that the idea of purgatorial fire was certainly known in twelfth-century Scandinavia, and not only among scholars, but also among the common people to whom the sermons were addressed.<sup>28</sup>

forgiven either in this world or in the world to come." He shows in this saying that some sins are forgiven in this world and some in the next.'

<sup>24</sup> 'they must - for the remission of their sins and to gain merit before God - patiently endure the cleansing fire [purgatory fire] which God imposes on them here, and he purges them of the sickness of their sins.'

<sup>25</sup> 'I propose from this *exemplum* in this case, that it is a great strength for those who experience illness or suffer bereavement or loss of property. Now this sort of thing is a cleansing fire [purgatory fire] here in this world, and it purges the sins from those who respond like Job.'

<sup>26</sup> cf. Weenen (xxx).

<sup>27</sup> 'Then everyone will immediately know his lot, whether he must suffer the pains of hell which will never end, or whether he must suffer the cleansing fire [purgatory fire] for a period of time (...). I mention the smaller rather than the greater sins for purging by the cleansing fire [purgatorial fire], because only those that are called the smaller sins can be purged by the cleansing fire [purgatorial fire], and none of the deadly sins.'

<sup>28</sup> The word *hreinsanareldr* is also found in later works: *Diplomatarium Islandicum* (VI, p. 592, l. 2); *Elucidarius* (p. 120, l. 6); *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* (I, p. 139, l. 14); *Postola Sögur* (p. 271, l. 21, where the word *purgatorio* is also recorded; p. 623, l. 31; p. 886, l. 15; p. 930, ll. 5-6); *Mariu Saga*

After St. Gregory, many scholars and theologians continued to discuss the concepts first put forward by the church fathers. The idea of Purgatory was given a strong impulse, among others, by Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141), who recognised the existence of purgatorial punishment after death, and by St. Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), whose sermons refer to purgatorial places in the afterlife (see Le Goff, *La nascita* 159-163).

The works of Hugh of St. Victor and St. Bernard were widely known in medieval Scandinavia. The House of St. Victor had been founded by William of Champeaux as part of the emergence of the University of Paris, and almost from its beginnings it had a strong influence on the Norwegian church (France 292; Haug *passim*). The second Norwegian archbishop, Eysteinn Erlendsson (d. 1188), went to St. Victor's in 1157, and stayed there for about four years before he could be consecrated. He was responsible for the foundation of the Victorine house of Elgjusetr, to which he had Haraldr harðráði's body translated for the sake of Haraldr's soul (see below, pp. 84-5). According to France (292) "such was the influence of this order of reformed canons in Norway that three consecutive archbishops of Nidaros belonged to the Victorines, in a period which almost exactly coincides with that of the Cistercian plantation in Scandinavia, that is, 1161-1214."<sup>29</sup>

The Rule of St. Augustine also spread to Iceland, and the monastery at Þykkvabær, founded in 1168, was only the first of five that adhered to it, the others being at Flatey (which moved to Helgafell in 1184), Saurbær (?), Viðey and

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(p. 102, l. 13). The idea of Purgatory is also to be found in the visionary literature, one of the most popular genres in medieval writing: see *Duggals Leizla* (ch. 15), and *Draumkvæde* (stt. 30-36).

<sup>29</sup> On the presence of the Cistercians in medieval Norway see France (77-98).

Möðruvellir.<sup>30</sup> As for the Benedictines, they had been present in Norway since the foundation of Selja (outside Bergen) around 1100, and in Iceland since that of Þingeyrar in 1133; the other Benedictine houses in Iceland were Munkaþverá and Kirkjubær (Nyberg 415; Halldór Hermannsson xv). The Benedictines had also made a contribution to the spread of ideas about Purgatory, since it was the Benedictine-related monastery at Cluny that established a special day for the commemoration of the dead (November 2nd, All Souls' Day).<sup>31</sup> This feast-day, which was established by the second half of the eleventh century, created a strong bond between the living and the dead in popular religious thought (Le Goff, *La nascita* 104-142).

The writers of the sources used in this study were certainly involved in the cultural and religious environment in which the discussion about Purgatory was being developed. This does not mean, however, that their attitudes towards the deaths of their characters are only an expression of medieval clerical spirituality and the anxiety about the afterlife that characterised it. From time to time, the sagas of kings still display 'beautiful deaths', i.e. those deaths that have the immediate advantage of rousing admiration in a secular sense. The authors are still fascinated by the ability to endure physical suffering and to maintain a virile and cool attitude at the moment of death, and by glorious and spectacular deaths on the battlefield, as were the poets from whom they took inspiration and information.

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<sup>30</sup> The importance that the Augustinians attached to spreading the idea of Purgatory can be witnessed by their interest in acquiring the life of St. Nicholas of Tolentino (d. 1305, an Augustinian saint who was known for his connection to the souls in purgatory), which is found in *Reykjahólabók* (Kalinke, *The Book* 33-34). On St. Nicholas's vision of the souls in purgatory see Salvucci (*La Saga* 57-61).

Curiously, some of the most spectacularly 'Christian' deaths, such as those of Sigurðr slembidjárn and Eysteinn Haraldsson, are also among the most 'beautiful' in a secular sense. In these cases one sometimes gets the impression that reciting the Psalter as one is being murdered or asking to be struck in the shape of the Cross are mentioned primarily as evidence for the victim's traditional secular stoicism, and only secondarily to suggest his Christian piety. The writers are still bound to the fundamental rules that were active in ancient times, such as the discipline of killings and the importance attached to the performance by laymen of a beautiful death, the kind of death that could convey immortality, at least in the memories of men.

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<sup>31</sup> Cluniac houses lived under the Benedictine Rule but were not formally part of the Benedictine order; for their system of government (which was at first very much centralised on Cluny itself), see Knowles (II, 157-161).

## CHAPTER 2

### MAGNÚS GÓÐI ÓLAFSSON HELGA (1035-1047)

Var tál-laust tólf vetr konungr  
mænnom þarfr Magnus Góði  
áðr í sótt Sygna dróttinn,  
afreks-maðr, andar misti.

Varð harm-dauðr hverjom manni  
fylkir færðr þars hans faðir hvílir:  
sá var norðr í Nóregi  
Kristz at kirkjo 'konung maðr' grafinn.  
(*Konunga-Tal* stt. 38-39)<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact that the Norse synoptic histories are all to varying extents fictive accounts, the accounts of Magnús góði's death in *Msk*, *Fsk*, *Ágrip*, *Theod.* and Snorri's *Mgóð* convey important information about rituals, characters' reactions and cultural approaches to death.

Magnús was Saint Óláfr's son, and he was accepted as king of Norway after the expulsion of the Danish rulers Sveinn and his mother Álfifa, with the support of the Norwegian people and a group of powerful chieftains, among whom Einarr þambarskelfir was a leading figure.<sup>2</sup> A few years later, Magnús restored the peace of the country through a treaty with King Hqrðaknútr of Denmark and England,

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. Guðbrandur Vigfússon (II, 315): 'Magnus the Good was doubtless king for twelve winters, ere he, the lord of the Sygns, lost his life in sickness. All men held it a sorrowful death: he was borne where his father rests; he was buried north in Norway at Christ Church in Cheaping.'

<sup>2</sup> *Mgóð* ch. 2-5; *Msk* pp. 20-21; *Fsk* ch. 46; *Ágrip* ch. 35; *Theod.* ch. 21.

Sveinn Knútsson's half-brother, whereby the two kings agreed that if one of them died without heirs, the other would become king of both countries.<sup>3</sup>

The sources report (*Mgóð* ch. 15-16; *Msk* pp. 25-31; *Ágrip* ch. 35; *Fsk* ch. 48) that King Magnús started punishing all those who had fought against his father as a way of taking revenge for him, and people became very dissatisfied with his harshness and lack of moderation. But when the king was warned through the verses of Sigvatr Þórðarson<sup>4</sup> of the very fraught situation, of his own unpopularity and the people's dissatisfaction, he changed his attitude completely: he reconciled himself with the Norwegians and because of this started to be called Magnús góði ('the good').<sup>5</sup>

When King Hǫrðaknútr died in 1042, King Magnús claimed the Danish throne on the strength of the agreement between the two kings. According to Snorri (*Mgóð* ch. 17) King Hǫrðaknútr died of sickness in England and was buried in Winchester beside his father.<sup>6</sup>

In *Msk*'s text the account of Hǫrðaknútr's death is considerably different, giving what was probably a Norwegian point of view. *Msk* (pp. 33-34) says that during one of his campaigns King Magnús arrived in Limafjörður, where

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<sup>3</sup> *Mgóð* ch. 6; *Msk* pp. 22-23; *Ágrip* ch. 36; *Fsk* ch. 47; *Theod.* ch. 22. This leaves out the question, which did arise later, of whether this agreement also applied to England - as Magnús seems to have thought. Since kingship was by election in all three countries, this was actually an illegal agreement, and as it turned out King Edward the Confessor seems later to have made this point with reference to England. See below p. 41 note 23.

<sup>4</sup> Sigvatr Þórðarson was probably born in Iceland around the year 995 (Guðbrandur Vigfusson II, 118-121). He had been St. Óláfr's poet and he was the one who gave Magnús his name (after Charlemagne, *Ólhelg* ch. 22).

<sup>5</sup> According to Cormack (*Saints and Sinners* 204 n. 91) "the soubriquet 'inn góði' was often applied to persons who were considered holy, but whose sanctity had not been formally confirmed."

<sup>6</sup> This information can also be found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (E version, p. 162). *Fsk* ch. 48 p. 215 specifies that Hǫrðaknútr died in England, but it does not state the cause of his death. *Theod.* (ch. 24) and *Ágrip* (ch. 36) do not state either the place or the cause of King Hǫrðaknútr's death.

Hǫrðaknútr, King of Denmark and England, came to meet him. He invited Magnús into his hall and offered him the honour of entering first and taking precedence in all honour and service ('ydr skal veita fyrri alla þionozstu og tign'). King Magnús replied that a king should have the honour of precedence in his own country, and as they were in Denmark it was up to Hǫrðaknútr to go first, sit first and drink first ('en nu skulu þier fyrre ganga er eg er hier komin. og sitia fyrre ok drekka fyrre'). Then Álfifa entered the hall, poured for King Magnús and invited him to drink:

*Magnus konungr segir. fyrst skal Hakon drecka og honum skal fyrst alla þionustu veita. Sidan fær hun Hakoni hornit og drack han af og mællti vid er hann kastade nidr horneno. eigi skyllde. eigi gat hann leingra mællt og æpti sidan til bana. (Msk p. 33, ll. 31-36)<sup>7</sup>*

According to *Msk* then, King Hǫrðaknútr did not die of sickness in England, but was poisoned in Denmark. The suspicion that King Hǫrðaknútr had been poisoned also appears in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (C and D versions) for the year 1042, which reports that when 'he stood at his drink' he fell to the ground, was seized with convulsions and died without speaking a word. The writer of *Msk* probably knew this story, but changed it so that its focus was on King Magnús, and added a few details to make it more interesting to his audience. According to his account, the poison was meant for Magnús and was concocted by Álfifa, the mother of Hǫrðaknútr's half-brother Sveinn. Álfifa was very much disliked by the Norwegians, because she was believed to have inspired Sveinn's harsh rule over

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<sup>7</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (111): 'King Magnús said: "Hákon [Knútr] should drink first and have precedence in every form of service." Then she gave the horn to Hákon [Knútr], and he drank it off, exclaiming, as he cast the horn aside, "shouldn't have," but he got no further and gave his death groan.' In the explanatory notes to his translation of *Morkinskinna*, Andersson and Gade (422, ch. 4, n. 4) suggest that the mix-up between Hǫrðaknútr and Hákon might be a wrong resolution of an abbreviation.

Norway in 1030-1031.<sup>8</sup> The passage in *Msk* suggests that, as with King Sveinn, Álfifa was the one who inspired King Hǫrðaknútr's actions, and probably the one who had suggested that he should offer Magnús the honour of taking precedence, because her plan was devised and would have worked on those terms. Actually, King Hǫrðaknútr's last words in *Msk* ('*eigi skyllde*'), suggest that he realises that she is responsible and that he should have been suspicious of the drink.

The rather "Norwegian" view of Hǫrðaknútr's death put forward in *Msk* is historically impossible, since Álfifa would have absolutely no reason to support Hǫrðaknútr (indeed, she was historically probably part of the plot to deprive him of election to the English throne in 1036 in favour of her son Harold Harefoot - a plot which is described in detail in the *Encomium Emmae*, which was written between Hǫrðaknútr's accession to the English throne in 1040 and his death in 1042).<sup>9</sup> The confusion in *Msk* probably arises from the fact that in English, Knútr's wife Emma (mother of Hǫrðaknútr) was also called Ælfgifu, and the Norse author failed to realise this. In fact, *Msk*'s account is also contradicted by versions E and F of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 1042 (a contemporary source), which states that 'Harðacnut' died at Lambeth in London on 8th June, 1042 (trans. Whitelock 235). He may well have been poisoned, as *Msk* reports, but this had nothing to do with an attack on Magnús.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ólhelg* ch. 239, 247; *Msk* p. 18; *Ágrip* ch. 32; *Theod.* ch. 21 p. 45 l. 1. *Fsk* (ch. 35) compares Álfifa to the wicked Gunnhildr konungamóðir, wife of Eiríkr blóðøx. According to Snorri (*Ólhelg* ch. 244), Álfifa did not recognize Saint Óláfr's sanctity. The traditional hostility to Álfifa must have arisen early; the contemporary *Encomium Emmae Reginae* refers to her rather contemptuously as one of the concubines of Knútr and even doubts whether she was really the mother of Haraldr Harefoot at all (*Encomium Emmae* III.i, ed. Campbell 38-41). In England, Álfifa was known as Ælfgifu of Northampton (Campbell 83).

<sup>9</sup> Further, see the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 1035-1040, trans. Whitelock (232-4).

After King Hǫrðaknútr's fall Magnús went to Denmark and was immediately accepted as king there. *Ágrip* (ch. 36) says that he was recognised as king because 'the sons of the most important men were held hostage' (Driscoll 49). Snorri, on the other hand (*Mgód* ch. 20), states that he was accepted as king of Denmark for three main reasons: the chiefs of the country were bound by oaths to him; all the descendants of King Knútr were dead; and the sanctity and miracles of his father King Óláfr were becoming famous in all countries. If Snorri gives the Danes a mixed motivation which is part religious piety and part practical politics, *Msk* attributes Magnús's accession in Denmark entirely to his righteousness and his mild attitude to people, describing how he cultivated the Danes (*Msk* p. 34, ll. 32-37).

King Magnús appointed Sveinn, son of Úlfr and Ástriðr, King Knútr's half-sister, to rule Denmark in his absence, but he was soon faced with a betrayal by Sveinn, who claimed the Danish throne, and with a claim for the Norwegian one by his uncle Haraldr Sigurðarson, when the latter returned from the Holy Land.<sup>10</sup> According to the sources, Magnús had to fight fierce battles against Sveinn to establish his control over Denmark again, but he finally succeeded in doing so, partly because he successfully ended the alliance between Sveinn and Haraldr Sigurðarson by agreeing to divide the Norwegian kingdom with his uncle.

There is a great difference between Snorri and the other sources in their accounts of the events surrounding the agreement between King Magnús and his kinsman Haraldr. *Msk* (pp. 89-91) and *Fsk* (ch. 52) write that the two of them had

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<sup>10</sup> *Mgód* ch. 25 (on Sveinn's treachery), *Haralds saga harðráða* chs. 12-13 (on Haraldr's return from the Holy Land); *Msk* pp. 22-23; *Ágrip* ch. 36; *Fsk* ch. 47; *Theod.* ch. 22.

met in Denmark, where Haraldr had offered his support to the king and asked to share his kingdom. Magnús had consulted his magnates, and they had all agreed with the opinion of Einarr þambarskelfir, who advised Magnús not to divide the kingdom but to remain sole king of Norway. Haraldr had then made an alliance with Sveinn, and together they had harried in Denmark. Afterwards Haraldr went to Norway, where he met King Magnús again; this time, Magnús offered him half of the Norwegian realm. In *Msk's* text (p. 90, l. 28 – p. 91, ll. 1-2) it is King Magnús himself who writes a secret letter (*leyndar bref*) to Haraldr, inviting him to come to Norway and declare a truce.<sup>11</sup>

*Ágrip* (ch. 39) also writes that the two kinsmen met in Denmark, but unlike *Msk* and *Fsk*, it claims that Magnús shared his kingdom with Haraldr immediately and willingly. In *Ágrip's* text then, nothing is said about the agreement between Haraldr and Sveinn or about their harrying in Denmark, and in accordance with this, its overall portrayal of Haraldr in the following events will be rather favourable.

Snorri tells the story quite differently (*Hharð* ch. 21). Here, Haraldr allies himself with Sveinn as soon as he comes back from his campaigns abroad, and it is the opinion of the king's counsellors that the two kinsmen should reach an agreement. A delegation is sent to meet Haraldr, who accepts the offer that he can have half of the Norwegian realm in exchange for giving half of his treasure to Magnús.

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<sup>11</sup> The stories of the kings of Norway, as reported in the sources dealt with in this study, very often display the importance that advisors and chieftains had in influencing the kings' political and military decisions (see below, *passim*). In this particular case King Magnús is compelled to write the letter behind his magnates' backs, and this demonstrates that he is wiser than they are, although he seems to be afraid to defy their counsel openly.

When Magnús and Haraldr finally left for Denmark with their unified forces, Sveinn Úlfsson did not dare to face them and fled to Scania. The two kings spent the whole summer in Denmark, and in the autumn Magnús fell ill and died.<sup>12</sup>

*En Magnús réð síðan Danmörk ok hálfum Nóregi með kyrrð ok með ró fyrir útan allt ákall, meðan hann lifði, ok réð alls hvárutveggja ríkinu þrettán vetr með þeim sex, er hann hafði Danmörk, ok fekk sótt á Sjólandi ok andaðisk þar vetri síðarr en Haraldr kæmi í land, fǫðurbróðir hans. (Ágrip ch. 40)<sup>13</sup>*

In *Hharð* the king's disease and death follow, and proceed from a dream in which he is questioned by his father St. Óláfr. The motif of the dream that portends death is not uncommon in medieval literature. Together with other supernatural and natural signs, dreams and the apparitions of ghosts were considered certain evidence of imminent death, either for the dreamer himself or for someone else.<sup>14</sup> St. Óláfr also appears in dreams in order to announce the imminent deaths of King Haraldr harðráði and King Sigurðr Jórsalafari.<sup>15</sup>

In Snorri's account of Magnús góði's dream, St. Óláfr offers his son two alternatives: he may choose whether to live a long and successful life, but commit a crime which it will be almost impossible for him to expiate, or to follow his father immediately (i.e. to die).

*Þat var eina nótt, þá er Magnús konungr lá í hvilu sinni, at hann dreymsði ok þóttisk staddr þar, sem var faðir hans, inn helgi Óláfr konungr, ok þótti hann mæla við sik: "Hvárn kost viltu, sonr minn, at fara nú með mér eða*

<sup>12</sup> *Hharð* ch. 28; *Msk* p.140-143; *Fsk* ch. 54; *Theod.* ch. 27; *Ágrip* ch. 40. According to Saxo Grammaticus King Magnús died because he fell from his horse while he was running after Sveinn (*Gesta Danorum*, liber decimus, XXII, ll. 32-38).

<sup>13</sup> Trans. Driscoll (55): 'Thereafter Magnús ruled Denmark and half of Norway in peace and tranquillity without further claims for as long as he lived. He ruled both kingdoms thirteen winters in all, including the six he ruled Denmark, and he fell ill and died in Sjóland the winter following his uncle Haraldr's return.'

<sup>14</sup> See Ariès (*L'uomo e la morte* 7); Vovelle (*La Mort* 68); Bagge (*Society and Politics* 214); Lönnroth (*Dreams in the Sagas* 455-456).

<sup>15</sup> On King Haraldr harðráði's dream see below p. 69; King Sigurðr Jórsalafari's dream is dealt with on p. 115 below.

*verða allra konunga ríkastr ok lífa lengi ok gera þann glæp, er þú fáir annathvært bætt trautt eða eigi?" En hann þóttisk svara: "Ek vil, at þú kjósir fyrir mína hönd." Þá þótti honum konungrinn svara: "Þá skaltu með mér fara." Magnús konungur segir draum þenna mönnum sínum. En litlu síðar fekk hann sótt ok lá þar, sem heitir Súðathorp. (Hharð ch. 28)<sup>16</sup>*

The passage containing the dream is very important, since it provides evidence for changing ideas about the imagined geography of the Other World, and for the evolution of the idea of Purgatory, which developed during the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Norway as in southern Europe. Actually, in St. Óláfr's words to Magnús, it is implied that crimes can be either expiated or not, and that the expiation required for them may vary according to their gravity. If Magnús's potential crime can be expiated at all, it will be only with difficulty (*'trautt'*).<sup>17</sup>

Ciklamini (139) suggests that the crime that Magnús could have committed could be identified as the slaying of Haraldr. The relationship between the two kings had actually been spoiled before the Danish campaign (*Hharð* ch. 27; *Msk* pp. 97-99 and 103-110; *Fsk* ch. 53); but Magnús might alternatively have killed Sveinn, who was recognised as his legal successor to the Danish throne. In this case, the words of St. Óláfr here may anticipate the judgement on those later Norwegian kings who *do* choose to kill their kinsmen, so that this episode also

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<sup>16</sup> Trans. Hollander (599): 'One night, when King Magnús lay on his bed he dreamed that he was in the presence of his father, Holy King Óláfr, and that he spoke to him, "Which of these would you choose, my son: to go with me now or to become the most powerful of all kings and live long and do such misdeeds as you could atone for hardly or not at all?" King Magnús dreamed that he answered, "I would want you to choose for me." Then he thought the king replied, "In that case you shall go with me." King Magnús told his men this dream. A short while after he fell sick and took to his bed at a place called Súðathorpe.'

<sup>17</sup> In Cleasby-Vigfússon's *Icelandic-English Dictionary* the word *'trautt'*, as an adverb, is translated *'hardly, scarcely'* (Cleasby 639, s.v. *'trauðr'*).

<sup>19</sup> See below, the chapters on Haraldr gilli and Ingi Haraldsson gilla.

functions as a religious criterion against which to assess the behaviour of later kings.<sup>19</sup>

Faced with the two alternatives, King Magnús does not make a determined choice about the fate of his soul by himself, but instead allows St. Óláfr to do it for him. From a human point of view it is perfectly understandable that Magnús is too frightened of death to make an immediate heroic choice to follow his father. On the other hand Magnús must realise that to let St. Óláfr choose for him can only mean to choose death, because his holy father would never choose the path of sin for him. Once again then, Magnús commits his fate and binds his history to that of his father, who has intervened in all the most important turning points of his life, such as before the battle of Hlýrskógsheiðr (*Mgóð* ch. 27; *Msk* p. 42, ll. 38-42, p. 43, ll. 1-4; *Fsk* ch. 50).

Unlike Snorri, and notwithstanding the miraculous episode of the fish (*Msk* p. 143, see below), *Msk* transfers the events surrounding King Magnús's death onto a touchingly human level, and makes them relate closely to contemporary continental traditions of description of the rituals of death.

Furthermore, *Msk's* account of King Magnús' death seems to be put within emphatic brackets: it starts with a warning to the audience that the big show of death is beginning: *Nu barsc þat at er mikil tíþindi ero at segia.* (*Msk* p. 140, l. 18), and ends with the epilogue *Eptir þesse myklu tíðennde...* (*Msk* p. 145, l. 12).<sup>20</sup> The special emphasis *Msk* puts on the moment of the king's death demonstrates

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<sup>20</sup> 'Now matters took a turn that made for important events.'; 'After these important events...'. *Fsk* (ch. 54) also uses the expression "great event" (*miklu tíðendi*) with reference to King Magnús's death.

that this author's concern with death is not casual and tangential, but deliberate and central.

In *Msk* the ritual of Magnús's death carefully follows the three principal phases that have been identified by the French historian Philippe Ariès (*Storia della morte* 87-88), even if they are not all given the same importance in the text.

They are:

1. the realisation of one's own imminent end, which introduces a "public liturgy" in which the dying person is surrounded by friends and relatives (*Msk* pp. 140-141);
2. the fulfilment of the last duties, especially that of making one's will publicly (*Msk* pp. 141-142);
3. the religious ceremony, after which the dying person starts waiting for death, which usually follows quite soon afterwards (*Msk* p. 143, ll. 24-26).

The king's illness breaks out in a sudden and violent way (*Msk* p. 140). Both Magnús and Einar þambarskelfir realise immediately how serious it is, and Haraldr, too, is soon aware of his relative's situation:

*þa er M konvngur var i Iotlandi at einn morgon varp konvngur af ser kleþonom mþpiliga er hann la i lyptingo oc ræc af honom. Einar þ. s. var þar hia honom oc melti. Ertv sivcr hera. Litt em ec enn sivcr fostri s. konvngur. Þat er oss harmr mikill s. Einarr ef þer verþr nocqvot. oc mono vinir þinir eigi botr biþa. Konvngur melti. Fostri s. hann. lat gæra reccio mina vt við borþit. þar mon høggra oc svalara. sva var gort. oc er hann var þar kominn. þa melti konvngur mþpiliga. Ecki tior þetta færi mic aptr isama stað. oc sva var gort. Oc þa melti Einar. Mel þv hera fyr vinom þinom þat er nætsyn er til. oc rap oss heilreþi kann vera at nv verþi eigi langt vart viðr mæli. Konvngur s. Þat scal oc vera vinr. oc þicci mer þat licligast nv. at sia sott myni scilia vara samvisto oc vinscap. Oc þa com þar Haralldr konvngur oc spurþi. Ero þer sivkir hera. M. konvngur s. Sivkir erom ver frendi. (*Msk* p. 140, 18-30; p. 141, 1-6)<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (181): 'One morning as the king lay in the ship's castle in an exhausted state, he threw off the covers and practically steamed from a hot sweat. Einar

*Msk* is careful to make the king understate his illness at first - showing his stoicism - but then face bravely the likelihood that he will soon die (though he puts it in a rather understated way, as merely 'ending our companionship'). He is also respectful to Einarr, who in return shows a real personal concern for him. All of this seems to build up a positive picture of Magnús as he faces death.

Unlike the other sources, *Msk* is very precise in describing the symptoms of King Magnús's illness, which manifests itself in a very high fever that exhausts him. *Msk*'s Magnús is portrayed as a suffering human being who tries to find a way to alleviate his pains and struggles to make conversation with his men even when he can hardly speak.

Nonetheless, Einarr þambarskelfir urges him to give them counsel, and when King Haraldr comes to meet him, King Magnús makes his will. Unfortunately it is not easy to follow the conversation between the three characters, because the manuscript is full of gaps (*Msk* p. 141, ll. 7-14), but it is clear that King Magnús bequeaths the Norwegian throne to Haraldr and the Danish one to Sveinn Úlfsson, in accordance with his treaty with Hordaknútr Knútsson (*Msk* p. 141, ll. 15-26 and p. 142, ll. 1-5). When Haraldr shows his dissatisfaction with this decision, Magnús follows Einarr's advice and gives instructions to his half-brother Þórir to hide in the forest until he knows Magnús is dead, so that he can then slip out of Haraldr's hands, go to Sveinn and confer on

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þambarskelfir was with him and said: "Are you sick, lord?" "I am not very sick yet, foster father," said the king. "It will grieve us greatly," said Einarr, "if anything should befall you, and it would be an irreparable loss to your friends." "Foster father," he said, "have a bed made for me out by the gunwale, where it will be cooler and more comfortable." That was done, and when the king was brought there, he was barely able to speak: "It doesn't help - take me back to where I was." They did so, and Einarr said: "Tell your friends what they need to hear, sire, and give us good counsel. It may be that we do not have long to talk." "So I shall, friend," said the king, "and it seems very

him the kingdom of Denmark (*Msk* p. 142, ll. 17-27). This passage of *Msk*, then, explains why Magnús also sends Þórir to Sveinn in *Hharð* (ch. 28), asking him to take care of his half-brother, even though Snorri does not explain that Þórir has been asked to convey to Sveinn the message of his succession to the Danish throne.

In *Msk*, all the public ceremony of the king's disease and death is then expressly described, and Magnús explicitly tells Haraldr and his court what his wishes are, but then, being afraid that they will not be executed, he entrusts to Þórir the task of conveying the vital message to Sveinn as soon as he himself is dead. In all sources but *Fsk* (ch. 54), where Magnús bequeaths his whole kingdom to Haraldr (*gaf hann upp allt ríki sitt Haraldri, frænda sínum*), the king expresses the desire to be succeeded on the Danish throne by Sveinn Úlfsson.<sup>22</sup> *Ágrip* (ch. 40) and *Theod.* (ch. 27) relate that as soon as he felt that death was imminent, Magnús sent his half-brother Þórir to convey the Danish throne to Sveinn.<sup>23</sup>

At this point in the tale, *Msk* introduces the supernatural episode of the fish: while Magnús is sleeping and Haraldr is sitting beside him, the courtiers see a

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likely that this illness will end our companionship." At that moment King Haraldr arrived and asked: "Are you ill, sire?" King Magnús replied: "Yes, I am ill, kinsman."

<sup>22</sup> In *Orkneyinga Saga* (ch. 30) King Magnús publicly declares before he dies that he wishes to confer the Norwegian throne on Haraldr.

<sup>23</sup> Magnús had no historical right to bequeath either of his thrones to anyone, since both were elective monarchies. In the eleventh century this may have been a contentious point; for example, in 1042 Edward the Confessor was able to assert his right to the English throne against Magnús because he had been elected, but Norman writers later asserted, possibly truthfully, that he himself bequeathed his throne to Duke William of Normandy. In a sense, the Battle of Hastings was about the conflict between Harold Godwinsson's claim by election and that of Duke William by bequest - see e.g. Frank Stenton (417, 557-8, 571-2). However, by the thirteenth century, elective kingship had become a fiction, even in Norway, so perhaps the writers, especially that of *Msk*, are projecting the assumptions of their own day back onto the past. There certainly does not seem to be any sense in the *Msk* account that Magnús is doing anything wrong in bequeathing his kingdoms - quite the reverse.

golden fish coming out of the sleeping king's mouth. As it cannot go back in, the fish enters Haraldr's mouth after having turned darker:

*Og litlu sidar fyrir andlath konungs þaa sofnade hann littad og uar Haralldr konungr þar þa hia honum. Ogh vid þann suefn opnadiz munnr hans og syndiz monnum sem fiskr rende vr munne konungsens og hafde gullz lit. og sedan villde fiskuren aptur huerfa j munnen og nade eigi og ueik sier þaa j munn Haralldi konunge er hann sat nær konungi og syndizt monnum sem þaa væri hann dauckr aalitz. Ogh þa vacknade Magnus konungr og sogdu menn honum þetta. Hann segir. þetta mun vera fyrir skammlifi minu og kann uera ath sumum verde myrkare og kalldare rad Haralldz konungz frænda mins en min. (Msk p. 143, ll. 10-22)<sup>24</sup>*

The first striking point about this episode is that it is not described as a dream, but as if it was witnessed by the people who were around the king at that moment.

According to Andersson and Gade (*Morkinskinna* 434, ch. 26 n. 4) the fish is "an occurrence of the *fylgja* (companion spirit) motif", a fetch whose appearance, in pagan belief, foreboded one's death. However, the fish going out of the king's mouth recalls the Christian belief of the soul passing away at the moment of death. Although in Nordic paganism "there is no definite boundary between living and dead, and no complete change in passing from one side to the other" (Christiansen 7), in Christian belief the division between body and soul is one of the foundations of the faith, and this division implies a different way of looking at the transition between life and death. The idea of a spiritual element in man that arrived along with Christianity is to be found in the general tenor of

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<sup>24</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (183): 'A little later, before the king died, he fell asleep for a while. King Haraldr was there by his bed. As he slept, his mouth fell open and people thought they could see a fish swim out of the king's mouth, and it was the colour of gold. Then the fish wanted to get back into his mouth, but was unable to do so and made for the mouth of King Haraldr, who was sitting close to the king. It struck the onlookers that it then had a dark complexion. Then King Magnús woke up and was told of this. He said: "This signifies that I do not have long to live, and some people may feel that the counsels of my kinsman King Haraldr are colder and darker than my own.'"

customs and tales about the dead in Norwegian tradition, as for example in the act of opening the window to let the soul of the dead go out (Christiansen 20). Indeed, Almqvist (141–54) found in both Irish and Icelandic literature examples of a person's soul being embodied in the form of a fish, and of the presage of death it brings about when it comes out of a person's body.<sup>25</sup>

In *Msk* the supernatural episode of the fish seems to clarify the political events that are to come. It is indeed King Magnús himself who, through the wisdom imparted by his role as the dying man, explains to his astonished followers the meaning of their vision. Haraldr is destined to become king, even though his rule may be darker and colder for some people than his own has been.<sup>26</sup>

The fish, which is as deeply connected to King Magnús as his soul is, and can be considered an emanation of his power, must be interpreted either as a symbol of divinely ordained kingship or of political and military power. If it is the first, we might conclude that the kingship is meant by God to pass to Haraldr, even if he will be a less morally splendid king than Magnús. If the fish is a symbol of power in a political sense, the story might suggest that power will pass to Haraldr, and he will use it regardless of Magnús's wishes and for "darker" purposes.

This symbolic 'passage' can be compared to the strange story of how Sigvatr Þórðarson became a poet after eating a strange and beautiful fish which he had been enabled by a mysterious unnamed Norwegian to catch while fishing in Apavatn (*Flateyjarbók* III, 237-248). This episode has been looked at by Margaret

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<sup>25</sup> As regards the fish as a Christian symbol see Lie (322–24).

<sup>26</sup> According to Andersson (*The Politics* 64), this sentence sums up the political difference between Magnús and Haraldr.

Clunies Ross (*From Iceland to Norway* 55-70) both as a 'rite of passage' story and in ways that suggest that the fish represents some particular poetic power or ability. Following the same interpretative model, the episode of the fish in *Msk* might well represent the passage of the capacity for effective command from King Magnús to King Haraldr.

After this episode, King Magnús repeats his intention to bequeath only the kingdom of Norway to Haraldr, even though he has recognised some time earlier that his advice to Haraldr will not do much good (*Msk* p. 142, ll. 1-5). *Msk* reports that Haraldr 'did not say much' (*Haralldr lætur sier ecke um finnast*), implying that he has decided not to argue with the dying king, but to take his own wilful course of action after Magnús is dead (*Msk* p. 143, l. 24).

At this point in the narrative *Msk* describes the third phase of the ritual of death (*Msk* p. 143, ll. 24-26): "*eptir þath koma til kennemenn og veita honum fagurliga þionustu.*"<sup>27</sup> The progress of the religious liturgy is only outlined in *Msk*, but the ritual of *visitacio infirmorum*, both in historical fact and as imagined by the writer of *Msk*, was probably very similar to the one found in *Manuale Norvegicum* (*Presta-handbók*), a manuscript from the middle or the second half of the thirteenth century (Fæhn 13-18).<sup>28</sup>

The ritual started with the blessing of the house and its inhabitants, and their aspersion with holy water. Then the celebrant recited a series of Psalms and the litanies for the sick person, among which was:

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<sup>27</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (183): 'Afterwards the priests came and performed solemn rites.'

<sup>28</sup> Helge Fæhn's edition of *Manuale Norvegicum* prints three handbooks which are kept in the Royal Library of Copenhagen: Thott 110, 8vo; NKS 32, 8vo; NKS 133 f, 4to. The quotations below are from NKS 133 f, fol. 36r, 3 - 38v, 19. As regards the mortuary ritual see also Gunnar F. Guðmundsson (275-277).

*Ab omni malo libera eum domine.  
Ab insidiis diaboli libera.  
Ab damnatione perpetua libera.  
Ab iniqua morte libera.  
Ab subitanea et improuisa morte libera.  
In hora mortis succurre ei domine. (Fæhn 14, ll. 10-13, 18, 30)<sup>29</sup>*

Then followed the confession of sins and the ministration of the *Viaticum*, literally 'food for the journey' (Fæhn 15-17). The ritual of the anointing described in the *Manuale Norvegicum*, which took place after the confession, was probably not actually performed at the time of King Magnús góði's death, since it only became normal practice towards the end of the twelfth century (Dudley 238), but since *Msk* is a thirteenth-century source, the author may well have assumed it, even though it did not take place in historical fact. The ritual ended with the absolution and the final blessing of the sick person: "*Benedictio dei patris omnipotentis et filii et spiritus sancti descendat super te et custodiat te, et perducatur te ad uitam eternam. amen.*" (Fæhn 18 ll. 2-3).<sup>30</sup>

None of this ceremony is actually stated in *Msk*, but it is possible to fill in the assumption that it lies behind the text and in its author's knowledge.

The watch with the dying person that followed the ministry to the sick reveals, in *Msk*'s narrative, the dreariness and the harsh reality of the moment of death: Magnús hands over the knife and belt to his page and dies at the precise moment when the boy looks at him:

*Sidan mællte konungr uid skosuein sinn. hefir eg nockut minzt þin. Ecke nu ath sinne segir hann. Konungr rette þaa til hans knif og bellte og var þath huortueggia gersime sem ætla ma er þuilikr madr hafde att og borit. og er*

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<sup>29</sup> 'From all evil deliver him, Oh Lord. / From the snares of the devil deliver (him). / From eternal damnation deliver (him). / From an unjust death deliver (him). / From a sudden and unexpected death deliver (him). / In the hour of death help him, Oh Lord.'

<sup>30</sup> 'May the blessing of God the Almighty Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost descend upon you and keep you, and lead you to eternal life. Amen.'

*sueirnen tok uid gripunum þa leit hann til konungs og uar hann þaa beint j andlateno. En honum sueininum bra so uid og feckzt so mikels ath hann fell j outh. og er hann uitkadizt þa uoru j burtu gripirner j þys þeim hinum mycla er þa uar og all dri sa hann þa sidan. (Msk 143, ll. 26-36)<sup>31</sup>*

The boy's genuine grief is contrasted with a marked silence about the reaction of the rest of Magnús's court. King Magnús had said that he had many valiant and noble friends around (*Msk* p. 142, ll. 8-12), but he lacks the public display that should accompany the death of a king, and the display of grief by royal retainers which would have demonstrated his great worth in a worldly sense. On the level of the fiction he is deprived of a splendid death, but from the point of view of the narrator looking with hindsight, he is given a more splendid one in a spiritual sense, though with the implied criticism that he should not have expected worldly loyalty.

According to Andersson and Gade (*Morkinskinna* 426, n. 3) the gift of knife and belt was frequent in the sagas, and it seems to have been regarded as an appropriate gift from a lord to a lower status man who has rendered him an important service, cf. especially *Msk* (p. 57, l. 39), where Haraldr himself gives a knife and belt to a farmer's son who has escorted him after he was wounded at the Battle of Stiklastaðir. The gift obviously shows that King Magnús is properly concerned even for his humblest followers, and the phrasing in *Msk* suggests that it also implies enhanced honour for both the giver and the recipient. Its theft when

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<sup>31</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (183): "The king said to his page: "Have I given you any token?" "Not as yet," he said. The king then handed him a knife and belt, and both were treasures, as might be expected considering the man who had owned and worn them. As the boy took the treasures, he looked at the king, who expired at that very moment. The boy took it so much to heart and was so overwhelmed that he lost consciousness. When he recovered his senses, the precious objects were gone in the tumult and he never saw them again."

the boy was unconscious because he was overwhelmed by the king's death shows the callousness and greed of the bystanders.

But the only bystander who is named is Haraldr, and although others are implied to have been present, the text may be suggesting that perhaps Haraldr himself was the thief. *Msk* reports that Haraldr had expressly asked about the gold he had brought to Norway just after King Magnús had bequeathed him half of his kingdom (*Msk* p. 142, ll. 5-12), and he may have wanted to take back what he considered to be his property: this is a further suggestion that he had decided to thwart the dying wishes of Magnús.

The image of the faithful servant who, after having received such a gift, faints with sorrow at the sight of his king's death, is probably the most moving scene of the saga. It is echoed later on by another faithful servant and the death of another Magnús: King Magnús blindi, who dies in Hreiðar's arms, bound to him by the same spear which transfixes them both (*Msk* p. 433; *Hsona* ch. 10, see below p. 154).

The lack of piety of the court is contrasted with the sincere sorrow of the common people and of Magnús's brother Þórir, who is said to have been unable to speak because of the grief he felt (*matti ecke uid konung mæla fyrir harme*), both when he heard about Magnús' illness and later, when he came into the presence of Sveinn Úlfsson to report King Magnús's death.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, *Msk* (p. 144, ll. 25-26) adds that Þórir did not live long because he could not thrive in his grief (*enn hann vnde engu og lifde eigi leingi*).

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<sup>32</sup> *Msk* p. 142, ll. 27-28 and *Msk* p. 144, ll. 11-12.

It is important to note that in *Msk*'s text Sveinn agrees to cherish both Þórir (because he thinks that King Magnús would have done the same for his brother: 'þat true egh ath so munde Magnus konungr giora uid minn brodur'),<sup>33</sup> and also Magnús's grieving mother. These are both things that Haraldr should have done; but in fact, Haraldr has tried to kill Þórir by having arrows fired at him in the forest,<sup>34</sup> and he has left it to the commoner Þorkell geysa to look after Magnús's mother. Her polite objection to spending Christmas with a common man implies, surely, that Haraldr should have invited her.<sup>35</sup> By contrast with this, Haraldr has pointedly refused to promise to cherish the friends of Magnús, stating that his first responsibility is to his own friends (*Msk* p. 141, ll. 12-13). All these details in *Msk* seem to contribute to a deliberate contrast between the Christian *caritas* exhibited by Magnús and the *cupiditas* of Haraldr, who believes only in worldly power and self-advancement.

The events that follow king Magnús' death, i.e. Haraldr's desire to keep the Danish kingdom and Einarr þambarskelfir's decision to bring King Magnús' body back to Norway, are described in almost exactly the same words in *Hharð* (ch. 29), *Fsk* (ch. 54) and *Msk* (p. 145, ll. 11-31). Nevertheless, because the sources differ in their accounts of the instructions given by the dying Magnús and of his last moments, these events assume a character which allows various interpretations of the authors' opinions.

In *Hharð* and *Msk*, Einarr's intention to go back to Trondheim with Magnús' body serves in this version to emphasise his loyalty to the dead king's will: he does

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<sup>33</sup> *Msk* p. 144, ll. 21-23.

<sup>34</sup> *Msk* p. 143, ll. 41-42; p. 144, ll. 1-6.

not want to help Haraldr to conquer another king's land. In Snorri's work then, Einarr's declaration that he prefers to follow king Magnús dead rather than any other king living sounds sincere and honest, especially since we have seen enough of Haraldr's character to suspect that Einarr is doing this despite the likelihood that he may suffer for it later, as indeed happens (see below pp. 56-60).

In *Fsk*, where Magnús has bequeathed his whole kingdom to Haraldr (see *Fsk* ch. 54), Einarr þambarskelfir's plan to leave for Norway and bury Magnús' body next to the grave of St. Óláfr is certainly an expression of piety and respect for the dead king, but it also shows a wilful refusal to accept the new king's commands. This account therefore seems more favourable to Haraldr at this point than the others are.

Unlike the other sources, *Msk* (pp. 146-147) reports that during King Magnús's funeral voyage a blind man received his sight back as a result of Einarr giving him a little ring that had belonged to Magnús. This story could be interpreted as the beginnings of an attempt to suggest that Magnús may also have been a saint, as will also happen later on in the cases of King Haraldr gilli and Eysteinn Haraldsson gilla, and it may have started either as an actual historical attempt by Einarr to promote (for political motives) the idea that Magnús had been a saint, or out of a later popular desire to have him canonised as well as his father.

However, *Msk* seems oddly tentative about this, since it also suggests that the miracle may have been due to the influence of St. Óláfr (*Msk* p. 147, ll. 10-13).

King Magnús's body was finally buried in Niðaróss. What the sources write about his tomb furnishes very important information about burial customs:

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<sup>35</sup> *Msk* p. 144, ll. 26-40; p. 145, ll. 1-4.

*Einarr þambarskelfir fór með liki Magnúss konungs ok með honum allr Þrændaherr ok fluttu til Niðaróss, ok var hann þar jarðaðr at Clemenskirkju. Þar var þá skrin helga Óláfs konungs. (Hharð ch. 30)<sup>36</sup>*

*Likit var jardath ath Kristkirkiu fyrir utan kor enn nu er þath jnnan kors fyrir rume erkebyskups. (Msk p. 147, ll. 27-29)<sup>37</sup>*

*Einarr þambarskelfir með Þrændaher fór með liki Magnúss konungs norðr til Niðaróss ok jarðaði hann at Kristskirkju fyrir utan kórin. (Fsk ch. 54)<sup>38</sup>*

*En lík hans var færð norðr í Þrándheim ok nið<r> sett í Kristskirkju, þar sem faðir hans hvílir. (Ágrip ch. 40)<sup>39</sup>*

Snorri is the only source to report that King Magnús was buried at Clemenskirkja, where the shrine of St. Óláfr was at that time. This shows a better historical awareness than *Msk* (p. 147), *Fsk* (ch. 54) and *Ágrip* (ch. 40), which all write that he was buried at Kristkirkja, even though that church did not yet exist, since it was Óláfr kyrrri who had it built.<sup>40</sup> Before being moved to its final destination in Kristkirkja, King Magnús's body was buried at Óláfskirkja, together with St. Óláfr's shrine, but Snorri does not record this event, although he must have known it. But Snorri does write in *Hharð* (ch. 44) that Einarr þambarskelfir himself and his son were buried in Óláfskirkja, close to King Magnús góði, and he had previously written that St. Óláfr's relics were preserved in Óláfskirkja while Mariukirkja was being built (*Hharð* ch. 38).

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<sup>36</sup> Trans. Hollander (600): 'Einar Thambarskelfir proceeded with the body of King Magnús, followed by the Thronders in the army, and brought it to Nitharós, where he was buried in the Church of Saint Clement. There was kept the shrine of Holy King Ólaf.'

<sup>37</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (186): 'The body was buried at Christ Church outside the choir, but now it is within the choir and outside the archbishop's chamber.'

<sup>38</sup> Trans. Finlay (199): 'Einarr þambarskelfir and the army of Þrændir went north with King Magnús's body to Nidaróss and buried him at Christ's Church outside the choir.'

<sup>39</sup> Trans. Driscoll (55): 'His body was moved north to Þrándheimr and buried in Kristskirkja, where his father rests.'

<sup>40</sup> Ólkyrr ch. 8; *Theod.* ch. 29, p. 59. As regards Kristkirkja see below p. 89 and Pesch (132).

As regards King Magnús's tomb, *Msk's* text is once again the most interesting account, because it bears witness to a change of custom as regards the custom of burying important people *ad sanctos*. According to *Msk* (p. 147, ll. 27-29) King Magnús was buried outside the choir (*fyrir utan kor*) soon after his death (eleventh century), while "now" (when *Morkinskinna* was written, i.e. in the thirteenth century), he lies inside the choir (*enn nu er þath jnnan kors*).<sup>41</sup> The site *fyrir utan kor* can be identified with the part of the churchyard around the apse of the church, just outside the east end of the choir (Lat. *in exhedris ecclesiae*). Ariès (*L'uomo e la morte* 59) shows that this part of the churchyard was used to accommodate honoured tombs at a time when it still seemed presumptuous to bury anyone inside the choir. Until the thirteenth century, burial *ad sanctos*, i.e. anywhere inside a church in which one or more saints were buried, was a privilege allowed only to kings, bishops and abbots (Vovelle, *La Mort* 74). Later, when churches started to become crowded with tombs, the most coveted and expensive place became the choir, which had until then been kept vacant (Ariès, *L'uomo e la morte* 52-53, 88-90).

The focus on King Magnús's death as "lived" by the king himself and by his co-protagonists of the story, has shown the differing attitudes of the sources towards the contrast between Magnús and Haraldr. Together with *Ágrip*, *Fsk* is the most favourable to Haraldr, seeing him as a glorious successor to Magnús (and even as one of the wisest kings that there have been in the Nordic lands, see *Fsk* ch. 56). At the opposite extreme, *Msk* seems the most hostile to him, and

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<sup>41</sup> Gade (*Kaupangr* 171) interpreted this clause as referring "to the remodelling of Kristkirken that was closely connected with the new name of the archbishopric."

correspondingly perhaps the most favourable to Magnús, the mild king, who prefers diplomacy to conflict and war.

The salvation of King Magnús's soul cannot be doubted either in *Msk*, where he attends to his spiritual needs before dying, or in *Hharð*, where he accepts St. Óláfr's will as it is revealed to him in a dream. Unlike King Magnús, Haraldr will not follow St. Óláfr's warnings and will probably not save his soul, but in Snorri's account his fame will shine more brightly than that of his predecessor.

## CHAPTER 3

### HARALDR HARÐRÁÐI (1046-1066)

Þá gat son Sigurðr ok Ásta,  
þann-er Haraldz heiti átti:  
sá réð einn all-vitr konungr  
viðri foldo vetr tuttogo.

Áðr her-fær hilmir gerði  
til Englandz með of-stopa:  
felldo vestr i vápn-þrimo  
Enskir menn Óláfs bróðor.  
(*Konunga-Tal* stt. 43-44)<sup>1</sup>

Haraldr harðráði's death is a point of particular dramatic intensity in the three main sources for the history of the medieval Norwegian kings, and seems to represent the climax (or the resolution) of numerous conflicts and contradictions: the conflicts between Haraldr and his co-protagonists in the story, and the contradictions between royal prerogatives and personal ambitions, between prudence and heroic reputation, and between death and immortality.

These conflicts are represented by many stylistic and narrative differences between the sources, and they also appear very clearly in the famous tale of the battle of Stamford Bridge, in which Haraldr met his death.

*Msk* seems not to love Haraldr very much, and as we have seen in the previous chapter, its view of him during the description of Magnús's death has portrayed him as wilful, unjust and selfish. *Msk's* opinion of him may have been

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. Guðbráundur Vigfússon (316): 'Sigurd begat a son on Asta, who had the name Harold. That wise king ruled the land alone for twenty winters, till in his pride he made an expedition to England. The English felled Olaf's brother west in the battle [Stamford Bridge].'

influenced by the clerical tradition, which was manifestly hostile to Haraldr,<sup>2</sup> but it was also counterbalanced by literary traditions about him.

According to Indrebø (173-180), *Msk* shows a combination of two inherited traditions that were in conflict with one another: in the skaldic verses King Haraldr is portrayed in a positive way, while in the *þættir* he is a negative character. Actually, such a conflict of views would not be surprising, since the skaldic verses were for the most part derived from Haraldr's court poets, and they could obviously be expected to praise him. The writer of *Msk* could hardly ignore them as a source even if they did not present the view he wanted to advance.

As regards the alleged discrepancy between the so-called "main text" and the *þættir*, it is not possible to disregard the possibility that there was an "Oldest *Morkinskinna*" without the *þættir*, which were clumsily interpolated later.<sup>3</sup> Assuming that the *þættir* originated with *Msk*, even though they might not have been written by its author, Andersson (*Politics* 59, note 9) states that they are consistent with *Msk*'s text as a whole because of their anti-royalist tendency. His view is that *Msk* makes Haraldr the "negative pole of royal authority", and that he presents him in this way throughout the text (as he will also do in the cases of Magnús berfœttr and Sigurðr Jórsalafari). Haraldr is thus presented as one of a

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<sup>2</sup> Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (III, 16) gives a very unfavourable portrait of King Haraldr, describing him as a kind of enemy of Christianity. He writes that: 'King Harold surpassed all the madness of tyrants in his savage wildness. Many churches were destroyed by that man; many Christians were tortured to death by him. (...) He also gave himself up to magic arts and, wretched man that he was, did not heed the fact that his most saintly brother had eradicated such illusions from the realm and striven even unto death for the adoption of the precepts of Christianity.' (Trans. Tschan 127-128). Adam also reports the letter that Pope Alexander II sent to admonish him and his bishops to show respect to the vicar of the Apostolic See (*Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, *Schol.* 70). One should also note, however, that one of Adam's named informants is King Sveinn of Denmark, whom he uncritically admires; Sveinn's view of his bullying enemy Haraldr was therefore almost bound to influence Adam.

<sup>3</sup> For a review of scholarship on *Morkinskinna* see Ármann Jakobsson (*King and Subject*); Andersson and Gade (*Morkinskinna* 11- 14, 23-24).

group of kings whom Andersson calls the "foreign adventurer" type; *Msk* seems to prefer the "builder and lawmaker" type.<sup>4</sup>

Ármann Jakobsson (*King and Subject* 103-105) takes a different view, arguing that the *þættir* are the means by which the author of *Msk* succeeds in portraying the complexity of the king's character. He writes that in *Morkinskinna* "Harold is neither a positive nor a negative character, but rather a three-dimensional human being with good sides and bad and always a bit unpredictable" (Ármann Jakobsson, *King and Subject* 109); and again "This inconsistency of portrayal could be interpreted as the work of two or more authors, as Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson and Indrebø did, but one could also imagine an author with an intricate mind and a keen interest in virtues and vices and the general weaknesses of human beings." (Ármann Jakobsson, *The Individual* 78).

The complexity of Haraldr's character in *Msk*, which has raised so much discussion among scholars, stands in marked contrast with the much simpler portrait of him in *Heimskringla*. Snorri does not generally include many *þættir* (which he must have known, even if we suppose that they were not included in the hypothetical "Oldest *Morkinskinna*"), and in the case of *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar harðráða* he omits all the episodes in *Msk* that make Haraldr's actions look disagreeable and inappropriate.<sup>5</sup> Contrary to this, he adds other incidents that seem to try to justify Haraldr's deeds and make him into a definitely positive hero.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Andersson (*The Politics* 58 and 679); Andersson (*The King of Iceland* 926-927); Andersson and Gade (*Morkinskinna* 65); Andersson (*Snorri Sturluson* 16).

In *Hharð* for example, Snorri cuts out two important episodes that in *Msk* precede the king's killing of Einarr Þambarskelfir. Einarr seems to have tried to compete with Haraldr for authority in the Þrændalög, and may even have tried to promote a cult of King Magnús góði as a saint in pursuit of this ambition (see previous chapter).

In the first of these episodes (*Msk* p. 175, ll. 24-25, 30-32) Haraldr, in order to test Einarr, sends him two supposedly Swedish ambassadors, who ask for Einarr's support against the Norwegian king. In this episode Einarr clearly demonstrates his moral honesty, because he declares to the false ambassadors that, notwithstanding his well-known disagreements with Haraldr, he will never betray his country and his king.

In the second episode (*Msk* pp. 178-179) Haraldr suggests that his kinsman Grjótgarðr should play a joke on Einarr, who has dared to fall asleep after a dinner at the king's palace, and worse, has done so while Haraldr was telling of his own heroic deeds. Following Haraldr's instructions, Grjótgarðr puts some straw in Einarr's hand and wakes him up saying: "*viliom bvaz Einar*" ('let's go, Einarr'). Einarr takes hold of the straw and farts in the process. Afterwards Einarr is so ashamed of this offence that he avenges it by killing Grjótgarðr (*Msk* p. 179):

*Oc nv er menn voro miðc drvcnir. þa var Einarr ner svefns. sat hann sva at hann hneg vp at dynonum. Þa lat hann at Griotgarþi frenda sinom oc melti. tac nv grasit s. hann oc vefsaman oc stic i hamð Einari oc kny hann við fast oc mel þetta viliom bvaz Einar. Griotgarþr giærrir nv sva oc treysti at iafmt iþvi oc frat við. Konvngr gek þa ibræt. Oc er Einarr veit þat er vm er þa verðr hann reiþr miðc oc fer þegar bræt oc heim of nottina. (Msk 178, 18-25; 179, 1-2)<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> According to Andersson (*The King of Iceland 929*) *Heimskringla* "can be read as a systematic censoring of the Icelandic attitudes in *Morkinskinna* that might have offended Norwegian readers, for example, those fine stories of enterprising Icelanders who put Norwegian monarchs to shame."

<sup>6</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (210): 'The men had drunk deeply by now, and Einarr was almost asleep. He sat leaning up against a cushion. The king leaned over and whispered to his kinsman

Kari Ellen Gade, in her article "*Einarr Þambarskelfir's Last Shot*", assumes that the insult to Einarr refers to his past ability as an archer and his present inability to fight because of his age. She writes (160) that "When he [Einarr] wakes up, he becomes aware of what has happened and realises the full extent of the insult: instead of pulling his famous bow, he is now clutching a bunch of straw (...) The prank has made it abundantly clear that, in Haraldr's opinion, Einarr is a feeble old man, unfit for fighting, and the only *þömb* [bowstring] he is able to cause trembling in is his own intestines."

William Sayers (541) gives a different interpretation of this episode, claiming that Haraldr could not have been sure of the effect that his prank would have produced (i.e. the fart), while he agrees with Gade that "the incident must be richer in allusion and the humiliation substantially greater than meet the eye for it to have served Haraldr's purpose and for Einarr to have taken such offence."<sup>7</sup> He suggests that Einarr momentarily thinks, as he wakes up, that he has the handful of straw in his hand in order to wipe himself. Given the physical and verbal prompts, he is tricked into thinking he is ready for the act of defecation and farts in the process (542). He adds that "being fouled with excrement was an event of such fundamental seriousness that it could only be repaid in a comparable medium, with blood." (543).

According to Liberman, the scribe of *Morkinskinna* and his source understood Einarr's nickname as 'farther,' and "made up the anecdote in which Einarr's fart becomes the instrument of his undoing." (101).

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Grjótgarðr: "Take some straw," he said, "weave it together, and give him a good poke, saying 'Let's go, Einarr.'" Grjótgarðr did so and [Einarr] took a firm hold and let go a fart. The king went his way. When Einarr learned what had happened, he was very angry and returned home the same night.'

It is actually difficult to understand, from the dynamics of the prank, what might have offended Einarr so seriously that he seeks an immediate blood revenge. But if we turn our attention away from the bunch of straw to the position in which he is placed as he lies half asleep, it is possible to interpret Grjótgarðr's insult to Einarr as having a sexual implication rather than being associated with a call of nature. In the *Flateyjarbók* variant of the episode (III, 350), the straw is put under Einarr's nose to make him sneeze, so that in this account the 'defecation' idea cannot arise. But Einarr's position in his somnolent state is the same in both texts:

*Sath hann so ath hann hneig vpp ath dynunum. (Flat III, 350)*

*Sat hann sva at hann hneg vp at dynonum. (Msk p. 178, 19-20)*

The verb *hneigja* means "to bow down", "to stoop": Einarr is probably slumped down, showing his behind, giving Haraldr the idea for a prank that hints at an accusation of homosexual behaviour. Rather than being a bowstring or a wiping instrument, the bunch of straw, woven together and made stiff, was probably meant to symbolise a penis. When Einarr reacts to the prompt by taking a firm grip of it, he would look in the eyes of his audience as if he were performing a homosexual act.

This is indeed a kind of insult that would justify a blood revenge by Einarr. In his *Nið, Ergi and Old Norse Moral Attitudes*, Ström gives a survey of the meanings attached to the offence of *ergi* (adj. *argr* or *ragr*), which was an accusation of being "unmanly" in various ways, and in particular of being homosexual and/or a coward. He reports (6) that in *Grágás* there are three

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<sup>7</sup> For Gade's reply to Sayer's argument see Gade (*Einar Þambarskelfir Again*, 547-549).

expressions that authorise the man who has been offended to take his revenge immediately: *ragr*, *stroðinn* and *sorðinn*. In the Norwegian laws of Gulapíng and Frostapíng the word *ragr* does not appear, but we do find the terms *sorðinn* and *sannsorðinn* (?), which mean 'demonstrably used as a woman'.<sup>8</sup>

The result of this offence is the killing of Grjótgarðr, perpetrated the following morning, while he is still sleeping in his loft (*Msk* p. 179, ll. 2-6). In order to settle the dispute that arises from this killing, Einarr is invited to meet the king in his hall (*Msk* p. 179, ll. 11-16). At this point *Hharð* (ch. 44) also tells about this meeting but, unlike *Msk*, it says that it was organised because Einarr had offended Haraldr by rescuing a thief, who had earlier been in his service, from the king's court.

Both *Msk* (p. 179, ll. 17-21) and *Hharð* (ch. 44) report that Einarr entered the king's meeting hall alone, and thinking he had nothing to fear, left his son Eindríði to wait for him outside. The king's quarters had been darkened, and as he entered Einarr said: "*Myrkt er í málstofu konungsins.*"<sup>9</sup> In the hall he was treacherously killed by the king's men, together with his son, who had entered to help him.<sup>10</sup> None of the sources tells us who actually struck at Einarr, but *Msk* specifies that Einarr recognised the king among his men:

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<sup>8</sup> I think that my interpretation of the prank is able to answer Sayers' objection to Gade's view, which can also be applied to his own: "How could Haraldr be sure that his (in Gade's eyes) elaborately staged and highly allusive trick would have the desired effects, first, in the sleepy Einarr's response to an object thrust into his hand and a few words, second, in the involuntary fart, third, in Einarr's and others' recognition that the events at Svöldr, or those of his youth generally, had been recalled to his present discredit?" (Sayers 542).

<sup>9</sup> *Msk* p. 179, ll. 18-19; *Hharð* (ch. 44). Trans. Andersson and Gade (210): 'It's hard to see in the king's quarters.'

<sup>10</sup> *Msk* pp. 179-180; *Hharð* ch. 44. *Fsk* ch. 56 is very similar to *Hharð*, although it does not describe the reconciliation attempt or the details of the murder of Einarr.

*Einar veþr þa at þar er konungr er oc hægr til hans oc sacar hann ekki því at hann er fyr itveim bryniom. Þa melti Einar. hvat bita nv hvndar konungs. (Msk p. 179. ll. 23-25; p. 180, l. 1)<sup>11</sup>*

Even if *Hharð* does not write explicitly that the king was in the hall, Haraldr bears the moral responsibility for this disgraceful murder, and according to Bagge (*Saga psychology* 53) his resort to treacherous behaviour is roundly blamed by Finnur Árnarson (*Hharð* ch. 45) and "possibly also by Snorri himself".

Anyway, Snorri is the one who adds information about the burial place of the two victims: according to Snorri they were buried in Óláfskirkja, near Mágus góði's tomb, i.e. a very important place which must also have been near St. Óláfr's tomb.<sup>12</sup> Snorri's specification of the burial place of Einarr and his son may perhaps reinforce the suggestion that their family had a particular reverence for the memory of Mágus.

As in its account of the king's treatment of Einarr Þambarskelfir, *Msk* also shows a negative view of the character of Haraldr in its version of his relations with the Uppland chieftain Hákon Ívarsson.<sup>13</sup> This negative tone is very obvious when we compare the version in *Msk* with *Hharð*'s account, where Snorri seems to try to absolve Haraldr of responsibility (Andersson, *Politics* 61-63). The

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<sup>11</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (210): 'Einarr plunged ahead to where the king was and struck at him without inflicting a wound because he was encased in two byrnies. Einarr said: "The king's dogs have sharp fangs."'

<sup>12</sup> In this passage (*Hharð* ch. 44) Snorri seems to contradict himself, because he writes that Einarr and his son Eindriði were buried close by the tomb of king Mágus in Óláfskirkja, while in *Hharð* (ch. 30) he had written that King Mágus Ólafsson had been buried in Clemenskirkja. Clemenskirkja's foundations were laid by St. Óláfr (*Ólhelg* ch. 53), and he was buried there one year after his death (*Ólhelg* ch. 244). After the burial in Clemenskirkja then, the remains of St. Óláfr and Mágus góði were moved to Óláfskirkja, but Snorri does not record this event, although he must have known about it. *Msk* (p. 147, l. 28), *Fsk* (ch. 54, p. 249) and *Ágrip* (ch. 40, p. 55) had written that the remains of St. Óláfr and Mágus góði were buried in Kristkirkja, which had been erected by King Óláfr kyrri afterwards (*Ólkyrr* ch. 6). See Pesch (127-130; 185). See above p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> *Msk* p. 231; *Hharð* ch. 47-50, 64, 68-70, 72. *Fsk* ch. 57 p. 269 only mentions Hákon's presence during the battle of Niz, while in ch. 57 p. 271 it summarises in a few lines the final battle between King Haraldr and Hákon, when, contrary to the account in *Msk* (p. 231) and *Heimskringla* (*Hharð* ch. 72, p. 164) the king does not take King Mágus's banner.

episode of King Sveinn's flight during the battle of Níz can be added to Andersson's examples. Here, *Hharð* (ch. 64) explicitly writes that Hákon helped the Danish king to flee, an action for which he could reasonably be regarded as a traitor to the Norwegian army, while *Msk* and *Fsk* simply write that Sveinn managed to flee.<sup>14</sup>

After Haraldr's conflicts with the various Norwegian chieftains have been narrated in these very different ways by the different sources, they all shift their focus to the internal problems and contradictions in Haraldr's policies. He had begun his career as king by defying King Magnús's wishes and trying to regain the Danish throne, which Magnús had assigned to Sveinn Úlfsson.<sup>15</sup> In a similar way, again in defiance of King Magnús's policy and all the bad omens, he ends it with an obstinate attempt to conquer the English throne.

Haraldr had been urged to organise a campaign against England by Tostig, son of Godwine, who had been excluded from the succession to the English throne by his brother Harold. Before landing in Norway, Tostig had tried to get support for his case from his cousin, the Danish King Sveinn.<sup>16</sup> Sveinn had offered him a *jarldom* in Denmark, but had refused to support a military expedition to England. The sources agree in reporting the reason for this refusal: Sveinn thinks that he is not equal to his kinsman King Knútr, and as he recognises his limits, he decides to live in accordance with his circumscribed powers.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Msk* pp. 214-215; *Fsk* ch. 57, pp. 269-271.

<sup>15</sup> On the succession to the Danish throne see the previous chapter. The following campaigns against Denmark are dealt with in *Hharð* ch. 29, 32, 34, 35, 52, 58-64; *Msk* pp. 145, 155, 161-169, 204-205, 209-214; *Fsk* ch. 55, 57.

<sup>16</sup> Outside Old Norse literature, only the Norman historian Orderic Vitalis reports that Tostig went to Norway (White 165).

<sup>17</sup> *Hharð* ch.78; *Msk* p. 263, ll. 10-18; *Fsk* ch. 59.

*Fsk* (ch. 59) and *Msk* (p. 263, ll. 19-20) report in direct speech the angry comment by Tostig that implies his intention of turning to the king of Norway:

"*Frændr várir gerask oss fjáendr. Þeira fjandmenn skulu þá vera várir frændr.*"<sup>18</sup>

In Snorri's version (*Hharð* ch. 78) Tostig's comment again implies his intention of turning to the Norwegian king:

"(...). *Kann nú vera, at ek leita þannug vináttunnar, er miklu er ómakligrá, en þó má vera, at ek finna þann höfðingja, er miðr vaxi fyrir augum at ráða mjök stórt heldr en þér, Konungr.*" (*Hharð* ch. 78)<sup>19</sup>

Tostig's sentence then shows his awareness of the difficulty of gaining support for a campaign which is so distant from the interests of Norway. However, at the same time his sentence conveys a positive opinion about the campaign, saying that it is a "great thing",<sup>20</sup> and thus attaching to it a heroic importance that seems to outweigh any utilitarian consideration.

In order to smooth the way for King Haraldr's intervention in the affairs of England, Snorri includes in his saga some episodes concerning Harold Godwinsson's life that show him to be an unprincipled person who is unfit to become a king. In *Hharð* (ch. 75) he writes that Harold was the youngest brother of King Edward's wife, and that he was adopted by the king as his son. In the next chapter (*Hharð* ch. 76) Snorri begins his negative portrait of Harold in a way which diverges strongly from the other sources.

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<sup>18</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (262): "Our kinsmen become our enemies, but their enemies can also be our kin."

<sup>19</sup> Trans Hollander (644): "(...). Now I may possibly seek friendly support in a quarter which is more unlikely. Yet it may well be that I shall find the chieftain who is less faint-hearted than you to engage in a great enterprise, sir king."

<sup>20</sup> "*Að ráða stórt*" can be translated 'to aim high, to undertake great things'. See Cleasby-Vigfússon (486, s.v. *ráða*).

First he describes Harold's journey to Normandy, where he is received by Earl William with great ceremony and is given hospitality throughout the winter.<sup>21</sup> During his stay it is implied (though not directly stated) that Harold has an affair with his host's wife, and in order to hush up the suspicion about their relationship, he asks William for the hand of his daughter in marriage.<sup>22</sup> He never honours this commitment and Snorri (*Hharð* ch. 95), in a way that diverges from the other sources, writes that it was for this reason that William the Bastard, after King Edward's death, decided to invade England and claim its throne.<sup>23</sup>

Then Snorri reports King Edward's death and the dispute over the succession to the English throne. Once again his narrative is very different from the other Norse sources and from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. While the other sources do not say anything about King Edward's death or Harold's election (*Msk* p. 262; *Fsk* ch. 58), Snorri reports what is supposed to have happened by the king's deathbed:

*Þat er sögn manna, at þá er fram leið at andláti konungs, at þá var Haraldr nær ok fátt manna annat. Þá laut Haraldr yfir konunginn ok*

<sup>21</sup> It is difficult for historians to work out the actual motive for Harold's visit to Normandy (Blair 111-112). As Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson states (*Heimskringla*. 3: xxviii), Snorri probably got to know about Harold's journey, directly or indirectly, from some foreign chronicles: his tale about Harold's visit to France agrees with William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*.

*Msk* writes about Harold's journey to Normandy after the tale of the Battle of Stamford Bridge (284-285). According to *Msk* Harold was entrusted with telling William that King Edward had designated him as his successor (see White 169), but there was certainly no time for Harold to visit Normandy between the Battles of Stamford Bridge, fought on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1066 (Stenton 582), and the Battle of Hastings, fought on 14<sup>th</sup> October (Stenton 585). Moreover, he would not have done so anyway, since the English *witan* had elected him king. Harold's visit to Normandy was actually probably in 1064 (Stenton 570), and its motivation may have included some message from Edward to William, but if William was promised the throne at all, it was probably during his very elaborate visit to England in 1051-2 (Stenton 557-8). Since the kingship was elective, King Edward did not in historical fact have the right to appoint his successor. However, *Msk*'s tale is not as negative towards Harold as *Hharð*.

<sup>22</sup> There may have been an old story about some illicit sexual activity during this visit, but according to the Bayeux tapestry it seems to have involved a cleric (i.e. not Harold) and a woman called Ælfgyfa (an English name). Two naked men in the border show that the story was improper (Wilson, plate 17). The story appears to have been distorted by the time it reached Snorri.

<sup>23</sup> In *Hharð* ch. 95, Snorri also cites William the Bastard's relationship with Edward (see below, p. 65).

*mælti: "Því skírskota ek undir alla yðr, at konungr gaf mér nú konungdóm ok allt ríki í Englandi." Því næst var konungr hafiðr dauðr ór hvílunni. (Hharð ch. 77)<sup>24</sup>*

This very significant episode seeks to demonstrate how Harold deceitfully influences the outcome of the election of Edward's successor. By means of these additions Snorri clearly characterises Harold Godwinsson as a negative figure: he is not only capable of trampling on a promise of marriage, but he does not even hesitate to desecrate the solemn moment of death. In Snorri's work Harold deprives King Edward of the sacredness of his last hour, and uses the importance attached to the dying man's last words to reach his wicked goal.<sup>25</sup>

After this episode Snorri's account goes on as in the other sources. The arguments that Tostig advances to persuade Haraldr to help him are fundamentally dynastic, i.e. the peace treaty between Magnús góði and Hǫrðaknútr.<sup>26</sup> However, Snorri adds to Tostig's argument something that sounds like a lesson in political strategy. In *Hharð* (ch. 79), he demonstrates to Haraldr that he has not been able to conquer Denmark because of the Danish people's hostility. It was for the same reason that Magnús had not claimed his right to the English throne after Hǫrðaknútr's death. But according to Tostig, Haraldr can claim his rights now because

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<sup>24</sup> Trans. Hollander (642): 'It is told that when the king was near death, Harold was present with few others. Then Harold bent down over the king and said, "I call you all to witness that the king just now gave me the kingdom and all power in England." A short while afterwards the king's [lifeless] body was lifted out of the bed.'

<sup>25</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (*Heimskringla* 3: 171 n. 2) asserts that King Edward must certainly have wished to have Harold as his successor, but it was not the king's prerogative to bestow the kingdom. Stenton (557-8), on the other hand, thinks that Edward probably favoured William, and it is true that he had always shown favour to Normans, and had made himself rather unpopular in England by doing so.

<sup>26</sup> According to this treaty, if Magnús góði or Hǫrðaknútr died without any heir, the other would take his kingdom (*Mgód* 6; *Msk* pp. 22-23; *Ágrip* ch. 36; *Fsk* ch. 47; *Theod.* ch. 22). Actually this peace treaty strongly clashes with the right of Tostig himself to claim the English throne. *Msk* (p. 262) seems to suggest that Tostig wanted the throne for himself, but actually proposed to both Sveinn and Haraldr that he would support their claims - so perhaps sees him as a hypocrite. *Fsk* (ch. 58-60) seems to agree with this. *Ágrip* (ch. 42) reports that Tostig objectively had a claim as

he can rely on the support of the chieftains who are still loyal to him.<sup>27</sup> However, it is significant that Snorri adds a sentence showing that Haraldr decided to help Tostig not only because there was a lot of truth in his words, but also because he was eager to conquer the English kingdom: "*Haraldr konungr hugsaði vandliga, hvat jarl mælti, ok skilði, at hann segir mart satt, ok í annan stað gerðisk hann fúss til að fá ríkit*".<sup>28</sup> Snorri then insists on the point that Haraldr's determination in performing a "great enterprise" is, as Tostig had foreseen (see above, *Hharð* ch.78), the major motivation that persuades him to act.

In historical fact, since Harold Godwinsson was not the son of a king and his father's ancestry is not very clear, his claim to the throne was based purely on the fact that the *witan* had elected him. In the thirteenth century, this would no longer seem to give him a valid claim, so Snorri, using the standards of his own time, naturally concludes that Harold was a usurper with no right to the throne at all. He evidently does not know the Norman tradition that Edward the Confessor bequeathed the English throne to Duke William, so he makes William claim the throne by reason of his relationship to Edward (*Hharð* ch. 95). This would be a very weak claim, since it was only a collateral relationship through the female line – Edward's mother Emma was William's great aunt - and in any case, William himself was a bastard, as Snorri must have known. According to this line of reasoning, it would be natural, from a Scandinavian viewpoint, to say that Edward's closest heirs should then have been the heirs of Hǫrðaknútr - i.e. either

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good as that of Harold Godwinsson and that he offered Sveinn and Haraldr half his kingdom if they would help him.

<sup>27</sup> See Bagge (*Society and Politics* 97-98).

<sup>28</sup> *Hharð* ch.79. Trans. Hollander (644): 'King Haraldr weighed closely what the earl said, and he concluded that much the earl had said was true; and also, he was eager to gain possession of that kingdom.'

Sveinn or, if the bargain between the kings were taken seriously, Haraldr harðráði himself. Since Sveinn refuses Tostig's offer, Snorri may have thought that he had resigned his claim, that Haraldr therefore actually had a reasonable claim, and that Tostig was behaving quite properly in seeking out the true heir.

Finally then, Haraldr decides to embark on a military campaign against England and he gets ready to recruit men and ships, but his decision stirs up controversy and discussion among the Norwegians (*Hharð* ch.79, *Msk* p. 265).

Before writing about the departure for England, Snorri again provides us with an original element, which is important in analysing the cults of saints and the beliefs attached to their afterlife. In *Hharð* (ch. 80) he actually specifies that before leaving Norway, Haraldr opened the shrine of St. Óláfr, trimmed the saint's hair and nails, then locked it again and threw the key into the river Nið: thirty-five years had passed since St. Óláfr's death, the same number of years as his age when he died. This sentence reveals that the ritual of trimming the saint's hair and nails must have been performed quite regularly after the first occasions, which are attested by Snorri himself in *Óláfs saga helga* (ch. 244-245). Moreover, it may also be evidence for a peculiar notion of "intermediate time" which is amazingly similar to the one that Dante will display in his *Divine Comedy* (beginning of the fourteenth century).<sup>29</sup> Dante's entry into Purgatory is preceded by the Ante-Purgatory (*Purgatorio*, cantos III-VIII), where the poet meets four types of penitents. These are the excommunicate; the negligent (those who had postponed their repentance until the last moment, but who *did* repent before death); the unabsolved (those who had delayed repentance, and met with death by violence,

but died repentant, pardoning and pardoned); and the negligent rulers (rulers who were virtuous, but negligent of salvation in life). Except for the excommunicate, all these souls must wait in the Ante-Purgatory for the same number of years as their age when they died, before they are admitted to Purgatory. St. Óláfr could be argued to belong at least to the last two of these categories - the unabsolved and the negligent rulers - and Snorri's account may provide evidence that a similar notion was already spreading in Scandinavia at the time when *Heimskringla* was being written. Haraldr throws the key away because he knows that the hair and nails will not grow any more: it was probably believed that once St. Óláfr had "lived" as a dead body for the same number of years as his existence in this world, he would have reached his final destiny in the other, or at least that he would have entered Purgatory and would no longer need physical ministrations in this world.

*Msk* does not report this event, although in view of St. Óláfr's popularity, it seems probable that the story was known to the writers of the other sources: this author's attitude towards St. Óláfr's miracles was probably more prudent than Snorri's.<sup>30</sup> This prudence can also be seen in other parts of the saga. For example he omits the miracles of St. Óláfr that are reported in Snorri's *Hharð* ch. 56 and 57. In contrast with Snorri's *Mgóð*, he is also cautious when he relates the king's dream about St. Óláfr:

*En er komit var at degi, þá sofnaði konungr ok dreymði, at hann sá inn helga Ólaf konung, fœður sinn, ok mælti við hann: (...). (Mgóð ch. 27)<sup>31</sup>*

<sup>29</sup> On the concept of "intermediate time" - that is the time that comes between death and the individual judgement of each soul, and between then and the Last Judgement, see Le Goff (*L'immaginario* 99-108); Vovelle (*La Mort* 62-64); Schmitt (43).

<sup>30</sup> On Snorri's approach to St. Óláfr's miracles see Phelpstead (298-303).

<sup>31</sup> Trans. Hollander (561): 'Now toward dawn the king fell asleep and dreamed that he saw Holy King Óláfr, his father, and that he spoke to him: (...).'

*Og eptir þath lagdizth konungr nidr og sofnar bratt. Og þegar vitraz honum draumr edr eigi sidr vitran hann þottiz sia fodr sinn aa huitum hesti og þotti hann mæla vid sig. (...). (Msk 42, 38-42)<sup>32</sup>*

*Msk's* account is also rather different as regards other supernatural events and the series of bad omens that cast a disquieting shadow on the English campaign. For example, the two stanzas that refer to the extraordinary events attached to the expedition are not reported by *Msk* in the same order, and are not attributed to the same speakers or the same situation as in the other sources.

*Vist es, at allvaldr austan  
eggjask vestr at leggja  
mót við marga knútu,  
minn snúðr es þat, þrúða.  
Kná valþiðurr velja,  
veit ærna sér beitu,  
steik af stillis haukum  
stafns. Fylgik því jafnan. (Hharð v. 150)<sup>33</sup>*

*Skóð lætr skína rauðan  
skjöld, es dregr at hjaldri.  
Brúðr sér Aurnis jóða  
óför konungs gørva.  
Sviptir sveiflannkjapta  
svanni holdi manna.  
Ulfs munn litar innan  
óðlæt kona blóði –  
ok óðlæt blóði. (Hharð v. 151)<sup>34</sup>*

*Hharð* and *Fsk* both apply the technique of the dream: stanzas 150 and 151 are recited by two *trollkonur* who appear in the dreams of the king's men Gyrðr and Þórðr. A network of symbols that foretell Norwegian defeat is linked to the

<sup>32</sup> Trans Andersson and Gade (119): 'After that the king lay down and quickly fell asleep. He immediately experienced a dream or some similar revelation. He thought he saw his father on a white horse, and he thought that his father addressed him: (...).'

<sup>33</sup> *Hharð* v. 150; *Msk* v. 76. Trans. Andersson and Gade (264): 'It is clear the king from the east is being enticed west to join forces with many a famous knuckle [i.e., he will die there]; that is my fortune. There the corpse grouse [bird of prey] can choose food from the foremost of the king's champions; it knows it has ample supplies; I always support that.'

<sup>34</sup> *Hharð* v. 151; *Msk* v. 75; *Fsk* v. 236. Trans. Andersson and Gade (264): 'The trollwoman lets the red shield shine as battle draws near; the bride of Aurnir's [giant] brood [giants, trollwoman] sees

*trollkonur*: in Gyrðr's dream the *trollkona* is holding a sword and a trough, and is waiting to feed the ravens and eagles squatting on every Norwegian prow. In Þórðr's dream the *trollkona* who is leading the defending army is riding a wolf and feeding it with human carcasses.<sup>35</sup>

*Msk* seems to keep its distance from such skaldic and heathen symbolism. Its author does not set the recitation of the stanzas within a dream, and thus avoids giving the impression that they have a supernatural origin or a learned and historically authoritative source.<sup>36</sup> *Msk* conveys a more "objective" narrative of the event: stanzas 75 and 76 are recited, as far as men could tell (p. 266, ll. 22-23), by real women at the moment of the arrival of the Norwegian army in England. It is Haraldr's men themselves who interpret these events as bad omens.<sup>37</sup>

Each of the three main sources also follows its own interpretative logic in reporting the stanza ascribed to St. Óláfr. Snorri writes that Haraldr himself dreamt that St. Óláfr recited this stanza to him. *Fsk* is more prudent and says that Haraldr thought he recognised St. Óláfr in the dream. *Msk* reports that this stanza was recited to Haraldr while he was sleeping and that men did not know who had recited it, even if many thought it was King Óláfr.

*Gramr vá frægr til fremðar  
flestan sigr enn digri.*

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the king's destined defeat at hand. Men's flesh is tossed into the hairy jaws; the woman, the raving female, reddens the wolf's mouth within with blood.'

<sup>35</sup> With the trollwoman and the trough cf. Víga-Glúmr's dream in *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 21 (Íslenzk fornrit IX, 71-2), which also has a skaldic verse attached to it. But there, since the following battle is inconclusive, the omen seems to mean only that people will be killed, not that Glúmr will be defeated - and the same may be true here.

<sup>36</sup> See *Msk* (p. 42, l. 40), when it writes, as regards King Magnús's dream of St. Óláfr before the battle against the Wendish army "*draumr edr eigi sidr vitran*" (p. 42, l. 40), i.e. "a dream or some similar revelation" (trans. Andersson and Gade 119).

<sup>37</sup> The same stanzas are also reported, together with other omens, in *Hemings þátrr Áslákssonar* (pp. 44-45). Those stanzas are recited neither in a dream nor, as in *Msk*, by a "normal" woman, but by a woman who is flying over the Norwegian ships, riding a wolf, with a trough filled with blood on her knees.

hlautk, þvít heima sǫtum,  
 heilagt fall til vallar.  
 Uggik enn, at, tyggi,  
 yðr mani feigð of byrjuð.  
 Trolls gefið fǫtum fyllar  
 fíks. Veldra guð sliku. (*Hharð* v. 152; *Fsk* v. 235)

Gramr va fregr til feigþar  
 flestan sigr en digri  
 hlytr þv ef heima sǫtir  
 heilagt fall til vallar'.  
 vgi ec øfst rað tigia  
 yþr mon feigþ of byriop  
 trollz gefit facom fyllar  
 fícs reðra gvþ slico. (*Msk* v. 77)<sup>38</sup>

Once again *Msk* avoids making this stanza seem to come from a supernatural dream-world. Moreover, there is a variant in the *Msk* text of the stanza that makes the identification of the speaker as St. Óláfr less clear than it is in the other sources. While *Hharð* and *Fsk* read "*Hlautk, þvít heima sǫtum, / heilagt fall til vallar.*", i.e. 'I died a holy death on the battlefield, because I stayed at home', with King Óláfr as the speaker (Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna*, Notes on Stanzas, St. 135, p. 480), *Msk*'s version of the stanza reads "*hlytr þv ef heima sǫtir / heilagt fall til vallar.*" i.e. 'If you stay at home, you will die a holy death on the battlefield'. In *Msk*'s case then, it is a statement that could have been made by anyone, not only by a martyr saint.

Another variant of the same lines can be found in *Hrokkinskinna* (Jónsson 1A: 430; Kock 21; Louis-Jensen, *Kongesagastudier* 79), where *heilagt*, 'holy', is replaced by *háleitt*, 'glorious, great'. Apart from any philological explanation,<sup>39</sup> however, I think that *heilagt* can be considered a better reading in the context of

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<sup>38</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (265): 'The famous stout king [St. Óláfr] was mostly victorious, yet doomed to die; if you stay home, you will die a holy death on the battlefield. I fear the final state of the king; death will be in store for you; you will provide food for the steeds of the greedy troll [wolves]; God will not cause that.'

the narrative situation, precisely because St. Óláfr is warning Haraldr that, in contrast with Óláfr's own death, that of Haraldr will not be holy because he has not stayed at home. Moreover, we cannot doubt that Haraldr's death was indeed regarded as "glorious", as we shall see, even if he died abroad.<sup>40</sup>

In any case, this stanza represents another important warning to Haraldr against the military campaign in England, one in which St. Óláfr plays one of the roles often fulfilled by saints, namely that of announcing someone's imminent death if he refuses to heed the saint's warning to him.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike Magnús who, had meekly followed St. Óláfr's will in the dream he had before dying (*Hharð* ch. 28, see above pp. 36-38), Haraldr does not accept Óláfr's moral warning and carries on with his expedition even though he knows that he will no longer be able to rely on St. Óláfr's help.<sup>42</sup>

The enumeration of all these bad omens seems to show the sources' detachment from Haraldr's decision to start the English campaign. It is clear that in their authors' opinion it was a terrible political mistake, and perhaps a moral mistake as well. It is also clear that Haraldr must bear sole responsibility for the deaths of all those brave Norwegians who fell honourably but uselessly on the battlefield at Stamford Bridge.

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<sup>39</sup> Since both these words begin with *h* (the necessary alliterating sound), and neither is needed as part of the *aðalhending*, it is not possible to distinguish which is better on metrical grounds.

<sup>40</sup> Among the various interpretations of this see verse Hollander (647) who writes: "A holy death I had, on / homeland falling, glorious". Magnusson and Pálsson (140) translate: "I died a man of holiness / because I stayed in Norway". Jónsson (1B: 400) suggests to translate "I had a kind of death that made me a saint."

<sup>41</sup> There is a close parallel in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (ch. 265, ed. 260-261), reporting an event that supposedly happened in 1248: King Alexander of Scotland is planning to ravage the Hebrides, and has a dream in which three men appear to warn him not to; they are later identified as St. Óláfr, St. Magnús of Orkney and St. Columba. The king refuses to heed the warning and dies soon afterwards. See also Vovelle (*La Mort* 68).

Even the stanza attributed to Þjóðólfr Arnórsson that relates to this campaign (which is reported as *Hharð* v. 159, *Fsk* v. 244 and *Msk* v. 92), adds a highly critical note to the expected celebration of the events. Þjóðólfr even accuses Haraldr of being partly responsible for a pointless expedition.<sup>43</sup> But in spite of this, the authors seem fascinated with Haraldr's death, which was as beautiful and glorious as it could be in the circumstances: on the battlefield, far from home, and in an aggressive rather than a defensive war.

The narrative of the Battle of Stamford Bridge in *Hharð*, *Msk* and *Fsk* follows a similar intensely dramatic course, which is depicted in strongly contrasting colours - bursts of enthusiasm that seek to defy the signs of fate and the inevitability of the tragic reality. The shining sun that brightens the march of the bold Norwegian army approaching York contrasts with the chilly breeze of the evening as the slaughter of that same army comes to an end. The proud ride of Haraldr in front of his army contrasts with his fall from his horse, just as his cheerful comment on it contrasts with its being clearly inauspicious (*Hharð* ch. 90; *Fsk* ch. 68, p. 282; *Msk* p. 274).

The narrative is full of anecdotes, episodes and famous remarks that recur among the various sources. After a stop in the Orkneys, where Haraldr's wife and daughter go ashore<sup>44</sup> and a host of men join the expedition, the Norwegian army arrives at Cleveland and ravages the Yorkshire coast. They reduce Scarborough

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<sup>42</sup> St. Óláfr had led King Magnús's army to victory over the Wends (*Mgód* ch. 27-28; *Theod.* ch. 24; *Ágrip* ch. 38; *Fsk* ch. 50; *Msk* pp. 42-43), and had also rescued Haraldr himself in Miklagarðr (*Hharð* ch. 14; *Fsk* ch. 51; *Msk* pp. 80-83).

<sup>43</sup> *Hharð* v. 159, *Fsk* v. 244, *Msk* v. 92. Trans Andersson and Gade (273): "People have paid a heavy price; now I declare that the army was deceived; without cause, Haraldr ordered his men to embark on this journey from the east. Thus ended the days of the daring king, so that we all are imperilled; the lord lost his commendable life."

with fire and win an important battle against the earls Morkere and Waltheof at the river Ouse (known in English sources as the Battle of Fulford).<sup>45</sup> Soon after this, the Norwegian army reaches York and starts to lay siege to the town. The people soon submit to king Haraldr, promising him hostages, to be taken the following day - the day which turned out to be that of the Stamford Bridge battle in which Haraldr lost his life (*Hharð* ch. 86-94; *Msk* pp. 270-280; *Fsk* ch. 64-71).

It was a hot and sunny day, so the Norwegians are said to have left their armour in their ships.<sup>46</sup> As they are walking merrily towards York they see an approaching army. Both *Msk* (p. 272, ll. 11-12) and *Fsk* (ch. 66) say that as soon as the Norwegians realised that it was a hostile army, jarl Tostig said "*Tøkum nú nokkut gott ráð ok vitrligt*" ('it is time to find some prudent strategy'), and then announced his plan to the king.

By contrast, in *Hharð* (ch. 88) it is Haraldr himself who says that it is necessary to decide on some "*good and wise plan*". When he opposes Tostig's

<sup>44</sup> *Hharð* (ch.83) reports that Haraldr left Queen Ellisif and her two daughters, Mária and Ingigerð, in the Orkneys (= *Orkneyinga saga* ch. 34); *Fsk* (ch. 63) speaks of Ellisif and Mária; *Msk* (p. 266) says that Haraldr left there his wife Þóra and his daughter Mária.

<sup>45</sup> According to Jones (435) this battle was important because the number of casualties influenced the results of the following battles of Stamford Bridge (because of the Norwegian casualties) and Hastings (because the Northumbrian casualties at Fulford had been so heavy that they were probably not able to send a force with Harold at all). See also Stenton (582).

*Msk* (p. 267) and *Fsk* (ch. 63) write that the two jarls were Harold Godwinsson's brothers. This is historically untrue - Morkere was the son of Ælfgar, Earl of Mercia, and Waltheof was Earl of Northumbria, and neither of them seems to have been a close relative of Harold. They also omit to say that Tostig had joined the Norwegian army before this battle, while Snorri remembers to mention this after the description of the Ouse River battle (*Hharð* ch. 86). On Waltheof and his alleged sanctity see Finlay (25-26).

<sup>46</sup> All the Norse sources (*Hharð* ch. 87; *Msk* p. 271, ll. 25-31; *Fsk* ch. 65) seem to share a misunderstanding here. Haraldr's fleet must have sailed from Cleveland down the Yorkshire coast, attacking Scarborough on the way, and then sailed up the Humber and the Ouse, which are large navigable rivers – that is the only way that they would have been anywhere near York. Snorri at least seems to recognise this (*Hharð* ch. 84), and he may be right to suggest that the battle took place at Fulford because the Norwegian fleet was moored near there. But Stamford Bridge is about 10 km away to the North East, so in order to fetch the armour, his men would have had to go back towards York – exactly the direction from which Harold Godwinsson's army was coming at them – and it would have taken at least three or four hours to get there and back. It is not believable that

suggestion of returning to their ships in order either to collect troops and weapons and fight or to take cover in the ships themselves, it is implicit that the "*gott ráð ok vitrligt*" will be the plan of the king himself, namely to stay and fight until the rest of the army arrives.<sup>47</sup>

Tostig's last comment on the king's plan is also significantly different in *Msk* and *Fsk* on one side, and *Hharð* on the other. In *Hharð* (ch. 88) Snorri relates that jarl Tostig told the king to decide in this as in other matters, but added that he was unwilling to flee (*lézk ok vera eigi gjarn at flyja*).

By contrast, *Fsk* (ch. 66) reports Tostig's words in direct speech: "*Þér skuluð ráða þessu sem þóru*" ('this is for you to decide this, like other things'), but then adds, switching into indirect speech: "*lézk ok vera eigi gjarnari at flyja en einhver annarra*" ('he said he was no more eager to flee than anyone else).

It is a slight difference, but it may be very significant. If Tostig says that "he is no more eager to flee than anyone else", does this mean that the common opinion is in favour of retreating? In this case Haraldr not only acts in defiance of all the bad omens, the advice of St. Óláfr and Tostig's opinion, but also against the wishes of the people who have followed him.<sup>48</sup>

*Msk* (p. 272, ll. 26-28) reads: "*oc ecki vera ec sva myclo giarnari at flyia en einhver annara. Sem þo varþ ec segia hvat mer syndiz rapligr.*"<sup>49</sup> In accordance

they would leave their armour so far away, so this looks like an excuse for why the Norwegians lost the battle.

<sup>47</sup> In his epitaph for King Haraldr in *Hharð* (ch. 99), Snorri writes that his followers said that when he was in great danger, he always took that decision which all afterwards saw gave the best hope of a fortunate issue.

<sup>48</sup> Indeed in *Hemings þátrr Áslákssonar* (p. 49) it is expressly said that the majority of the army wanted to go back to the ships.

<sup>49</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (268): '(...) and I am no more eager to retreat than anyone else, though I was obliged to say what I thought was most advisable.'

with what it considered to be the "*gott ráð ok vitrligt*" then, *Msk* makes Tostig reaffirm that "he had to say what he thought was most advisable".

Haraldr then decides to fight, and draws up his army.<sup>50</sup> But just as he is riding to inspect the troops his horse falls and throws him off forwards. This incident is reported by all five of the Scandinavian sources considered in this study.<sup>51</sup> But while *Ágrip* and *Theod.* make Haraldr admit that it is a bad omen,<sup>52</sup> in the other three sources he comments that "a fall is a good omen": it seems he needs it to be, to remain consistent with the decisions he has taken so far. He needs to keep on pretending that he has a chance of winning the battle, in order to involve his men as much as he can in his desperate and crazy pursuit of his own way, however disastrous.

Haraldr seems to be conscious of his army's inferiority. The three sources report that after he found out that King Harold's messenger, who had approached the Norwegian army to offer a truce to Tostig, was none other than the king himself, he regrets not having taken advantage of his enemy's proximity by killing him, adding that in this way he would not have lived to relate the deaths of his men.<sup>53</sup> This may also function as a tragic suggestion of how unaware Haraldr is - even if this remark seems to admit that he will lose the battle, or at least suffer heavy casualties, it does not seem to occur to him that he himself will also die, so

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<sup>50</sup> On the military details of Stamford Bridge, see Gelsinger (13-29) and Hughes (30-76).

<sup>51</sup> *Hharð* ch. 90; *Msk* p. 274, ll. 15-16; *Fsk* ch. 68; *Theod.* ch. 28, p. 57, ll. 3-7; *Ágrip* ch. 42. In *Hemings þáttur Áslákssonar* (p. 50) it is St. Óláfr who causes Haraldr to fall. The king remarks: "*hvi skal nú sva Ólafr broðir*". Tostig smiles and Haraldr says that it is Tostig's fault if St. Óláfr has turned away from him.

<sup>52</sup> In ch. 30, p. 59, ll. 12-14 of his work, Theodoricus reaffirms that Haraldr's death was prefigured in his fall from his horse.

<sup>53</sup> "*Of lengi váru vér þessu leydnir. Þeir váru svá komnir fyrir lið vart, at eigi myndi þessi Haraldr kunna segja banaorð várra manna.*" *Hharð* ch.91; *Msk* p. 275, ll. 22-24; *Fsk* ch. 68.

that in fact he will not 'live to relate his men's deaths'. This sentence also looks like a detail hostile to Haraldr that Snorri has omitted to remove, since killing a herald was regarded as disgraceful.<sup>54</sup>

The king's words are also strongly contrasted with Tostig's virtue, because he affirms that he would prefer to be killed by his brother rather than to be his killer.<sup>55</sup> His words, reported by *Hharð*, *Fsk* and *Msk*, sound like a warning to future members of the Norwegian royal dynasty, who will be guilty of horrible crimes and abominations.<sup>56</sup>

*I. s. Sam ver þat hera at ovarliga for þvilicr hofþingi. oc verþa matti þetta sem þer segit. for hann með þvi at hann vildi biþa griþ b. sinom oc mikit valld. vist vera ec þa sanliga kallaðr veri hofþingi ef ec biþa sva elli. at ec vera bana maþr broþor mins. oc betra er at þigia bana af brøþr sinom en veita honom bana. (Msk p. 275, ll. 24-29; p. 276, ll. 1-2)<sup>57</sup>*

After this Haraldr starts playing the role of the hero, and recites his last verses in order to incite his soldiers to fight and to urge them to measure up to his own courage.<sup>58</sup> The first stanza he produces celebrates their courage in giving battle without armour:

*Framm gøngum vér  
i fylkingu  
brynjulausir  
und blár eggjar.*

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Note in the text the use of the compound word *banaorð* or *dauðaorð* "news of (sb's) death" (Degnbol vol. II, col. 3), which seems to suggest the importance attached in Old Norse literature to the narration and description of somebody's death.

<sup>54</sup> See for example *Hlödskviða* in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs* (ch. 13), where the unjust Hlöd is prevented by his grandfather from killing the Gothic messenger Gizurr Grýtingaliði.

<sup>55</sup> *Mskp.* 275; *Fsk* ch. 68; *Hharð* ch.91: "Vil ek heldr, at hann sé minn banamaðr en ek hans."

<sup>56</sup> See below the chapters on Haraldr gilli and Ingi Haraldsson gilla.

<sup>57</sup> *Hharð* ch. 91; *Fsk* ch. 68. Trans. Andersson and Gade (270): 'The jarl replied: "I saw, sire, that this chieftain advanced imprudently, and it may have turned out as you say. But he came to offer his brother a truce and a great fief, and I would surely have been called a wicked chieftain if I had awaited old age with the reputation of being my brother's killer. It is better to suffer death at the hands of your brother than to be responsible for his death."'

<sup>58</sup> These verses are probably not genuinely by Haraldr but, as Tolmie (613) rightly states: "When I speak of Haraldr's reconstructed purpose and desire, I am necessarily speaking of his intention(s) as understood by people after his death; likewise his poetic choices are choices assigned to him in a sort of loop-back to an unknowable, and perhaps non-existent, originary utterance."

*Hjalmar skína.  
Hefkat ek mína.  
Nú liggr sknúð várt  
at skipum niðri. (Hharð v. 155)<sup>59</sup>*

But King Haraldr soon admits that this stanza was poorly composed,<sup>60</sup> probably not only from a poetic point of view, but also in the sense that its content was too negative; he is, after all, still trying to furnish a positive interpretation of the events, as he has done earlier, when he fell from his horse. As Tolmie observes (616), the verse that underlines the fact that their armour lies down by the ships has a bitter taste, and seems to ride roughshod over the opinion of the soldiers, who probably wanted to go back to the ships and get the armour.<sup>61</sup>

He then recites a completely different stanza, in the different and more important measure called *dróttkvaett*, that does not refer to their armour at all:

*Krjúpum vér fyr vápna,  
valteigs, brøkun eigi,  
svá bauð Hildir, at hjaldri,  
haldorð, í bug skjaldar.  
Hótt það mik, þars mættusk,  
menskorð bera forðum,  
hlakkar íss ok hausar,  
hjalmstofn í gný malma. (Hharð v. 156)<sup>62</sup>*

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<sup>59</sup> *Fsk* v. 238, *Msk* v. 87. Trans. Andersson and Gade (271): 'Without byrnies, we advance in battle array beneath blue [sword] edges; helmets shine - I don't have mine [*scil.* Byrnie] - now our armor lies down by the ships.'

<sup>60</sup> *Hharð* ch. 91: "*Þetta er illa kveðit, ok mun verða at gera aðra vísu betri.*"

*Fsk* ch. 68: "*Þetta er illa ort, ok skal gera nú aðra vísu betri.*"

*Msk* p. 276, ll. 18-19: "*Ecki er sia visa ver gor er apr qvoþom ver oc scolo ver gora apra betri.*"

<sup>61</sup> This is of course a fictional situation, invented afterwards to 'explain' the Norwegian defeat, since in geographical fact there were two reasons for retreating from Fulford to Stamford Bridge: to put a river between them and any counter-attacking force, and to control the main North-South Roman road. Either of these strategic reasons would have made it a piece of utter folly to leave the armour in their ships. For a comparison with this excuse, see the ballad *The Battle of Otterburn* (Child no. 161, version C, st. 20, vol. 3, p. 300): 'He belted on his guid braid sword / And to the field he ran, / But he forgot the helmet good / That should have kept his brain.'

<sup>62</sup> *Fsk* v. 239; *Msk* v. 88. Trans. Andersson and Gade (271): "In battle we do not hide from the crash of weapons in the hollow of the shield; thus the loyal Hildir [valkyrie] of the hawk field [arm, woman] commanded. Earlier, the necklace pole [woman] told me to hold the helmet stem [head] high in the clamor of steel [battle] where Hlökk's [valkyrie] ice [sword] and skulls were clashing."

This last "brief exhortation" must be thought of as affecting Haraldr's companions as much as that of Ulysses had inspired his men before they passed the Pillars of Hercules,<sup>63</sup> because despite all the bad omens and the lack of their armour, the Norwegian army starts fighting bravely and heroically in one of the most memorable battles to be fought by Norwegians on foreign soil. This bravery and heroism will not be repeated in the stories dealing with later kings.<sup>64</sup>

Finally the battle starts, and the account of Haraldr's death in *Hharð*, *Fsk* and *Msk* becomes the climax of the tension which has been built up by the contrasts between good and bad fortune, the missed opportunities, the surprise events and the prophecies. The three main sources (*Hharð* ch. 92; *Msk* p. 277-278; *Fsk* ch. 69) tell about Haraldr's death as a memorable event that is able, for a moment, to eclipse all misfortunes, difficulties and political considerations. In the moment when it occurs, the spectacle of death is celebrated beyond its motives and consequences.<sup>65</sup>

Everyone seems attracted by Haraldr's dramatic and sensational fate: he rushes forward ahead of his men, fighting two-handed; his fury is so tremendous that he seems to be cleaving the wind. No one has ever seen such a brave and irresistible advance. And just as no human being is able to compete with the king's

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<sup>63</sup> "Li miei compagni fec'io sì aguti, / con questa orazion picciola, al cammino, / che a pena poscia li avrei ritenuti." Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, *Inferno* 26, 121-123. Trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (online): 'So eager did I render my companions, / With this brief exhortation, for the voyage, / That then I hardly could have held them back.'

<sup>64</sup> Compare the story of Magnús berfœtr's death in Ireland, during the battle against the Irish army, when most of the Norwegians fled despite the words and the courage of the king (see below).

<sup>65</sup> As Ármann Jakobsson has written (*The Individual* 85) "As a moralist, the *Morkinskinna* author cannot approve of his aggressiveness, (...). Nevertheless, it is possible that to the author, King Haraldr was a charming villain, (...), one whom one must disapprove of, yet cannot but be fascinated by."

terrible strength, so death comes to Haraldr in a completely anonymous way, i.e. through a spear, guided by an unknown hand, that pierces his throat.<sup>66</sup>

*Haraldr konungr Sigurðarson var lostinn þru í óstinn. Þat var hans banasár. (Hharð ch. 92)<sup>67</sup>*

*Nv fêr Haralldr konvngur lag framan í ostin sva at þegar com bloðboginn vt imvinn. Þetta var hans banasár. oc því næst fell hann til iarþar. (Msk p. 278, ll. 5-7)<sup>68</sup>*

*Þá var Haraldr konungr skotinn framan í óstina, svá at þegar kom út blóð at munnum. Þetta var hans banasár, ok því næst fell hann til jarðar. (Fsk ch. 69, p. 287)<sup>69</sup>*

Only *Hemings þátrr Áslákssonar* (52, 19-30) specifies that it was Harold Godwinsson who thrust the spear that killed the Norwegian king<sup>70</sup> and reports King Haraldr's last conversation with the poet Þjóðólfr and with Tostig. All the other sources remain silent about this point:

*Haralldr G(vðina) svn skytr þa I ostin a Haralldi konvngi. Setz þa konvngur niðr. hann mællti til Þioðólfs skallz farðv hengat ok setz vnder havfvð mer lengi hefir ek þinv havfpi vpp halldit. T(osti) geck at konvngi ok spvrði hvart hann var saR. konvngur svarar litið iarn var mer sent en þers venti ek at þat hafí eigi til enkis erindis ór afli verið borið. vil ek at þv takir sættir af broðor þinvm en ek man þigia þat af rikin v sem mer var boðit i morgin. T(osti) s(egir) ein kall sklv vit baðir gista i kvell. Konvngur s(egir) þar getr þv þers kals er ek villða allðri gisting at þigia ok síþan salaðiz konungr. (Hemings þátrr Áslákssonar 52, 19-30)<sup>71</sup>*

<sup>66</sup> *Ágrip* and *Theod.* do not specify which was Haraldr's mortal wound.

<sup>67</sup> Trans. Hollander (655): 'King Haraldr Sigurtharson was struck in the throat by an arrow. That was his death wound.'

<sup>68</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (272): 'King Haraldr now received a spear thrust in his throat, and the blood gushed from his mouth. That was his death wound, and he fell to the round.'

<sup>69</sup> Trans. Finlay (229): 'Then King Haraldr was shot in the throat from in front, so that blood poured at once from his mouth. That was his death-blow, and next he fell to the round.'

<sup>70</sup> *Hemings þátrr Áslákssonar* (p. 52) writes that Heming himself had pointed out Haraldr to the English king, but he did not want to kill him personally because he was afraid of St. Óláfr. *Hemings þátrr Áslákssonar* is also the only source which also reports the details of Tostig's death: he is killed by Hemingr with an arrow that hits his eye. Eysteinn is also killed by Hemingr, with an arrow that hits his heart (p. 54).

<sup>71</sup> Trans. Simpson (112-113): 'Harold Godwinsson then shot King Harald through the throat. Then the king sat himself down. He said to the poet Thjodolf: 'Come here, sit down, and hold my head up for me; for a long time I've helped you to hold your head high.' Tosti went up to the king and asked whether he was wounded. The king answered: 'It was a small dart they sent me, but I should think that it wasn't meant to be useless when it was taken from the forge. I want you to come to

The words that St. Óláfr had whispered to Haraldr before his arrival in England come true: not only does he not die a holy death, or the kind of death that could have made him a saint, but the situation, the dynamics and way in which he dies make us think that he can hardly have managed to save his soul.

But disregarding the divine judgement, in the three main sources human judgement seems to be in favour of Haraldr, because even after his death his army does not give itself up to the truce offered by the English king, but starts to fight again with renewed impetus and force. The battle is fought in three stages, with three leaders who take command and die one after the other: Haraldr, Tostig and finally Eysteinn orri (*Hharð* ch. 92-93; *Msk* pp. 279-280; *Fsk* ch. 70-71).

In *Msk* the outcome of the battle seems to be predetermined from the beginning, and this can only be the result of the king's absurd plans. The Norwegian army starts to be destabilised soon after the first attacks by the English (*Msk* p. 277, ll. 2-7), and even if the English are on the point of fleeing after Eysteinn's attack, the battle is lost because of the greater numbers of the enemy:

*En sia orrosta for sem von var. at þeir hófðu meira lvt sem fiolmennari voro. (Msk 280, 3-5)<sup>72</sup>*

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terms with your brother, and I will accept that piece of the kingdom which was offered me this morning.' Tosti said: 'It's the same old man who will give both of us our lodgings tonight.' The king said: 'You mean that old man from whom I never would accept a lodging.' And thereupon the king breathed his last."

Fellows Jensen suggests (*Hemings þátrr Áslákssonar* p. cxxvi) that Tostig's words to Haraldr were meant to recall the words that Odd told Haraldr when they thought that Hemingr was dead. The *Flateyrbók* version of the passage reads: "Oddur suarar eigi mundi þath verit hafa. Ath þit hefðit einn veg farit þo ath þid hefðud bader latiztt. Hueria gisting ættar þv huorvm okrvmm s(eiger) konung. villda ek s(eiger) Oddur fara til þeirar gistingar, sem ek ættla Hemingr buna. En ek ættla. At Kristur mune ei vilia ath fiandinn verdi þier suo feigen ath hann taki vid þier j kuellu" (*Hemings þátrr Áslákssonar* 25, 23-29). In the light of this, Simpson's suggestion (113) that the "kall" to whom Tostig and Haraldr refer is Odin, seems to be very anachronistic unless, in a Christian sense, this is considered a metaphor for the devil.

<sup>72</sup> *Fsk* ch. 71. Trans. Andersson and Gade (273): 'But the battle went as might be expected, and the army with the greater numbers had the upper hand.'

Unlike *Msk*, Snorri's account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge still tries to justify and excuse the king's thoughtless actions. Snorri does not take the ultimate defeat of the Norwegian army for granted, but considers the events that follow one another during Haraldr's last day as incidents that in the end combine to prevent any chance of a successful outcome.

At the beginning of the battle (*Hharð* ch. 92) the English seem not to be able to do anything against the Norwegian shield castle, and it is only when the Norwegians start to attack in their turn and break up their battle array that the English are able to thrust spears and shoot arrows. Nonetheless, the English are again about to take to flight when Haraldr performs his charge, and the Norwegians would have won if Haraldr himself had not been killed so soon. Ironically, however, this seems to imply that Haraldr's charge, magnificent though it was, caused the Norwegian defeat. Even Snorri, therefore, indirectly admits Haraldr's responsibility for the disaster, and even finds a new reason why his irresponsibility was to blame for it.

In Snorri's work Haraldr is the sole and absolute arbiter of the match. He shines so much that he eclipses whoever is near him. Both Tostig and Eysteinn are only instruments of his will, and after his death, Snorri does not bother to give details of when and how they died.

Unlike Snorri, *Msk* writes about Tostig's glorious death (279, 13-15):  
*"Iarlinn bersc vascliga oc fylgþi merkionom, oc aþr en letti fell hann þar með*

*mikilli pryði oc goðom orðz tír*",<sup>73</sup> and does not forget to add that "*Fell þar Eysteinn orri íþesi hrið er síþan var colloþ orrahriþ*" (*Msk* 280, 5-6).<sup>74</sup>

*Fsk*, although without further comment, writes that Tostig and Eysteinn fell (respectively ch. 70 and 71), and *Ágrip* (ch. 42) and *Theod.* (ch. 28, p. 57, 7-9) also mention Tostig's death.

More than the other works then, Snorri's tale focuses on Haraldr, and his death represents the glorious and spectacular conclusion of a life which had been lived heroically, disregarding fate and human contingency. It is no surprise, then, that Snorri even forgets to tell us about the deaths of Tostig and Eysteinn: the action has reached its climax with the tale of Haraldr's fall, and after that his audience has left the stalls.

On the very day and at the very hour in which Haraldr fell, his daughter Mária is said to have died in Orkney. This tradition, which must have had as strong an emotional impact as any of the many other anecdotes surrounding Haraldr's death, was probably very popular, because it is attested in the three main sources and also in *Orkneyinga saga*.<sup>75</sup>

Snorri does not emphasise this event, but seems to regard it as his duty to report it:

(... ) *váru þar þau tíðendi, at Mária, dóttir Haralds konungs Sigurðarsonar, hafði orðit bráðdauð þann sama dag ok á þeiri sǫmu stundu, er Haraldr konungr fell, faðir hennar. (Hharð ch. 98)*<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (273): "The jarl fought valiantly and stayed by the standard, but before the battle ended, he fell with great fame and glory."

<sup>74</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (273): "Eysteinn orri fell in the battle, which came to be known as Orri's Battle."

<sup>75</sup> *Hharð* ch. 98, *Msk* p. 282, *Fsk* ch. 72, *Orkneyinga saga* ch. 34.

<sup>76</sup> Trans. Hollander (660): "And there he learned that Mária, the daughter of King Harald Sigurtharson, had died suddenly the same day and the same hour as did her father, King Harald."

The other three sources also report people's attempt to explain it, writing that it was said that Mária and Haraldr shared the same life: "*Þat mæltu menn, at þau hafi haft eins manns fjör bæði.*" (*Fsk* ch. 72).<sup>77</sup> This explanation was evidently sufficiently clear to contemporary saga readers, but the passage is now quite obscure and difficult to interpret. Only *Msk* provides some interpretative clues, because is the only source that describes Mária: "*hon var oc allra qvæna vitrost oc friþvst syndvm oc vinhollost.*" (*Msk* p. 282, ll. 4-5).<sup>78</sup>

*Msk's* portrait of Mária makes her a positive *alter ego* of her father: her wisdom and loyalty to her friends may counterbalance Haraldr's impulsiveness and recklessness, but most of all, her death may weigh against his faulty death when they reach the Other World together. Moreover, Mária's portrait echoes the numerous descriptions of her important namesake: her peculiar plea for her father's soul reminds us of the medieval faith in the intercession of the Virgin Mary, who was believed to defend sinners at the tribunal of Judgement (*Vovelle, La Mort* 127).<sup>79</sup>

*Msk's* text is also more detailed as regards Haraldr's burial. It reports that one year after King Haraldr's fall Skúli, the son of Tostig, went to England to ask for the king's body, and brought it to Norway. *Hharð* (ch. 99) writes only that Haraldr was interred in St. Mary's church, the church he himself had founded,

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<sup>77</sup> *Msk* 282, 2-4. Trans. Finlay (232): 'People said that the two of them had shared one person's life.'

<sup>78</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (275): "She was the wisest and fairest of women, and most loyal to her friends."

<sup>79</sup> In his *Purgatory* V, which includes those who died by violence but repentant, Dante meets Buonconte di Montefeltro, whose soul is saved only because he pronounced the name of Mary in the moment he was dying: "*Quivi perdei la vista e la parola / nel nome di Maria fini', e quivi / caddi, e rimase la mia carne sola.*" (Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia, Purgatorio*, V, 100-102). Trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (online): 'There my sight lost I, and my utterance / Ceased in the name of Mary, and thereat / I fell, and tenantless my flesh remained.'

while *Ágrip* (ch. 42) and *Msk* state where King Haraldr is buried at the time of writing, i.e. at Elgjusetr:

*(...) jarðaði lík hans í Máriukirkju í Niðarósi -en nú liggr hann á Elgjusetri- þvíat þat þótti fallit at hann fylgði kirkju þeiri er hann hafði látit gera, (...). (Ágrip ch. 42)<sup>80</sup>*

*En nú liggr hann at Elgesætre. því at þat þótti fallit at hann fylgði þeiri kirkio er hann sialfr hafði látit gera. (Msk p. 284, 9-11)<sup>81</sup>*

Elgjusetr, modern Elgeseter near Trondheim, was not in fact founded by Haraldr, but more than a century later by Archbishop Eysteinn, when he had St. Mary's church demolished and rebuilt at Elgeseter.<sup>82</sup> The two sources attribute to Archbishop Eysteinn himself the initiative of transferring the body of Haraldr, and above all specify the motive for this translation:

*En Eystein erkibyscyp let þangat föra hann hreinlifis Monnom vndir hendr. oc aflapi til þar með mikilla eigna. oc akaþi mioc staparins gøþi með þeim eignom er hann sialfr hafði þangat gefit. (Msk 284, 11-15)<sup>83</sup>*

*(...) en Eysteinn erkibyskup lét þangat fara hreinlifismönnum undir hendr, ok aukaði með því þá eign aðra er hann sjálf hafði þangat gefit. (Ágrip 42)<sup>84</sup>*

Even though on the surface the two sources seem more interested in the wealth of the Elgjusetr estate than in Haraldr's soul, they clearly convey another example of the evolution of the idea of Purgatory in medieval Norway: if Haraldr's soul had been considered to be in Hell or in Heaven, it would have not needed any prayer or care from the monks. It was probably believed, therefore,

<sup>80</sup> Trans. Driscoll (59): "He buried Haraldr's body in Mariukirkja in Niðaróss – he now lies at Elgjusetr - because it was thought fitting that he remain with the church that he himself had had built."

<sup>81</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (276): "He now lies buried at Elgisetr because it seemed fitting that he should lie in the church he himself had constructed."

<sup>82</sup> See Pesch (131), Nyberg (416), France (292).

<sup>83</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (276): 'Archbishop Eysteinn had him delivered there to the care of the monks and made great donations. He increased the prosperity of the place greatly with the properties that he himself had donated.'

that Haraldr's soul continued to need attention, and the monastery was considered a better place to do this, since it could ensure a greater number of "special" masses for the dead. The practice of these masses, which developed in Europe in the period between the ninth and the eleventh century and was reorganised at the beginning of the thirteenth, was characterised by personal prayers for a particular soul, and it enabled churches and monasteries to increase their wealth very greatly (cf. Ariès, *L'uomo e la morte* 180-181). As Binski says (32), "Monasteries in effect assumed society's role of caring for the dead", and for this reason they were also able to amass large fortunes.

While *Msk* and *Ágrip* end their account of King Haraldr with assurances about the destiny of his soul, then, Snorri writes (*Hharð* ch. 99) to assure him of his place in history and to celebrate his stormy and heroic life.<sup>85</sup> Significantly Snorri ends his saga by reporting a comparison that Halldórr made between Haraldr and St. Óláfr (ch. 100): the two kings had very similar dispositions, but St. Óláfr was killed in his own land by those who would not accept his just and rightful severity, while Haraldr made war to gain fame and power, and he died in another king's realm. Nonetheless both gained fame and honour.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Trans. Driscoll (59): 'Archbishop Eysteinn had him moved there into the care of the monks and thus added to the other possessions he had himself given them.'

<sup>85</sup> According to Allen (130) "It has been remarked that the heroic legends of the Germanic peoples celebrate defeats and never victories. Even in historical times the two most famous Norwegian kings, Óláfr Tryggvason and St. Óláfr Haraldsson, were appreciated as much for having met their ends in properly spectacular debacles as for any of their other achievements. But a defeat worthy of celebration also implies a resistance heroic and sustained enough to live on as an example to later men."

<sup>86</sup> From the standpoint of this similarity Sverre Bagge examines Snorri's view of the rule of Haraldr and of St. Óláfr in his article "Saga Psychology: the double portrait of St. Óláfr and Haraldr harðráði in *Heimskringla*." *Preprints of the 10th International Saga Conference*, Trondheim 1997, 47-56.

## CHAPTER 4

### MAGNÚS (1066-1069) AND ÓLÁFR KYRRI (1066-1093), SONS OF HARALDR HARÐRÁÐI. HÁKON MAGNÚSSON (1093-1094)

Tók friðsamr til faðor-leifðar  
ok ár-sæll Óláfr Kyrri:  
sá réð gramr grýttri foldo  
sam-fast vetr siau ok tuttogo.

Kom of brátt ændo at ræna  
mikil sótt Magnuss faðor:  
sá var enn æðlingr grafinn  
Kristz at kirkjo í Kaupangi.  
(*Konunga-Tal* stt. 45-46)<sup>1</sup>

The violent and spectacular death of Haraldr harðráði is followed by the natural deaths of his successors, Magnús and Óláfr Haraldsson and afterwards of Magnús's young and promising son, Hákon. All three of them die of disease. Although we are not told the kind of disease that caused the death of the most important of them, Óláfr kyrri, who reigned longest, the sources are very largely in agreement about the deaths of Magnús and his son Hákon.

Magnús Haraldsson's death, which comes first in chronological order, is ascribed to an illness called *reformr* by the three main sources, while *Ágrip* (ch. 43) and *Theod.* (ch. 29, p. 58, l. 3) do not specify the name of the disease or the place of his burial:

*Magnús konungr fekk vanheilendi, reformasótt, ok lá nokkura hrið. Hann andaðisk í Niðarósi ok var þar jarðaðr. (Hharð ch. 101)<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. Guðbrandur Vigfússon (316): 'The peaceful and season-blessed Olaf the Quiet took up his father's estate. He ruled the land seven-and-twenty winters through. Too soon came a mighty sickness to stop the breath of Magnus' father. The king was buried at Christ Church in Cheaping.'

<sup>2</sup> Trans. Hollander (663): 'King Magnús became ill with ergotism and lay sick for some time. He died in Nitharós and was interred there.'

(...) voro þeir báðir konungar vm hriþ aþr M. fecc bana sótt. Oc var hann aþr vanheill nocqvora hriþ. Oc hafði þesskonar mein sem menn kalla reforma. (Msk 282, 27-30)<sup>3</sup>

Váru þeir tveir konungar um hrið, áðr en Mágnus fekk banasótt, ok var hann vanheill nokkura hrið, fyrir því at hann hafði þess kyns sótt, er menn kalla reforma. (Fsk ch. 72)<sup>4</sup>

The word *reformr*, which in Old Norse appears only in these three passages, has been taken by scholars to refer to ergotism, and not the modern meaning of the Icelandic noun *reformur*, which is “ringworm”, a skin disease which could hardly be fatal.<sup>5</sup>

Ergotism is a disease transmitted by eating rye bread infected by the sclerotium of *Claviceps purpurea* (ergot). Historically ergot has been linked to epidemics that caused thousands of fatalities and mass poisonings in the Middle Ages. The initial burning sensation of the illness led to the Latin name *ignis sacer*, ‘holy fire’.<sup>6</sup> As St. Anthony was the patron saint of the malady, ergotism was also called St. Anthony’s fire. The disease developed in two forms: a gangrenous one, which was the most serious, and a convulsive and hallucinatory one. The first form was more widespread in France, Spain and England, while the second was more prevalent in Scandinavia, Germany and Russia (Reichborn-Kjennerud, *Vår gamle trolldomsmedesin* III, 155). The possible symptoms were burning and convulsions, hallucinations, lack of coordination of movement, melancholia, and a temporary or permanent psychosis (Samorini). The wide diffusion of this disease

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<sup>3</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (275): ‘(...), and they ruled together for a time before Magnús fell fatally ill. He was ill for some time before he died and was afflicted with what is called ergotism.’

<sup>4</sup> Trans. Finlay (232): ‘They were both kings for a while until King Magnús became fatally ill, and he was in poor health for some time because he had a kind of illness called *reformr*.’

<sup>5</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (III, 202 n. 1); Reichborn-Kjennerud (*Gamle Sykdomsnavn*, 119).

<sup>6</sup> Torfæus (III, 384) ascribes Magnús Haraldsson’s death to *ignis sacer*.

in the Middle Ages and the symptoms described above, lead us to think that the death of Sigurðr Magnússon might also be ascribed to ergotism.<sup>7</sup>

Besides the recognition of *reformasótt* as a particular disease, for which reference should be made to the specialised literature on the history of medicine cited in my bibliography,<sup>8</sup> in this study it is important to underline that the interest in death does not seem to be directly proportional to the importance of the characters. The case of Magnús Haraldsson is the only one, among those which are dealt with in this study, in which the name of the king's fatal illness is specified. Magnús was not one of the most important eleventh century kings of Norway, and it is hard to say whether this case was meant to recall an epidemic which had occurred in those years, a particular fear that the writers and their contemporaries had, or merely a curiosity about a strange disease (if it was ergotism, it probably would not be very strange or unfamiliar, though it might seem remarkable that a king or kings should have died of such a 'peasant' disease).

As regards Magnús Haraldsson's burial place, although the three sources agree about his disease, only *Hharð* (101) informs us that he was buried in Niðaróss.

The case of Óláfr kyrri Haraldsson is quite different: we do not know the name of the disease that caused his death, but all sources, including *Ágrip* (ch. 45)

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<sup>7</sup> See below pp. 124-26 for King Sigurðr Magnússon's insanity: Theodoricus (33, 9-11) raises the suspicion that it was caused by poisoning. However, since ergot grows only on rye grain, the usual way in which people became infected with it was by eating rye bread, which was mainly consumed by poor people, and one would expect a king to be more likely to eat wheat or barley bread, and thus to be less likely than most people to contract ergotism. On the types of grain that were most commonly grown in medieval Scandinavia, see Postan (647-648) and Myrdal.

<sup>8</sup> For a survey of medieval medicine see Skúli V. Guðjónsson, I. Reichborn-Kjennerud, Herbert Reier, Charlotte Kaiser, Pia Bennike. See also Diana Whaley, "Miracles in the Biskupa sögur: Icelandic variations on an international theme" (1994) where the author makes a list of the

and *Theod.* (ch. 29, p. 58), give the name of the place where he fell ill and died (Haukbær in Ranríki, except *Theod.* that only reports Vík), and his burial place (Kristskirkja in Niðaróss).

*En er hann var austr í Ranríki á Haukbæ at búi sínu, þá tók hann sótt þá, er hann leiddi til bana. (...). Lík Óláfs konungs var flutt norðr til Niðaróss ok jarðat at Kristskirkju, þeiri er han lét gera. (Ólkyrr ch. 8)<sup>9</sup>*

*Olafr konvngr fecc banasott i Víc austr a Haukstoþom. Oc var fluttr norþr i Þrandheim. Oc iarþaþr at Cristz kirkio. (Msk p. 296, ll. 25-27)<sup>10</sup>*

*Óláfr konungr tók banasótt, þár sem heitir Haukbær, ok var lík hans fært norðr til Niðaróss ok jarðat at Kristskirkju. (Fsk ch. 79)<sup>11</sup>*

*(...), þá sýkðisk hann á bæ þeim er heitir Haukbær, austr á Ranríki, þar sem hann tók veizlu, ok andaðisk þar, ok var líkamr hans fluttr norðr í Niðarós ok var jarðaðr í kirkju þeiri er hann hafði látit gera. (Ágrip ch. 45)<sup>12</sup>*

*Hic obit in Wic, sepultus vero fertum in prædicta ecclesia Nidrosiensi, quam ipse construxerat. (Theod. ch. 29)<sup>13</sup>*

As *Ólhelg* (ch. 245) had done previously, *Ágrip*, *Theod* and *Ólkyrr* report that it was Óláfr kyrr himself who had had Kristskirkja built. *Ólkyrr* (ch. 6) specifies that it was built right on the spot where King Óláfr's body had first been buried, with the altar directly placed over where the king's grave had been, and that the shrine was set somewhere near the altar ("sett þar yfir altári").<sup>14</sup>

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miracles in *Biskupa sögur*, which is very helpful in giving an idea of the frequency of various diseases and the major causes of death in medieval Scandinavia.

<sup>9</sup> Trans. Hollander (667): 'But when he was east in the District of Ranríki, on his farm of Haukbær, he was struck down by a sickness which caused his death. (...) King Ólaf's body was brought north to Nitharós and buried in Christ Church, which had been erected by him.'

<sup>10</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (285): 'King Óláfr became mortally ill to the east in Vík at Haukstaðir. His body was moved north to Þrandheimr and buried in Christ Church.'

<sup>11</sup> Trans. Finlay (241): 'King Óláfr became fatally ill at a place called Haukbær, and his body was carried north to Niðaróss and buried at Christ Church.'

<sup>12</sup> Trans. Driscoll (61): '(...), he was taken ill at the farm called Haukbær, eastward in Ranríki, where he was being feasted. He died there and his body was taken north to Niðaróss and there buried in the church he had built.'

<sup>13</sup> Trans. McDougall (47): 'He died in the Vík, but is said to have been buried in the aforementioned church of Niðaróss which he himself had built.' *Theod.* here seems to be the least accurate source in reporting the place where the king fell ill and died.

<sup>14</sup> St. Óláfr's shrine had been described by Snorri in *Mgóð* (ch. 10) as being of the same size and shape as a coffin, with a cover fashioned like a roof and with a portico beneath.

Moreover, *Ólkyrr* (ch. 6) provides further information about the ceremonies performed for the consecration of the church:

*(...). Þar var vigð Kristskirkja. Var þá ok þannug flutt skrin Óláfs konungs ok sett þar yfir altári. Urðu þar þá margar jartegnir. En annat sumar eptir at jafnlengð þess, er kirkjan hafði vigð verit, þá var þar allfjölmennt. (...). En sjálfan messudaginn, þá er skrinitt ok helgir dómar váru út bornir – skrinitt var sett niðr í kirkjugarðinn, svá sem siðvenja var til – þá fekk sá maðr mál sitt, (...). (Ólkyrr ch. 6)<sup>15</sup>*

This practice of setting up relics in public view before the high altar had been already referred to in *Ólhelg* ch. 244 (*Var þá líkami konungs borinn inn í Klemenskirkju og veittur umbúnaður yfir háaltari*),<sup>16</sup> but here Snorri also conveys the custom of the time ('*svá sem siðvenja var til*') of taking the shrine out to be carried about through the streets in procession (*Ólkyrr* ch. 6).<sup>17</sup>

The celebrations of the anniversary of the church's consecration must have been a very important event, because also the law codex *Grágás* (12) stipulates that on such a day:

*"(...). Þar skal hver maður halda kirkjudag sem biskup vill halda láta, og halda svo að helgi sem páskadag, en jafnt fer hann sem messudagar aðrir."<sup>18</sup>*

After Óláfr kyrri's death the throne was claimed by his son Magnús berfœttr and by Hákon, the son of his brother Magnús. According to *Ágrip* (ch. 46), Hákon Magnússon and Magnús Ólafsson shared the kingdom for one year, and they both spent the winter in Niðaróss, in two separate residences.

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<sup>15</sup> Trans.: 'It was consecrated Christ Church. King Óláfr's shrine was removed to it, and was placed before the altar, (...). Then many miracles too place there. The following summer, on the same day of the year as the church was consecrated, there was a great assemblage of people. And on the mass-day itself, when the shrine and the holy relics were taken out - the shrine was set down in the churchyard, as was the custom - a man recovered his speech, (...).'

<sup>16</sup> Trans. Hollander (530): 'Subsequently the body of the king was carried into Saint Clemens Church and set up in public view before the high altar.'

<sup>17</sup> On consecration ceremonies and the ritual for transferring relics see Spatz (347-350).

<sup>18</sup> Trans. Dennis (*Grágás* I, 32): 'Everyone is to celebrate the dedication day at the church the bishop wishes. The dedication day is to be kept as holy as Easter Day and it is observed like other feast days.'

*Msk* (p. 297) writes that Hákon was chosen king by the Þrændir, while Magnús was king in the east of Norway. That Christmas, when they were both in Niðaróss, Hákon forgave the farmers their Christmas contributions (*Jólagjafar*) and land-taxes (*landauragjald*), both in Trondheim and in the Upplands, and improved the conditions of those farmers who acknowledged his title to the throne.<sup>19</sup>

According to Snorri (*Mberf* ch. 1) Magnús was about to be chosen king of all Norway immediately, but when the people of Uppland learned of King Óláfr kyrri's death, they chose Hákon as their king. Together with Þórir, his foster-father, Hákon went to Trondheim, summoned the Eyrabing and was given dominion over half of the land, just as his father had had. Consequently King Hákon was able to make himself well-liked by the Þrændir through favourable amendments of the laws, especially by revoking the land-tax and the Christmas contributions. When he went back to the Upplands, he also introduced these amendments there.

With regard to the winter both kings spent in Niðaróss, Snorri (*Mberf* ch. 2) states clearly that Magnús arrived first and kept seven ships in front of the royal residence. When king Hákon learned about this, he travelled to the town through the Dofra Mountains.

All the sources (*Mberf* ch. 2; *Msk* p. 297, ll. 23-29; *Fsk* ch. 80) agree that Magnús felt dishonoured and wronged by his cousin's policy, because he thought that Hákon had given away a part of his own property. As for Hákon and his foster-father Þórir, it seems that they were worried about the possible reaction of

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<sup>19</sup> Contrary to this, *Fsk* (ch. 80) writes that Hákon had amended the laws before spending the winter in Niðaróss, and it does not mention the *Jólagjafar*.

Magnús, especially because of the seven fully-equipped ships he had (*Mberf* ch. 2; *Msk* 297, ll. 29-32). When, one night in spring, King Magnús set out with his ship and anchored not far from the town, King Hákon therefore suspected a trick, so he had trumpets sounded to collect his forces. When at dawn King Magnús saw all the townsmen gathered, he decided to sail southwards to the Gulapíng district.<sup>20</sup>

Although that land and its revenue were lawfully his as well as his cousin's, Magnús must have thought that he could not perform an act of defiance against someone he considered to be a rightful holder of the throne along with himself, and he let it pass.<sup>21</sup>

But the circumstances of Hákon Magnússon's untimely death seem indirectly to reaffirm the natural claim to the throne that Magnús was not able or did not want to exploit on this occasion.

After King Magnús had left, Hákon thanked the Þrændir for their support and travelled back to the Dofra Mountains, and it was there that he fell sick and died. The sources are again striking in their close agreement about the details of Hákon's death, even over those that seem not to have much importance for the understanding of the event. The king comes down with an illness after having followed a ptarmigan (*rjúpa*) that ran away from him (for a long time, as *Msk* specifies).

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<sup>20</sup> *Mberf* ch. 2; *Msk* 298, ll. 8-10; *Fsk* ch. 80.

<sup>21</sup> When, after Hákon Magnússon's death, the Þrændir, led by Steigar-Þórir and Egill Ásláksson, help Sveinn succeed to the throne, king Magnús delivers this speech to the assembly:

*Hvat megi meiri scomm oc svivirþing gera sinom konvngi þeim er ętborin er til lanz þesa. en þat er þeir hafa gort við mic. Tekit einn man smaborin oc ecki konvngborin til rikis. sva sem þesi maþr er. var þat nockor varkvn meðan Hacon frendi var lifþi at þeir heldi vndir hann riki. oc letom ver þa eptir því svifa. en þetta er osęmanda. (Msk 300, 26-33).*

Trans. Andersson and Gade (287): "What greater shame and dishonor could be inflicted on a king whose birth entitles him to rule than what they have done to me? They have taken a man of no royal birth and poor lineage to rule. That is the sort of man he is. As long as our kinsman Hákon was alive, there was some excuse for their giving him the power to rule, and we let that pass, but this is dishonorable."

*Hákon konungr fór upp til Dofraffalls. En er hann fór yfir fjallit, reið hann um dag eptir rjúpu nökkurri, er fló undan honum. Þá varð hann sjúkr ok fekk banasótt ok andaðisk þar á fjallinu, ok var lík hans norðr flutt ok kom hálfum mánuði síðar til Kaupangs en hann hafði brot farit. (...). Lík Hákonar konungs var niðr sett í Kristskirkju. (Mberf ch. 2)<sup>22</sup>*

*En hann flyttisc þá till fjallz vpp. Oc þarer fra sagt at hann for ein dag lengi eptir einni rivpv er flo vndan honom. Oc i þeiri reiþ fecc hann vanheilyndi. Oc þat sama leiddi hann til bana. oc andaz hann þar a fjallino. oc como þeir aptr til bætarins með licit a háls manapar fresti. (...). Lic hans var iarþat at Cristz kirkio. (Msk p. 298, ll. 22-30)<sup>23</sup>*

*En hann fluttisk þá til fjalls upp ok fór dag einn eptir rjúpu einni ok fekk bráðasótt ok andaðisk þar á fjallinu. Ok kómu aptr á hálsf mánaðar fresti menn hans til Kaupangs með þeim tíðendum, at menn skyldu ganga í móti líki Hákonar konungs, ok svá gekk allr lýðr, (...). En lík hans var niðr sett í Kristskirkju. (Fsk ch. 80)<sup>24</sup>*

*(...), en hann fluttisk þá til fjalls upp ok fór dag einn eptir rjúpu einni er flaug undan hónum er hann reið. Þá varð hann sjúkr ok fekk banasótt ok andaðisk þar á fjallinu, ok kvómu á hálsf mánaðar fresti aftr tíðindin til Kaupangs. Ok menn skyldu ganga í móti líki hans, ok gekk allr lýðr á móti (...). En lík hans var niðr sett í Kristskirkju. (Ágrip ch. 47)<sup>25</sup>*

The ptarmigan, a bird of the genus *Lagopus* and belonging to the grouse family *Tetraonidae*, was probably considered to be a rather important animal at that time. Indeed, it is specifically mentioned in Icelandic law *corpus*: in the *Kristinna Laga Þáttur* section of *Grágás*, it is specified that it is lawful for human beings to eat poultry and ptarmigan: '*Rétt er að eta hænsn og rjúpur.*' (*Grágás*, p. 32).

<sup>22</sup> Trans. Hollander (669): 'King Hákon journeyed up to the Dofra Mountains; and one day, as he rode over the mountains, he followed after a ptarmigan which flew away from him. Then he took deadly sick and expired there on the mountain. His body was brought north and arrived in Kaupang half a month after he had left it. (...). The body of the king Hákon was interred in Christ Church.'

<sup>23</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (286): '(...) he headed into the mountains. It is reported that one day he pursued a ptarmigan for a long time, and it kept flying out of reach. During this ride he became ill, and that illness was fatal. He died there in the mountains. Two weeks later they returned to the town with his body. (...). His body was buried at Christ Church.'

<sup>24</sup> Trans. Finlay (242): 'And then he had himself taken up onto the mountain; and one day he was following a ptarmigan, and he suddenly took sick and died there on the mountain. And after the space of two weeks his men came back to Kaupangr with the news that people were to go and retrieve King Hákon's body, and all the people did so, (...). And his body was laid to rest in Christ Church.'

<sup>25</sup> Trans. Driscoll (63-65): 'He then went onto the mountain. One day he followed a ptarmigan which flew away from him as he rode. And he then fell ill and this was his death-sickness and he died there on the mountain. Word reached Kaupangr a fortnight later. It was requested that the people should go to meet his body and all the townspeople went, (...). His body was buried in Kristskirkja.'

In the *Landabrigðisáttur* section it is also said that a man may lawfully catch, on someone else's land, eagles and ravens, merlins and plovers and curlews and all small birds that do not float on water, except for ptarmigans:

50. Rétt er manni að veiða í annars manns landi örnu og hrafna, smyrta og lær og spóa og alla smáfluga þá er eigi fljóta á vatni, nema rjúpur. (Grágás, p. 349)<sup>26</sup>

A similar veto can be found in *Gulapingslög* (449) where in the chapter devoted to the regulation of elk-hunting, named *Um Elgiaveidi*, we are told that a man has to pay as his sentence decrees if he goes into someone else's forest (*elgskógr*, i.e. a forest with elks) and catches with traps "*þiðra eða orra*", i.e. grouse belonging to the same family of *Tetraonidae*.<sup>27</sup>

In the light of the importance attached to the ptarmigan by the law, and the importance attached to this particular ptarmigan by the sources (which all write emphatically *rjúpu nökkurri* or *rjúpu einni*), the circumstances of the King's death must certainly have a symbolic meaning. This can only function as a judgement on his actions: Hákon is hunting on land which is not to be considered his, or at least not only his. To catch the ptarmigan would be to contravene the law, which the king has a primary duty to uphold and defend. Having deprived his cousin of the revenue which was lawfully his, his obstinate attempt to enforce his status against natural right leads to his death.

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<sup>26</sup> Trans. Dennis (*Grágás* II, 320): 'On someone else's land a man may lawfully catch eagles and ravens, merlins and plovers and curlews and all small birds that do not float on water other than ptarmigan.'

<sup>27</sup> The Latin translation which accompanies the 1817 edition of *Gulapingslög*, identifies the two birds as "*lagopis et urogallis*" (449), and the *Index vocorum et phrasium rariorum* of the same edition confirms "*þidr*" as *lagopus avis* (134) i.e. ptarmigan, and "*orri*" as *urogallus avis* (94) i.e. western capercaillie. But according to Cleasby - Vigfússon (735 and 469), which quotes from the same edition of *Gulapingslög*, these two birds can be identified respectively with *tetrao perdrix* (grey partridge), and *tetrao tetrax* (black grouse), i.e. genus *Tetrao*. In his *Íslensk Orðsifjabók*, Asgeir Blöndal Magnússon identifies "*þiður*" with *tetrao urogallus* (1178) and defines *orri* as "*fugl af hænsnfuglaætt, skyldur rjúpu*" (694) 'a bird of the chicken family, related to the ptarmigan'. Ptarmigans are very similar to grouse of genus *Tetrao*, but they are distinguished by having feathered toes and tarsi (Webster 1455).

This looks like a case where the sources share a common and traditional political view, though it is expressed only symbolically: Hákon's death, fruitlessly chasing a *rjúpa* to which he has no right, is a symbol of God's punishment for his aggression and unjust behaviour. Moreover, Hákon comes from and returns to Dofrafjöll, which seems to have been associated with pre-Christian giants, and he brings his foster-father Þórir with him - see e.g. Bárðr's foster-father and father-in-law, the giant Dofri, in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* (ch. 1 and 6), as a result of whose fostering it is said that Bárðr is said to have been '*tröllum ok líkari at afl ok vexti en mennskum mönnum*', 'more like trolls in strength and height than like human men'. Similarly, *Bárðar saga* (ch. 1), *Flóamanna saga* (ch. 1) and *Orms þáttr Stórolfssonar* (ch. 1) all refer to Haraldr hárfagri (in not very flattering contexts, perhaps) as *Dofrafóstri*. The suggestion may be that there is something pre-Christian and sub-human, or 'giantish', about Hákon's aggressive behaviour, both over the way he claimed the throne and over his remission of taxes for his own political benefit without consulting Magnús - and perhaps, if we read in a veiled allusion to Haraldr hárfagri, also that Hákon is trying to take the kingdom by force rather than entitlement.

Even though the sources agree that Hákon was buried in Kristskirkja (*Mberf* ch. 2; *Msk* 298, ll. 29-30; *Fsk* ch. 80; *Ágrip* ch. 47) together with his virtuous and honoured predecessors, the symbolism of his end probably suggests that they supposed that his soul could not be saved.

## CHAPTER 5

### MAGNÚS BERFÆTTR (1093-1103)

Frá-ek Berfættr bærn at ætti  
Magnús mærg þau-er metorð hæfðo:  
vóro þess þengils synir  
fremdar-flíótz fimm konungar.

Fór mál-sniallr Magnus konungr  
til Írlandz ungr at herja:  
varð ágætr Eysteins faðir  
fleina flaug felldr í 'þeiri'.  
(*Konunga-Tal* stt. 48-49)<sup>1</sup>

After Hákon Magnússon's death the Þrændir, led by Steigar-Þórir and Egill Ásláksson, organized the accession to the throne of Sveinn, a supporter of King Hákon.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, King Magnús had not attacked his cousin Hákon Magnússon, who in the view of the thirteenth-century historians could justly claim a share in the throne by right of birth (*Msk* p. 300, ll. 26-33), but he did fight against and finally defeat the forces of Sveinn, which had been conscripted in the Uppland district (*Mberf* ch. 4). While Sveinn managed to escape, Þórir and Egill were pursued, caught and hanged on Vambarhólm island. As Ström (*On the Sacral Origin* 123-4) testifies, execution by hanging was the death that was thought to be appropriate for traitors, because: "hanging as a

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. Guðbrandur Vigfússon (316): 'Magnus ruled the land ten years, as men tell it up. I know that Bareleg had many glorious children of his blood: five of his sons became kings. King Magnus went to Ireland in his youth to harry. Yea, Eystan's father was stricken down in battle there.'

punishment for both theft and treason is based upon a certainly unbroken customary legal tradition from ancient Germanic times."

Sources agree on the details of the deaths of Þórir and Egill.<sup>2</sup> Before being hanged, Þórir is said to have recited a couplet that, according to Perkins (110-113), can be related to Old Norse rowing chants and children's verses:

*Vorum félagar fjórir  
forðum, einn við stýri.*<sup>3</sup>

*Msk* and *Fsk* specifies that he recited this couplet grinning, when he was approaching death and only two of them remained alive:

*Oc er Þórir ser galgan oc banan opinn fíre ser, en þeir voro .ii. einir eptir, þa mælti Þórir oc glotti við. (Msk p. 304, ll. 2-4)*<sup>4</sup>

*Þá váru reist gálgatré, ok sá Þórir, at allt lið hans vat þá á braut flýit, en hónum myndi bani ætlaðr. Þá mælti Þórir ok glotti við: (...). (Fsk ch. 80)*<sup>5</sup>

*Ágrip* writes that Þórir recited the couplet when the noose had already been placed round his neck:

*"(...), ok kvað þetta áðr hann væri hengðr ok snaran látin á hálsinn."*  
*(Ágrip ch. 48)*<sup>6</sup>

Þórir's witty attitude had been previously emphasized, both by Snorri and in *Msk* and *Fsk*, when they report his supposed comments after he had burned Viðkunnr's farm and ship: "*Meirr á stjórn, Viðkuðr!*",<sup>7</sup> and when he was greeted by Sigurðr ullstrengr before being captured by King Magnús's men: "*Ertu heill,*

<sup>2</sup> *Mberf* ch. 6; *Msk* pp. 303-306; *Fsk* ch. 80; *Ágrip* ch. 48; *Theod.* ch. 31, p. 61, ll. 2-7.

<sup>3</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (290): "Formerly we were four companions, one at the helm." *Mberf* ch. 6; *Msk* p. 304, ll. 5-6; *Fsk* ch. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (290): '(...), and when Þórir saw the gallows and death staring him in the face with only two of them remaining, he said grinning: (...).'

<sup>5</sup> Trans. Finlay (244): 'Then a gallows was raised, and Þórir saw that all his men had now run away, while death must be intended for him. Then Þórir said, and grinned: (...).'

<sup>6</sup> Trans. Driscoll (65): '(...), and before he was hanged and the noose put round his neck he spoke this verse: (...).'

Þórir?" Þórir svarar: "Heill at höndum, en hrúmr at fótum."<sup>8</sup> In accordance with this characterisation, Þórir adopts a sarcastic manner, not only towards his companions but also towards his own fate. This couplet deprives his death of any ceremonial dignity, and even if his last sentence "ill eru ill ráð"<sup>9</sup> seems to show a sad awareness of the results of his own actions,<sup>10</sup> his quick death from a broken neck, brought about by his great stature and weight, does not make his demise any more heroic. But at least Þórir is consistent and courageous in his flippant attitude, taking his own death as lightly as everything else. A Christian might deplore this cynicism, but one cannot help having a certain amount of respect for his consistency in it.

Unlike the death of Þórir, that of Egill assumes a surprising dignity in the sources, considering the treacherous nature of his previous actions. First of all his words to the king's thralls as he is being led to the gallows are not only deeply caustic, but also sound sadly prophetic in the light of what will happen during King Magnús berfættir's last battle:

*"Eigi skuluð þér mik fyrir því hengja, at eigi væri hverr yðrarr makligri at hanga." (Mberf ch. 6)<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> *Mberf* ch. 5; *Msk* 304, 16-17; *Fsk* ch. 80. Trans. Hollander (672): "More to starboard, Víthkun!"

<sup>8</sup> *Mberf* ch. 6; *Msk* p. 303, ll. 17-18; *Fsk* ch. 80. Trans. Hollander (672): "Are you hale, Thórir?" Thórir replied: "Hale in my hands, but halt in my feet."

<sup>9</sup> *Mberf* ch. 6; *Msk* p. 304, l. 28; *Fsk* ch. 80. In *Ágrip* (ch. 48) Þórir utters this sentence before the couplet.

<sup>10</sup> Only Torfæus (*partis tertiae, liber septimus*, ch. II, p. 414) interprets Þórir's last words as a final act of penitence: "*Illā sola pænitentiae nuncia vox ad extremum emissa.*" ('Only that voice that announced repentance was pronounced at the last moment.')

<sup>11</sup> *Msk* p. 305, ll. 1-2; *Fsk* ch. 80. Trans. Andersson and Gade (290): "Your hanging me does not mean that there is a single one of you who does not deserve it more."

Moreover, in *Msk's* account of Egill's execution, we have the portrait of a man who succeeds in overcoming the usual desperate human reactions in the face of death:

*Þa melti Egill. Þat etla ec at nv hyGi menn her gott til at sia fotalætín var idag. Hann var i halfscriptom kyrtili. Þa svaroþo menn honom. Etlar þv eigi at þv monir þvi raþa hversu þer scal bregþa við banaN. Þat mon nv synaz s. Egill hvart ec ma necqvi vm raþa. Oc siþan var virgill dregiN ahals honom. Oc er hann hof vpp. þa ste hann fetinom aþrom aristina oc brasc ecki við oc þar let hann lif sitt. Oc allir hormoþo slican dreng. er hann scylldi sva fara. (Msk 305, 12-21).<sup>12</sup>*

Egill's honourable death is able to conterbalance the negative aspects of his character symbolized by the detail of his wearing a parti-coloured tunic that, as Roscoe (ch. 6, *'Tvískipt klæði'*, pp. 104-116) has shown in her analysis based on the family sagas, is often used as a sign of 'deceitful action and ambiguous words'.

All the sources agree that King Magnús was angry because none of his men had the courage to ask for the life of either Þórir or Egill, and he suggested to people that he would like to have been asked for Egill's life when he said, as Egill hung there: *"Illa koma þér góðir frændr í þörf."* (*Mberf* ch. 6).<sup>13</sup> But this, of course, can denote the kind of thing that kings are inclined to say after the event, when their enemies are safely dead, in order to deflect criticism onto their counsellors.

After this event Magnús was finally sole king of Norway.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (291): 'Then Egill said: "I imagine that people are looking forward to watching me dance on the gallows today." He was dressed in a parti-coloured tunic. The answer he got was: "Don't you think you can control how you will face death?" "You will see how well I can control it," he said. Then a noose was pit around his neck, and when he was raised, he pressed one foot against the other and never moved. And there he died. Everyone grieved that such an excellent man should perish in this way.'

<sup>13</sup> *Msk* 305, 25; *Fsk* ch. 80. Trans. Andersson and Gade (291): "'Your friends were no help to you in your need.'"

<sup>14</sup> According to *Msk* (pp. 306-315), after the fall of Egill and Þórir, King Magnús has to confront Sveinki Steinarsson. *Msk's* long and articulate account of the conflict between the two contenders is

Having succeeded in establishing peace and security in his own country,<sup>15</sup> Magnús was now able to turn his hand to expeditions abroad. His foreign campaign was victorious and unrelenting: he conquered the Orkneys, the Hebrides, Islay and Anglesey, and harried on both sides of the Irish Sea in Ireland and Scotland.<sup>16</sup> Among the king's valiant men in the campaign, Snorri mentions Skopti Ögmundarson, father of Finnr and Ögmundr: all three of them display great bravery and fidelity to their king but, according to *Mberf* (ch. 17-20), they left Norway after becoming involved in a quarrel about an inheritance which the king claimed for himself.

After his exploits in the west, King Magnús proceeded to Gautland, to claim a district which, he asserted, belonged to Norway for historical reasons. In order to keep the territories he had occupied in Sweden, the king ordered a timber fort to be built in Lake Væneren. This fort was eventually destroyed by the troops of Ingi, the Swedish king, and proved to be one of king Magnús' main tactical mistakes.<sup>17</sup>

After the kings of Denmark, Norway and Sweden had negotiated a peace,<sup>18</sup> King Magnús started another campaign in the west and sailed to Ireland, where he died after having reigned over the Norwegian realm for ten years.<sup>19</sup>

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not present in *Mberf* and *Fsk*. This may, as Andersson and Gade suggest (*Morkinskinna* 78), be partly because *Msk*'s author seems to sympathize with those characters who, like Sveinki, try to limit the king's power, but also partly because "the story about the legitimacy of provincial independence was acceptable to the Icelandic audience of *Morkinskinna* but less acceptable to the royal audience in Norway." (Andersson and Gade, *Morkinskinna* 449 n. 9).

<sup>15</sup> *Mberf* ch. 7; *Msk* p. 315; *Ágrip* ch 48.

<sup>16</sup> *Mberf* ch. 8-11; *Msk* pp. 316-321; *Fsk* ch. 81; *Ágrip* ch 50.

<sup>17</sup> One of the commanders of the fort was Finn, son of Skopti Ögmundarson. During the quarrel between his father and the king, Finn reminded the king of his faithfulness when he was stationed in the fort. He also said that it was widely believed that those who were stationed there saved their lives thanks to King Ingi, who had shown greater chieftainly qualities than King Magnús had (*Mberf* ch. 17-20).

<sup>18</sup> *Mberf* ch. 15; *Msk* pp. 328-329; *Fsk* ch. 83; *Ágrip* ch 49.

The sources agree that the Norwegians raided territories and fought many battles against the Irish. They also joined forces with the king of Connacht, Mýrjartak, conquered much land and won the town of Dublin.<sup>20</sup> *Msk* offers a very significant extra detail, writing that, before attacking Dublin, King Magnús addressed his troops to convince them that by conquering the town they would gain honour and riches. Sigurðr Sigurðarson replies to the king, expressing the doubts of the troops about this new enterprise, and comparing the circumstances they are in now to those that led to Haraldr harðráði's death at Stamford Bridge:

*Pá s. Sigurðr Sigurþar s. Hera. allir mvndo þess bvnir at vna yör til sëmðar. en hreddir erom ver vm noccot iþeso landi hvat til sëmþar vill gerasc. er land þetta fiolment en folkit svicallt. oc er oss vgr ahve til verþr geymt. for sva vm frenda yðarn Haralld konvng at fyrst var honom allt vpp gefit iEnglandi þar sem hann com vþ. en þo læc sva at hann letz þar sialfr. Mondi vinom þinom þiccia allrabezt at þv heþir kyr setit iþino riki. sva gott sem þv [att vm at vela. (*Msk* p. 333, ll. 1-20)<sup>21</sup>*

A similar statement is found in *Ágrip*:

*(...) í fyrstu gekk hónum með vildum, sem Haraldi fçðurfeðr hans er hann fell á Englandi. Drógu hann til lifláts ok in sçmu svik, (...). (*Ágrip* ch. 51)<sup>22</sup>*

<sup>19</sup> The historical events regarding King Magnús berfættr were probably very different from those reported in Old Norse sources. On the historical death of Magnús see Rosemary Power "Magnus Barelegs' Expeditions to the West." and "The Death of Magnus Barelegs." Power thinks that in historical fact, Magnus's death was all a mistake, and that he was actually killed by the Ulaid (Ulster) allies of his own ally, King Muirchertach of Dublin (the Mýrjartakr of the synoptic histories), because they mistook his force for marauding Hebrideans. She also thinks that the landscape of boggy fields and drainage ditches described by the synoptic histories is that of the thirteenth century, when the synoptic histories were written, but that they were in fact part of a drainage scheme by the monks of the Cistercian abbey of Inch that was not built until the 1180's. She also points out that Sigurðr Magnússon was married in Dublin to the daughter of Muirchertach (who is called Bjaðmynja in *Mberf* ch. 11).

<sup>20</sup> *Mberf* ch. 23; *Msk* p. 333; *Fsk* ch. 84; *Ágrip* ch. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (310): "Then Sigurðr Sigurðarson said: "Sire, everyone is prepared to promote your honor, but we are somewhat apprehensive about what honor is to be had in this country. It is a populous region and the people are treacherous. We are not certain how well we can guard ourselves against them. Your kinsman King Haraldr had the experience that people in England at first surrendered to him wherever he went, but it ended with his death. Your friends would have deemed it best if you had remained quietly in your realm, considering the advantages that you have.""

<sup>22</sup> Trans. Driscoll (69): ""(...) all went well for him in the beginning, just as it had for his grandfather Haraldr, when he fell in England. And the same treachery drew him to his death, (...).""



The character of King Magnús has already been compared with that of his grandfather Haraldr by Snorri (*Mberf* ch. 7), *Theod.* (ch. 30, p. 59, ll. 11-12) and *Ágrip* (ch. 48), but the events that lead up to their deaths and their attitudes in confronting death also seem to link them in a very close way. Anyway, *Msk*'s rather pacific outlook does not seem to be shared by the other sources: when in the above quoted passage it adds that it would have seemed best to Magnús's friends if he had stayed peacefully in his own realm, *Msk* seems to suggest that he would have done better to imitate his father than his grandfather, and that kings who invade the lands of others rather than seeking to rule well over their own countries may be acting unjustly, and possibly even that in religious terms they deserve the disasters that they bring upon themselves.

Indeed, in Norse sources the circumstances of King Magnús's death are very similar to those of King Haraldr's. On his way back to Norway, King Magnús disembarks in Ulster with most of his men to look for those he had sent to ask King Mýrjartak for provisions. It is the feast-day of St. Bartholomew.<sup>23</sup>

Just like the day on which the battle of Stamford Bridge was fought, the weather is said to have been good and the sun was shining (*Mberf* ch. 24). It is probable that, as in that case, the troops were carrying their weapons but not wearing full armour, only their helmets and shields.<sup>24</sup> They set off inland, crossing some very marshy terrain.

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<sup>23</sup> August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1103. The day before, according to *Msk* (p. 334, l. 1). This feast-day may have seemed grimly appropriate to medieval Christians, since Bartholomew was the patron saint of butchers and his attribute was a butcher's knife (because he was martyred by being flayed alive) - see Attwater (58-9). The suggestion may be that the Norwegians fall on this day, slaughtered like animals.

<sup>24</sup> Only *Ágrip* (ch. 51) explicitly writes that the king and his men had little armour, describing what the king was wearing.

It is Snorri's account that furnishes us with the most detailed visualisation of the events that followed (*Mberf* ch. 24-25). As the troops reach the top of a high hill, they see a great cloud of dust arising from a body of horsemen. Just as in *Hharð* (87), they do not know at first sight whether these men are enemy forces or their own men coming with provisions. The king is advised by Eyvindr ölbogi to be careful and to draw up some plans for their troops to follow. The king orders his men to place themselves in battle array, but when the cloud of dust approaches they recognise their own men. They start to return to their ships, passing slowly over the fens, but are treacherously attacked by an Irish army that emerges from the surrounding woods. According to Theodoricus King Magnús was deceived, just as his grandfather had been in England:

*"(...) eodem modo deceptus, quo et avus ejus Haraldus in Anglia." (Theod. ch. 32, p. 63, ll. 12-13)<sup>25</sup>*

The sources agree that the Norwegians were in danger of being overcome, and that once again, it was Eyvindr who had to press the king to come up with a plan. King Magnús did in fact decide on an effective plan, ordering his men to form a rampart of shields and retreat over the moors, because once they reached firm and even ground the danger would be over. As many Norwegians had fallen while getting over the ditch, the king called Þorgrímr skinnhúfa, a district chieftain from Uppland, and ordered him to cross the ditch with his troops while those who remained on the near side of it provided covering fire. Once they had crossed, they were to shoot at the Irish in order to allow the remaining Norwegians

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<sup>25</sup> Trans. McDougall (51): '(...), and he fell into the same trap as his grandfather Haraldr in England.'

to escape. But as soon as they had crossed the ditch, the Upplendingar put their shields on their backs and ran down to the ships.

In *Mberf* (ch. 25) the treason of the Upplendingar is highlighted and emphasised more than in the other sources, because the king has given them a precise order which is reported by Snorri as Magnús's own direct personal speech to Þorgrímr skinnhúfa:

*"en vér munum verja meðan," segir hann, "svá at yðr skal ekki saka. Farið síðan á hólma þann, er þar verðr, ok skjótið á þá, meðan vér fgrum yfir dikit. Eruð þér bogmenn góðir."* (*Mberf* ch. 25)<sup>26</sup>

But in *Fsk* and *Msk*, where there seems not to be any precise defence plan, we find that the king merely thought that the Upplendingar were to shoot against the Irish while the rest of his forces crossed over:

*Magnús konungr (...) hugði at Upplendingar þeir, <er> fyrstir fóru yfir fenit, skyldu skjóta af bogum sínum, (...).* (*Fsk* ch. 85)<sup>27</sup>

*(...) oc hvghi at Vpplendingar myndi sciota til IraNa er þeir drogvz ifir fenin.* (*Msk* p. 334, 31- 335,1)<sup>28</sup>

This implies a different view of Magnús as military leader: he is no longer seen as a resourceful and capable general who is let down by some of his men, as he is in Snorri, but rather as a disorganised figure who trusts to luck and blames others when things go wrong as a result of his own lack of forethought.

The three major sources all report the sentence that the king is supposed to have shouted to Þorgrímr:

<sup>26</sup> Trans. Hollander (686): "'but meanwhile we shall keep them away," he said, "so that they won't harm you. Then get on the knoll over there and shoot at them while we pass over the ditch-you are good shots.'"

<sup>27</sup> Trans. Finlay (251): 'King Magnús (...) intended that the men of Upplönd, who were the first to cross the bog, should shoot with their bows, (...).'

<sup>28</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (311): 'He thought the men of Upplönd would loose their arrows on the Irish when they crossed the swampy round, (...).'

*Ódregiliga skilsktu við þinn konung. Óvitr var ek, þá er ek gerða þik lenda man, en ek gerða útlaga Sigurð hund. Aldri mundi hann svá fara. (Mberf ch. 25)<sup>29</sup>*

This sentence sounds bitter in Snorri's text, which reports the loss of faithful and brave men such as the sons of Skopti Ögmundarson, who had demonstrated their steadfast loyalty to the king (*Mberf* ch. 17-20). Furthermore, Snorri seems to turn this into the bitter conclusion of a story that begins in *Mberf* ch. 1, when the Upplendingar refuse to accept Magnús as king of all Norway. Their final treason thus becomes the logical conclusion of a well-known sequence of preceding events. Worse still, according to Snorri's account, the unity of the troops collapsed after the flight of the Upplendingar, and the moral responsibility for this also seems to fall on those who fled instead of giving covering fire when it was needed.

Different from this are the accounts in *Msk* and *Fsk*, where the king is presented more like a frantic man than a wise leader. In *Msk* the king's address to his men at the moment when the Irish begin to attack them sounds disdainful of the enemy and above all pompous and unrealistic in its estimate of the bravery of the Norwegians. It also seriously overestimates their devotion to Magnús himself, as the following treason of the Upplendingar demonstrates:

*Bvizz menn nú við s. hann og hycit at því at þer snvizz eigi aflotta fire bræclingom. oc þat er nú dregiligt at syna sic sem þer eroþ goþer drengir. can oc vera at nú megi þat synaz hvat þer vilit veita yþrom konvngi. (Msk p. 334, ll. 11-15)<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> *Msk* p. 335, ll. 4-8; *Fsk* ch. 85. Trans. Hollander (686): "Shamefully you part with your king. A fool I was to make you my steward but outlawed Sigurth the Hound - he would never have behaved so!"

<sup>30</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (311): "Prepare yourself, men, and don't retreat before these breechlings. This is the time to show what brave fellows you are. You may also get the chance to show whether you want to support your king."

Unlike *Mberf*, both *Msk* and *Fsk* introduce a stanza that was supposedly recited by the king on this occasion, but this sounds sardonic and awkward, especially in *Fsk*, where it appears after the Upplendingar have fled and all the others are leaving the king.

*Hvat scolom heimfor qvitta  
 Hvgr er min iDyflini  
 EN til capangs qvena  
 Kom ec eigi austr ihasti'.  
 Vnic þvi at eigi syniar  
 Ingian gamans þinga  
 Orscan veld ec þvi at irscom  
 AN ec betr en mer svana. (Msk v. 162)<sup>31</sup>*

In *Msk* the king recites this stanza before the flight of the Upplendingar. Nonetheless, it seems improper and awkward even in this context, unless it was meant to show the king's awareness of his approaching death and his daring in joking about it.<sup>32</sup>

Both *Msk* and *Fsk* also report that after the flight of the Upplendingar, those who were in the rear rank fled as well. The king's mistaken appraisal of the situation is emphasised when these two sources add that the king believed the defence would be successful because they were succeeding in killing many of the Irish, without considering that many others were still arriving:

*Eptir þetta flýðu allir þeir, er aptarr stóðu. Ok hinir er yfir fenit váru komnir. En konungr sjálf stóð í ǫndverðri fylkingu ok barðisk drengiliga ok hugði æ at hlýða myndi, fyrir þvi at langa hrið hjoggu Norðmenn Íra*

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<sup>31</sup> *Fsk* v. 260. Trans. Andersson and Gade (311): 'Why should we talk of our homeward journey? My heart is in Dublin; for this fall I shall not return to the women in Kaupangr [Nidaros]. I thrive because the girl does not deny me moments of pleasure; youth causes it, for I love the Irish maiden better than myself.'

<sup>32</sup> According to Andersson and Gade (*Morkinskinna* 42) "the relationship between prose and poetry in this part of *Msk* MS is often both redundant and awkward."

*sem bú<fē>, en æ þar <sem> einn var höggvinn <þá> kómu tveir í staðinn af landi ofan, (...). (Fsk ch. 85)<sup>33</sup>*

Even when King Magnús receives a spear-thrust through both legs, he breaks off the spearshaft, says that the wound was trivial and urges his men to fight on:

*(...), ok þá er þynntisk um merkit, fekk konungrinn lag af spjóti í gegnum báða fótleggi. Braut hann spjótskaptit svá, at <hann> tók hendi sinni til niðr á milli fótanna ok þrýsti ok mælti: "Svá brjótum vér alla sperrileggina," ok kallaði þá á lið sitt, bað þá berjask vel ok sagði sik ekki mundu til saka. (Fsk ch. 85)<sup>34</sup>*

As Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson emphasises (*Heimskringla* III: 236 n. 2), the king's act of breaking the spear must have been considered a great show of strength by the sagas' audience, as men used to break a spear that had pierced an animal with their bare hands as a show of strength. More naturalistically, it would also be a display of indifference to pain, since it would be extremely painful to do this when the point of the spear was embedded in one's body. There is a similar detail in *The Battle of Maldon* (ll. 136-7),<sup>35</sup> where Byrhtnoð, the leader of the English forces, breaks the shaft of a spear that has wounded him by hitting it with the rim of his shield. It may be an indication of heroic stoicism, but both Byrhtnoð and Magnús are killed shortly afterwards.

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<sup>33</sup> Trans. Finlay (252): 'After that all who were standing further back fled, as well as those who had got across the bog. But the king himself stood at the front of the army and fought heroically and always believed that it would turn out well, because for a long time the Norwegians cut down the Irish like cattle; but always as soon as one was cut down, two came down from the countryside in his place, (...).' *Msk* p. 335, ll. 9-13.

<sup>34</sup> Trans. Finlay (252): '(...) and when the group around the standard thinned, the king got a thrust from a spear through both his legs. Then he broke the shaft by putting his hand down between his legs and pushing, and he said: "So we break all the spear-legs," and then he called out to his troops, told them to fight well and said he had not come to much harm.' *Msk* p. 335, ll. 14-17.

<sup>35</sup> The date of the composition of this poem is uncertain, but on linguistic evidence Scragg (28) places the poem as we have it in the late tenth or early eleventh century. The battle was fought in 991.

Snorri describes the same action by the king, but omits the sentence in which the king says that his wound is of no consequence and urges his men to fight on (*Mberf* ch. 25). In accordance with what we have already seen, Snorri's omission of some of the material found in *Msk* and *Fsk* means that he can avoid conveying the image of Norwegian troops who had become dispersed and disoriented, as well as the idea that Magnús was a frantic king who displayed poor leadership qualities. The outcome of the battle was sealed, according to Snorri, by the treason of the Upplendingar when they ignored the king's precise and explicit order.

In *Msk* and *Fsk*, by contrast, the recklessness of the king is emphasised still further by the description of his dress and armour, which appears only at this point and makes him an easy target to identify:

*Magnús konungr var auðkenndr; hann hafði hjálm gullroðinn ok skrifat á león af gulli. Sverð hans var kallat Leggbítr; váru á tannhjölt ok gulli vafiðr meðalkaflinn ok var allra sverða bitrast. Hann hafði dregit silkitreyju ermalausá rauða yfir skyrtu, ok var þat mál allra manna, at eigi hefði sét vígligra mann við jafnmörgum vápnum eða vaskligra eða tíguligra. (Fsk ch. 85)<sup>36</sup>*

In the description of the king's dress and armour there may be some implication of the Magnús's excessive pride (and lack of practical common sense) inherent in it. It may be worth noticing, too, that there is a pre-figuring of this detail in the fact that Harold Godwinsson's adherents recognise Haraldr harðráði by his blue kirtle and beautiful helmet when he falls from his horse (*Hharð* ch. 90), whereas Harold Godwinsson himself, disguised as the herald, is recognised by no

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<sup>36</sup> Trans. Finlay (252): 'King Magnús was easily recognised: he wore a gilded helmet with a lion depicted on it in gold. His sword was called Leggbítr (Legbiter); its hand-guards, cross-bar and pommel were of walrus ivory with gold wound around the haft, and it was the sharpest of all

one except his brother. There is an even closer parallel in the story of the fall of Sigurðr Haraldsson (*Hsona* ch. 28, see below p. 172), where Sigurðr cannot get a hearing because he is instantly recognisable by his gold-adorned shield. In these synoptic histories there seems to be a downward spiral in the way that such arrogant 'action-men' are seen - Magnús is less glorious than Haraldr, and Sigurðr not even as glorious as Magnús. Maybe this reflects the common medieval pattern of thought that sees a continual decline in the splendour of the world.

In contrast with this, Snorri has described Magnús berfættr's dress and armour before the Norwegians meet the Irish army (*Mberf* ch. 24), and he adds that Magnús was not the only one wearing a red silk surcoat with a lion sewn on the front and back in yellow silk, since Eyvindr ölbogi was also wearing a red surcoat like that of the king. Snorri seems to want to present a more glorious picture of Magnús, but it is odd that he mentions the dress of Eyvindr as well. It is possible that Eyvindr is the standard bearer and thus makes it even easier for the enemy to see where Magnús is by his conspicuous dress. More usually in stories of this kind, however, the retainer is mistaken for his king and killed as a result - cf. e.g. Shakespeare's *Richard III* (Act V, scene 4, 11-12), where Richard says of his enemy Richmond: *'I think there be six Richmonds in the field: / Five have I slain today instead of him.'*

Soon after, this easily-identifiable king receives his death wound:

*Magnús konungur var höggvinn á hálsinn með spörðu, ok var þat hans banasár. Þá flýðu þeir, er eptir váru. (Mberf ch. 25)<sup>37</sup>*

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swords. He had pulled on a red sleeveless silk coat over his tunic, and everyone said that a more warlike man with so many weapons, or more manly or noble-looking, had never been seen.'

<sup>37</sup> Trans. Hollander (686): 'King Magnús received a blow with a battle-axe on his neck, and that was his death-wound. Then those fled who were still left.'

*Oc litlo síðar fec Magnús konungr hogg af sporðu irscri. oc com ahalsin við herþarnar. oc var þat hans banasar. oc fell konungr þa. (Msk p. 335, ll. 25-28)<sup>38</sup>*

*Þá fekk Magnús konungr hogg af spörðu irskri á háls við herðarnar. Var þat hans banasár, ok fell Magnús konungr þá. (Fsk ch. 85)<sup>39</sup>*

In accordance with the image of the king he wants to convey to his audience, Snorri makes a decisive omission while describing King Magnús's death-blow: the blow is not delivered from behind, as in *Msk* and *Fsk* ('á háls við herðarnar'), but, rather vaguely, somewhere on the neck. In this way, Snorri saves the king from the final dishonour of being treacherously killed, and is able to number his death among those that are seen as manly and proper.

Snorri ends his account by telling how Víðkunnr Jóansson carried the king's sword and standard to the ships, and listing the names of those who were the last to take flight. To honour all the Norwegians who had fought bravely, and probably to suggest that the battle could have been won if all the troops had obeyed Magnús's orders, he adds that there were many more casualties among the Irish than among the Norwegians: '*Mart fell Norðmanna, en þó miklu fleira af Írum.*' (*Mberf* ch. 25).<sup>40</sup>

It is only in the following chapter (*Mberf* ch. 26) that Snorri writes that it was Víðkunnr Jóansson who killed the man who had given the king his fatal wound. But unlike *Fsk* (ch. 85) and *Msk* (p. 336, ll. 5-8), Snorri does not say that Víðkunnr cut him in half, demonstrating as much strength and bravery as the king.

<sup>38</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (312): 'A little later King Magnús received a blow from the tip of an Irish ax. It struck him on the neck by the shoulder, and it was his deathblow. The king then fell.'

<sup>39</sup> Trans. Finlay (252): 'Then Magnús suffered a blow on the neck between the shoulders from an Irish axe. That was his death-blow, and then King Magnús fell.'

<sup>40</sup> Trans. Hollander (686): 'Many Norwegians fell, yet many more Irishmen.'

Perhaps this may also be because it would not have seemed believable, but too much like that kind of exaggeration one finds in *fornaldarsögur*.

Snorri's Magnús is the untamed hero who mocks death, one who, like Haraldr harðráði, keeps his resolve against all the odds. At the end of *Magnúss saga berfætts*, Snorri quotes the words with which Magnús is said to have answered some friends who told him that he often behaved without due caution, and they embody his whole character and attitude: '*Til frægðar skal konung hafa, en ekki til langlífis.*' (*Mberf* ch. 26)<sup>41</sup>

Unlike Snorri, but in keeping with its consistent view of Magnús, the end of the account of him in *Msk* conveys a completely different image of the king. Lying on the battlefield and conscious of his approaching death, he turns his mind to his son and his friends:

*Oc nu er konungr fan at hann var sár til vlifis. þa bað hann Viðcun hialpa ser með flotta. oc er mest van. s. hann. at her verþi nu var scilnaðr. oc hefir þv vel mer fylgt oc drengiliga. oc ber q. mina Sigurþi kvnngi oc ollom vinom minom. (Msk p. 336, ll. 10-15)<sup>42</sup>*

In *Msk*'s account Magnús finally discovers that, despite his heroic exploits and the fame they bring, he must face death alone. He also discovers death's deepest pain: the sorrow of leaving his nearest and dearest. But even in this view of a tragically rash, inadequate and unjust king, there is one final note of respect: Magnús's dying greeting to King Sigurðr looks like a statesmanlike attempt to make sure that he will be succeeded by his son Sigurðr by implicitly bequeathing the kingdom to him.

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<sup>41</sup> Trans. Hollander (687): "For glorious deeds one should have a king, not for a long life."

<sup>42</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (312): "When the king realized that he was mortally wounded, he asked Viðkunnr to make good his escape. "I now expect," he said, "that this will be our parting, but you have stood by me bravely. Bring my greetings to King Sigurðr and all my friends."

As for Sigurðr, the only one of his sons who went to Ireland with him, *Msk* reports that he asked for the details of his father's death (p. 336, ll. 29-30). He returned to Norway and left his Irish fiancée/wife behind,<sup>43</sup> because:

*qveþr ser allt leitt þat er com til hofþingia vestr þar beþi iScotlandi oc sva Irlandi. sva mikít sem hann hafþi þar latip. (Msk p. 337, ll. 5-8)<sup>44</sup>*

This sentence gives Sigurðr's emotional reaction to his father's death, and reads like a rejection of all his father's worldly ambitions in the west. It is possible that it also reflects the moral attitudes of the *Msk*'s author himself: Magnús had died because of worldly hubris, teaching his sons that the proper course for a king of Norway is either to stay at home and rule peacefully over his own kingdom, or (as Sigurðr will do) to devote one's military energies to fighting against the heathen in the Holy Land. The first of these seems to be seen by the writer of *Msk* as superior to the second (see below Sigurðr and Eysteinn's *mannjafnaðr*, p. 119).

None of the Old Norse sources reported where the body of king Magnús berfættr was buried, but we are told by *Chronica Regvm Mannicæ et Insularvm* that he was buried at St. Patrick's Church in Down, i.e. modern Downpatrick, Northern Ireland (Munch 6-7, notes on pp. 70-73). It is likely that his soul was considered to be condemned to hellfire (see below, p. 117).

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<sup>43</sup> Theodoricus and *Ágrip* ignore the question of Sigurðr's Irish wife. *Msk* (p. 323, ll. 2-6) and *Fsk* (ch. 85, p. 315) share the mistaken belief that he had been betrothed to the daughter of the king of the Scots (whom *Msk* wrongly calls Malcolm - actually, Malcolm III had been killed in 1092, and was succeeded by his brother Donald Ban (1094-7) and then his son Edgar, who was still king of Scots when Magnús was killed in Ulster - see A.L. Poole (267-268). However, they both add that Sigurðr returned to Norway and left this woman behind, and Snorri echoes this (*Msona* ch. 1), though he more accurately says that the girl was the daughter of the Irish king (i.e. Muirchertach, see above note 19).

<sup>44</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (313): 'he loathed everything that had to do with western chieftains, both in Scotland and Ireland, considering how much he had lost there.'

## CHAPTER 6

### ÓLÁFR (1103-1115), EYSTEINN (1103-1122) AND SIGURÐR JÓRSALAFARI (1103-1130), SONS OF MAGNÚS BERFÆTTR.

Þat er þá sagt, at saman réði  
þjóð-konungar þrír fyrir landi:  
þat hefi-ek heyrnt at hafi varla  
fremri bréðr á fold komit.

Varð Óláfr ungr inn góði  
lof-sæll fyrstr líf at missa:  
móetto þess Magnúss sonar  
skamma stund skatnar nióta.

Gerði flest þat er frama gegndi  
innan-landz Eysteinn konungr:  
unz hiart-verkr hilmi fréknan  
brigða brátt til bana leiddi.

Þeir ero bréðr báðir lagðir  
norðr í grund á Níðar-bakka:  
þar stendr hátt í hæfuð-kirkjo  
Óláfs skrin yfir altari.

Enn Sigurðr sýno lífði  
þeirra lengst þriggja bréðra:  
hinn er út til Íórsala  
frægsta fær fór or landi.

Réðr ágætr ok ellifo  
sextán vetr Sigurðr fyr ríki:  
áðr mann-skéð Móra dróttins  
bana-sótt brygði lífi.

Þess er austr í Oslo bóe  
lofðungs lík lagit í kisto:  
nú gróer iæroð yfir iæfurs beinom  
at Hallvarðz hárrí kirkjo.

(*Konunga-Tal* stt. 50-56)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. Guðbrandur Vigfússon (II, 316-317): 'It is told that three fellow-kings ruled the land together. I have heard that three nobler brothers never walked the earth. First of them, Olaf the Good lost his life in his youth; the people had but a short while to profit by the rule of Magnús son. Eystan did all that was good within the land [at home], till in a short while spasm of the heart brought about his death. Both these brothers are laid in the ground north by the banks of Nith, where Olaf's shrine stands high above the altar in the cathedral church. But Sigurd lived far the longest of the three brothers, -he who made the very famous journey out of the country away to Jerusalem. Now Sigurd ruled the realm sixteen-years-and-eleven, till a murderous mortal disease [mania] cut off his life. This king's body is laid in a coffin east in Oslo-by [Christiania]; the grass is growing over his bones by the lofty church of St. Hallward.'

Óláfr, Eysteinn and Sigurðr, the sons of Magnús berfœttr, are the last kings in *Heimskringla* to die from disease.<sup>2</sup> Before them, only five other kings had died natural deaths, namely Haraldr hárfagri (the father of the country, ca. 945), Magnús góði (1047), Magnús Haraldsson (1069), Óláfr kyrri (1093) and Hákon Magnússon (1094). All these kings shared the characteristic of having brought peace and wealth to their fatherland, like those of their ancestors in *Ynglinga saga* who shared the same fate.<sup>3</sup> Actually *Heimskringla* (*Msona* ch. 33) emphasises this characteristic when Snorri writes that during King Sigurðr Magnússon's reign there was both *ár ok friðr*, i.e. good harvests and peace. As had happened in the mythical past, the peace and harmony that the king succeeded in maintaining was believed to have a positive effect on nature, and a death from disease was a manifestation of response to a natural order as well as, in more practical terms, a symptom of the absence of war.

From the point of view of the history of death and of human anxiety about the afterlife, *Msk*'s version is undoubtedly the most interesting of the sources about the Magnússonar. Like Snorri's *Msona* (ch. 1-14), *Msk* devotes the first part of its account to Sigurðr's campaigns in the Mediterranean (pp. 337-352) and to the description of King Eysteinn's accomplishments in Norway (pp. 352-353). In a section which shows considerable originality in comparison with the other sources

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<sup>2</sup> Magnús Haraldsson gilla was also to die a natural death, but although *Hsona* (ch. 14) writes that he was also chosen king and had his share of the land, he died young. Snorri introduces a stanza by Einar Skúlason, intended as praise of the Haraldssonar, where Magnús is said to bring peace to men: "*Semr Magnús frið bragna.*" (see below pp. 162-3).

<sup>3</sup> The kings who die natural deaths in *Ynglingasaga* are Óðinn (ch. 9), Njörðr (ch. 9), Freyr (ch. 10), Dómarr (ch. 16) and Dyggvi (ch. 17). Njörðr, Frey and Dómarr are said to have brought peace and good harvests to their country. See, for example, the reign of King Dómar (*Yngl* ch. 16), during whose reign "*var þá góð árferð ok friðr*" ('good seasons and peace prevailed in his days.'). On sacral kingship and the discussion about its diffusion among Germanic people or its Medieval

it then adds *Ívars þáttur Ingimundarson* (pp. 354-356) and a brief survey on the Kings' genealogies (356-357). Most importantly, *Msk* also adds the tale of a dream experienced by King Sigurðr that functions as a key to the interpretation of the events that follow.

*Msk* writes that King Sigurðr became very depressed, so much so that it was not possible to get him to take any decision. His friends and advisers were very worried, and asked King Eysteinn to discover the cause of this depression (pp. 357-358). King Sigurðr confided to his brother that he was depressed because of a dream he had had. After he has told the dream to King Eysteinn he asks him to interpret it:

*Þat dreympi mic at mer þotti sem ver brøþr .iii. setim allir aeinom stoli fire Cristz kirkio norþr í capangi. en mer syndiz ganga en helgi Olafr konvngr [frendi v .. vt or kirkionni oc var ikonvngs scrvþi með dyrligri asiano oc bliþri. Hann gecc at Olafi konvngi brøþr ockrom. oc toc ihond honom oc melti bliþliga. far með mer frendi s. hann. Hann reis vpp oc gecc með honom ikirkio oc fal syn fyrst með oss. Noccoro siþar com en helgi konvngr vt oc gecc at þer broþir oc melti við þic at þv scylldir með honom fara. en eigi var hann þa með iafnmikilli bliþo sem fyr. gengv þit siþan ikirkiona. en þa venta ec at hann mondi mer imoti coma. en þat varþ ecki. oc þa slo ifir mic hrezlo mikilli oc vanmegni oc oþvera þeim oc feð er siþan hefir noccof kent. oc vaknaþa ec iþvi. (*Msk* p. 358, ll. 17-32).<sup>4</sup>*

King Eysteinn gives a very perceptive interpretation, explaining that, according to the dream, their brother Óláfr will be the first of them to die, and Saint Óláfr will intercede for him with God. Then Eysteinn himself will die,

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origin see McTurk (*Sacral Kingship*) and (*Scandinavian Sacral Kingship*); Lönnroth (*Dómaldi's death*); Martin; Baetke; Gunnes.

<sup>4</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (329-330): "I dreamed that we three brothers were sitting on a bench in front of Christ Church in Kaupangr (Niðaróss), and our kinsman Saint Óláfr went out of the church in royal robes and with a kind and glorious countenance. He went up to our brother King Óláfr and took his hand and said gently: 'Come with me, kinsman.' He rose up and entered the church with him and disappeared from our view. A little later Saint Óláfr came out and approached you, brother, and said that you should go with him, but he was not as gentle as before. You then went into the church, and I expected that he would come to me, but it did not happen. Then I was overcome by great fear and weakness, and by the illness and melancholy that I have since suffered from. At that moment I awoke."

although in his case St. Óláfr will not intercede with God so wholeheartedly as for his brother Óláfr, because Eysteinn will have committed many sins and broken many commandments. As regards Sigurðr, King Eysteinn says that his dream may prefigure some bad illness for him, and that he will live longest of the three.

In the light of the events that take place afterwards, it seems that the author of *Msk* makes Eysteinn's interpretation less negative towards Sigurðr than it should be. Through his interpretation, which completely satisfies his brother, Eysteinn plays down the dream's function as a warning to the dreamer.<sup>5</sup> At the same time *Msk* allows us to understand, without writing it explicitly, what the destiny of the three kings in the afterlife will be. Since St. Óláfr clearly represents religious approval, the dream shows most approval for King Óláfr (the virgin king, destined for Heaven), some approval for King Eysteinn (the builder, whose soul can still be saved),<sup>6</sup> but none for King Sigurðr, who will die after having been interdicted by the Church. Even St. Óláfr will not be able to do anything to save his soul from Hell. This is also interesting in view of the common belief that crusaders who had made proper confession of their sins would go straight to heaven if they died fighting for Christ. In this case, the author of *Msk* may have thought that Sigurðr's relatively long life was actually a curse to him, and that it would have been better if he had died in the Holy Land.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Lönnroth (*Dreams in the Sagas* 455-456) "One obvious function of saga dreams is to anticipate future events, for a dream in a saga, usually reported by the dreamer to a confidant, is always a concealed warning to the dreamer, a warning that the proper confidant will be able to interpret correctly: the meaning of the dream is always that this or that –usually something horrible- is going to happen to the dreamer, his kinsmen, or the neighbourhood where he lives."

*Msk*'s interest in its characters' afterlife is also emphasised in the events that take place after the tale of King Sigurðr's dream. In the following pages (359-364), *Msk* reports the episode of the conflict between the chieftain Ingimarr and an Icelander named Ásu-Þórðr (*Scripti Eysteins konvngs oc Ingimas vm Aso þorb*). The Icelander had accused one of Ingimarr's men of theft, and had succeeded in having him sentenced to death, thanks to King Eysteinn's intervention. In order to prove the justice of the sentence, the king declares that the thief will suffer hellfire in the other world. Ingimarr replies bitterly, commenting that in his opinion King Eysteinn's father, Magnús berfœttr, is the one most likely to suffer hellfire:

*Þa melti konvngr. Hvat etlar þv Ingimar hvat þiofrinn mon hafa iþrom heimi. Gott s. Ingimarr. Nei s. konvngr beint helviti. Ingimarr s. Eigi mon þat. En mislagþar ro þer hendr. dregr fram lvta mærlandans. en þorir eigi at hefna foþor þins er drepin var a Irlandi sem hvndr a beinom. oc hann hyg ec helldr hafa mono helviti. sprettr vpp síþan oc snyr þegar til scips sins oc for astr iVic. (Msk p. 364, ll. 9-17)<sup>7</sup>*

*Msk* reports that the king took no notice of Ingimarr's foolish words, because he let his goodness and intelligence prevail, as always was the case (p. 364, ll. 19-22).

Actually, it seems that *Msk* is here using another stratagem to express its author's opinion about the afterlife of his characters without having to write it explicitly, as in the preceding case of King Sigurðr. King Eysteinn, as Ingimarr maintained, wasted his time on supporting Ásu-Þórðr, but he abandoned the

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<sup>6</sup> Theodoricus also emphasizes Eysteinn's building activity. He even compares the building of the port of Agðanes by King Eysteinn to the construction of *Brundusium* (modern Brindisi) by Augustus (*Theod.* 32, p. 64, ll. 15-20).

<sup>7</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (333): 'The king asked: "What do you think will be the thief's lot in the other world, Ingimarr?" "A good lot," said Ingimarr. "No," said the king, "nothing less than hellfire." Ingimarr replied: "That will not come to pass, but your energy is misspent in favoring this suet-eater [Ásu-Þórðr] though you dare not avenge your father, who was killed in Ireland like a dog gnawing a bone. I think he is the most likely to suffer hellfire." Then he jumped up, went to his ship, and sailed east to Vík, (...).'

defence of his father's memory: the king's silence may suggest that he, too, thinks that his father's soul may have been destined for Hell.

As King Sigurðr's dream predicts in *Msk's* text, King Óláfr Magnússon is the first of the three brothers to die. The sources testify that he was only seventeen years old and that he was buried at Kristskirkja in Niðaróss :

*Óláfr konungr tók sótt þá, er hann leiddi til bana, ok er hann jarðaðr at Kristskirkju í Niðarósi, ok var hann it mesta harmaðr. (...). Óláfr konungr var sjautján vetra, er hann andaðisk, en þat var ellifsta kalendas Jánúaríi [22 December]. (Msona ch. 18)<sup>8</sup>*

*A þrettanda ári rikis þeira bræðra toc sott O. Konungr Magnvs son oc andapiz. oc er hann grafín at Cristz Kirkio norðr ikapangi. oc var hann alvisell maþr. (Msk p. 364, ll. 26-28)<sup>9</sup>*

*Á þrettánda ári rikis þeira bræðra, Sigurðar konungs ok Eysteins konungs, tók sótt Óláfr konungr, bróðir þeira, ok andaðisk. Var lík hans jarðat í Niðarósi at Kristskirkju, (...). (Fsk ch. 93)<sup>10</sup>*

*Var Óláfs þó litla hrið við freistat, því at hann lifði eigi lengr en tólf vetr eptir fráfall fœður síns, andaðisk í Kaupangi seyrtján vetra gamall ok var jarðaðr í Kristskirkju, ok hœrmuðu allir menn hans fráfall. (Ágrip ch. 52)<sup>11</sup>*

*Olavus tertio anno post patris obitum immatura morte præventus ex hac luce subtractus est planxitque eum omnis Norwagia eo, quod pro morum*

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<sup>8</sup> Trans. Hollander (700-701): 'King Ólaf was attacked by a disease which caused his death. He is buried by Christ Church in Nitharós and was much lamented. (...) Ólaf was seventeen when he died, which was on the twenty-second of December.'

<sup>9</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (334): 'In the thirteenth year of their joint rule King Óláfr Magnússon became ill and died. He is buried at Christ Church north in Kaupangr (Niðaróss). He was a very popular man.'

<sup>10</sup> Trans. Finlay (257): 'In the thirteenth year of the reign of the brothers King Sigurðr and King Eysteinn, their brother King Óláfr fell ill and died. His body was buried at Christ Church in Niðaróss, (...).'

<sup>11</sup> Trans. Driscoll (71): 'Trial was made of Óláfr only a short time, however, for he lived but twelve winters after his father's death. He died in Kaupangr at the age of seventeen and was buried in Kristskirkja. His death was mourned by all.'

*Ágrip* shows a trace here of the idea that it may be best to die young because one is in that way less likely to fall into sin, and this is rather like the attitude implied in *Msk's* story about Sigurðr's dream.

*elegantia et suavitate eloquii cunctis gratus extiterat.* (Theod. 32, p. 64, ll. 3-6)<sup>12</sup>

After King Óláfr Magnússon's death, *Msk* continues to add original material in comparison with the other sources, namely *Þinga saga Milli S. konvngs oc Eysteins* (pp. 365-382), which reports a quarrel that took place while King Óláfr was still alive. King Sigurðr has taken Sigríðr as his mistress, and has sent her husband to Ireland. Sigríðr is the sister of Sigurðr Hranason, Magnús berfœttr's sister's husband: the quarrel between the king and Sigurðr Hranason then becomes a legal battle between the two kings.<sup>13</sup>

In *Þinga saga* King Eysteinn's moral and intellectual superiority is made clear, as it is again in the following episode, in which the royal brothers compare their achievements. Both *Msk* (pp. 382-385) and *Msona* (ch. 21) report the episode of the so-called *mannjafnaðr*, where King Eysteinn, in accordance with Nordic tradition, invites his brother during a drinking session to a contest in which they will match their achievements against each other.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Trans. McDougall (51): 'Óláfr, cut off by premature death, was removed from the light of this world in the third year after the death of his father. And all Norway mourned him, because he had been well liked by all on account of his gracious manners and agreeable speech.' According to the translator (p. 112 note 312), the Latin text writes "*tertio anno*" but probably means "*tertio decimo anno*".

<sup>13</sup> In *Msona* there is no trace of this important quarrel between King Sigurðr and King Eysteinn, but there is another episode that must have clouded the relationship between them. In *Msona* ch. 19 Snorri writes about the intimate friendship that grew up between King Eysteinn and Borghildr, daughter of Óláfr í Dali, and how she had to undergo an ordeal to prove that this was a chaste relationship. When King Sigurðr heard that Borghildr's innocence had been established, he rushed to her and made her his concubine. Borghildr later gave birth to the king-to-be Magnús blindi (see also *Msk* p. 357, ll. 13-17). Snorri's story is not very flattering to Sigurðr, since it makes him deprive a woman of the sexual innocence that she has just gone to great lengths to prove - but it is a good deal less damaging than the one in *Msk*, which virtually accuses him of incest.

As no source includes both these stories, and both of them involve Sigurðr taking a relative of a close retainer as his mistress in a way that offends Eysteinn, it is possible that they are alternative versions of the same thing or, at least, that both serve the same traditional purpose of showing Sigurðr as lustful and selfish in contrast to the innocence of Eysteinn.

<sup>14</sup> On *mannjafnaðr* and the various kinds of flying in Old Norse Prose see Bax and Ruggerini.

*Þá mælti Eysteinn konungr: "Sá ǫlsiðr hefir opt verit, at menn taka sér jafnaðarmenn. Vil ek hér svá vera láta." Þá þagði Sigurðr konungr. "Sé ek," segir Eysteinn konungr, "at ek verð hefja þessa teiti. Mun ek taka þik, bróðir, til jafnaðarmanns mér. (...)". (Msona ch. 21)<sup>15</sup>*

According to Snorri, the *mannjafnaðr* is started by Eysteinn, and this may suggest that he is rather envious of Sigurðr's military achievements, and not as concerned as he should be to keep the peace between them. In *Msk* (p. 382), by contrast, it begins when Sigurðr has one of his silent moods and no one can please him. Eysteinn asks him what is the matter and receives what he feels is a disdainful reply, after which he asks - reasonably enough - if they aren't equal as sons of King Magnús. That is the remark that leads to the comparisons, which are not a game at all, but a gradually intensifying quarrel of which the basic cause is Sigurðr's ill-temper.

Snorri does not seem to imply any clear verdict as to whether the military crusader is superior to the legal negotiator or vice versa, but in *Msk*'s text there is an obvious preference for King Eysteinn. Through the use of irony, *Msk* seems in this episode to express a general manifesto about the role of a king: it is better for him to do useful and profitable things for the nation rather than fighting abroad for wealth and fame:

*Nv er þetta smatt at telia. en eigi veit ec vist at lanz bvino gegni þetta ver e. se vhallqvemra en þott þv brytiapir blamenn fyrir en raga karll oc hrapapir þeim sva ihelviti. (Msk p. 384, ll. 29-32)<sup>16</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> Trans. Hollander (702): 'King Eystein said, "It has often been the custom for men when drinking to choose someone to compare themselves with. Let us do so now." To that, King Sigurth said nothing. "I see," said King Eystein, "that it behooves me to start this entertainment. I shall choose you, brother, for my match. (...)."'

<sup>16</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (347): "'This [King Eysteinn's improvements] does not amount to much, but I am not sure that it is less useful or profitable for the people of the nation than your bludgeoning Africans off to the devil and sending them to hell.'" As Ármann Jakobsson asserts (*Í leit að konungi*, 185-189), the *konungasögur* clearly indicate that one of the most important role of a king is to ensure peace for his country. Bagge (*Society and*

After the episode of the *mannjafnaðr*, Snorri's work depicts King Sigurðr showing the first signs of insanity; he sees an imaginary fish in his bath, and is possessed with laughter for no reason (*Msona* ch. 22).<sup>17</sup> Then all the sources write about King Eysteinn's death:<sup>18</sup>

*Eysteinn konungr var á veizlu á Stim á Hústöðum. Þar fekk hann bráðasótt, þá er hann leiddi til bana. Hann andaðisk fjórða kalendas Septembris [29 august], ok var lík hans flutt norðr til Kaupangs, ok er hann þar jarðaðr í Kristskirkju. Ok er þat mál manna, at yfir enskis manns líki hafi svá margr maðr í Nóregi jafnhryggr staðit sem Eysteins konungs, síðan er andaðr var Magnús konungr, sonr Óláfs ins helga konungs. Eysteinn var konungr tuttugu vetr at Nóregi. (Msona ch.23)<sup>19</sup>*

*Sex vetrom eptir andlat O. konvngs barsc þat at. er Eysteinn konvngur var aveizlo svðr Askstöðom. oc þar fecc hann braða sott þa er hann leiddi til bana. oc var lic hans flvtt norðr til capangs. oc iarðat i Cristz Kirkio. oc er þat mal manna at ifir enskis mannz líki hafi iafnmargir menn i Noregi iafnhrygvir staþir sem ifir grepti E. konungs. siþan er andapiz M. konvngur son O. ens h. (Msk p. 387 ll. 31-32, 388 ll. 1-6)<sup>20</sup>*

*(...), en sjau vetrum síðarr fekk Eysteinn konungr sótt ok andaðisk suðr á Stimi á Hústöðum. Var síðan lík hans færð norðr í Niðaróss ok jarðat at Kristskirkju. Hans dauða harmaði hverr maðr á Nóregi. (Fsk ch. 93)<sup>21</sup>*

*Postquam vero Augustinus tenuerant regnum annis viginti, rebus humanis decessit, (...). (Theod. 32, p. 64, ll. 7-8)<sup>22</sup>*

*Politics* 156) takes the rather different view that for Snorri, the ideal king "should be a mixture of both types".

<sup>17</sup> The vision of the fish might have a symbolic meaning, and could be interpreted as foreboding the king's death. See above pp. 41-3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ágrip* does not now report King Eysteinn's death, because the page which probably included this episode is missing from the manuscript.

<sup>19</sup> Trans. Hollander (705): 'King Eysteinn was at an entertainment [given him] at Stim near Hússtathir. There he took suddenly ill, and that was his death. He died in the fourth of the Kalends of September [29th of August], and his body was brought north to Kaupang, and there he is interred in Christ Church. It is said that over no man's body in Norway had ever stood so many men in sorrow, since the death of King Magnús, the son of Holy King Ólaf, as over him. Eystein was king in Norway for twenty years.'

<sup>20</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (349-350): 'Six years after the death of King Óláfr it happened that King Eysteinn was at a feast south at Askstaðir. He fell victim to a sudden illness that cost him his life. His body was moved north to Kaupangr (Niðaróss) and was buried in Christ Church. People say that there was never such a numerous crowd of mourners at a man's grave in Norway as there was by King Eysteinn's grave, subsequent to the death of King Magnús Ólafsson.'

<sup>21</sup> Trans. Finlay (257): '(...), and seven years later King Eysteinn took ill and died in the south at Stímr at Hústaðir. Afterwards his body was taken north to Niðaróss and buried at Christ Church. His death was mourned by everyone in Norway.'

Eysteinn's death was caused by a deadly disease he contracted while at Stimr at Hústaðir.<sup>23</sup> His body was buried in Kristskirkja, where his brother Óláfr and the great kings who had preceded him were buried. According to the main sources, his death was mourned by a great crowd of people, second in numbers only to those who had gathered after the death of King Magnús góði. As noticed above (p. 49), particularly in *Msk*'s text, Magnús góði's death calls forth the strongest emotions and profound sorrow (*Msk* 145, 147-48): this sentence implicitly compares Eysteinn with Magnús góði, and represents another contribution to the positive portrait of the king.

Now that Sigurðr has become sole king of Norway, the sources begin to concentrate on him, although they differ greatly about the sequence, dynamics and details of the stories that are reported.

Both *Msk* (pp. 390-391) and *Msona* (ch. 28) include the story of an Icelander who is swimming together with his men when the king's ship is anchored in a harbour, and how King Sigurðr tries to kill him. In *Msona* the king wants to kill the Icelander because he has been ducking his men, while in *Msk* he plunges into the water to duck the Icelander without having any reason to do it beyond the fact that he is in a bad mood. In *Msona* the king is then prevented from killing the man by Sigurðr Sigurðarson, who invites King Sigurðr to play ducking with him instead. In *Msk* the king is held up to ridicule by a man called Erlendr gapamuðr, who plunges him down three times in order to hand out to him the same rough treatment that he has been giving the Icelander.

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<sup>22</sup> Trans. McDougall (51): 'After he had ruled the kingdom for twenty years, however, Eysteinn departed from human affairs; (...).'

The two sources also diverge in their accounts of an incident involving Haraldr gilli, who has a quarrel with Sveinn Hrímhildarson in *Msona* (ch. 29), and a man called Loðinn in *Msk* (pp. 391-392). These two episodes can be considered as a kind of follow-up to the previous ones because they take place very soon afterwards (the following morning and the same evening), and involve the same central characters (Sigurður Sigurðarson and Erlendr gapamuðr respectively). In *Msona*, Sveinn Hrímhildarson's mistreatment of Haraldr gilli's servant leads to a quarrel in which Haraldr wounds Sveinn on the hand (presumably the same hand with which he has unjustly wounded the servant), and Sveinn and his men seize Haraldr and intend to hang him. Sigurður Sigurðarson wakes the king, who threatens to kill him for disobeying his orders (not to wake him), but is then persuaded to go and rescue his brother, and as a result not only spares Sigurður's life but realises that he needs his counsel. The two stories together show Sigurður as a wise counsellor who first dissuades or distracts the king from unjustly exerting his power and then teaches him that just as he wishes to spare his brother, so he should spare other men himself.<sup>24</sup>

The Loðinn story in *Msk* is fairly similar, with Loðinn in place of Sveinn Hrímhildarson. Again, there is a quarrel over the sleeping arrangements of Haraldr gilli's servant, and Haraldr's opponent is wounded, but Haraldr is not seized, and the king resolves the matter next morning without needing a moral lesson from anyone (other than the one about the ducking – he summons Erlendr gapamuðr and rewards him without any further prompting). The two stories together give a

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<sup>23</sup> According to *Konunga-tal* (s. 52) he died of a heart spasm. Note that *Msk*'s text reports the toponym *Askstaðir*, probably an error for *Hústaðir* (Kválen 89).

more favourable view of Sigurðr in *Msk* than in *Msona*: *Msk* suggests that the king only needs to sleep on it and reflect in order to come to a just decision, both about the ducking and about the next case he has to deal with, while Snorri suggests he still needs to be taught a lesson by someone else after the ducking incident.

*Msk* had introduced the ducking story and the Loðinn story before the arrival of Haraldr gilli; Snorri instead had obviously postponed the ducking story and the near-hanging until after Haraldr's arrival.

The two sources agree on a dream of King Sigurðr's that predicts Haraldr gilli's arrival in Norway (*Msk* p. 395, ll. 5-32; *Msona* ch. 25). In Sigurðr's dream a tree that has drifted ashore breaks into pieces that are scattered over the whole realm of Norway. Most of the pieces are small, but others are larger. The king interprets the dream for himself: the tree prefigures the arrival of some man in Norway and the varying fortunes of the members of the dynasty he will establish there.<sup>25</sup>

The sources also agree on the ordeal Haraldr has to undergo in order to prove that he is King Magnús berfœttr's son (*Msk* p. 395-396; *Msona* ch. 26), and on the unjust race between Haraldr and King Sigurðr's son Magnús (*Msk* p. 396-398; *Msona* ch. 27). Although these episodes present very different wording and stylistic devices, they seem to set up the idea that Haraldr will be a worthier successor to Sigurðr than his own son is.

Afterwards *Msona* narrates two miracles worked by St. Óláfr (ch. 30 and 31), while *Msk* reports a series of seizures suffered by King Sigurðr, which caused

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<sup>24</sup> Sigurðr Sigurðarson appears as the wise counsellor of King Sigurðr's son, Magnús blindi, though there every piece of advice he gives is rejected. See below pp. 139-140.

his government and leadership to become less effective. These seizures are always preceded by a serious state of depression, and they often include an attack on Church and its precepts: in one case he throws his most precious religious book onto the fire (*Msk* pp. 388-390);<sup>26</sup> in two others he asks for meat on religious fast-days, i.e. on a Friday and at Christmas time (*Msk* pp. 393-394 and p. 394, ll. 18-23 respectively). He is prevented from committing a sin by two men of small lineage, who are rewarded after he recovers his wits and his normal good spirits.

*Theod.* is the only source that gives a possible cause of Sigurðr's insanity, when it reports a rumour that it was due to some poisonous concoction he drank:

*Siwardus inter optimos principes tunc merito numerandus, postmodum verò inter mediocres, dicentibus quibusdam sensum illi fuisse immutatum propter potionem cujusdam noxiæ confectionis. Sed qui hoc affirmant viderint ipsi, quid dicant; nos ista in medio relinquimus. (Theod. 33, 8-12)<sup>27</sup>*

Theodoricus does not express any view about whether this story is true or not, but it does seem very likely that King Sigurðr's disease may have been caused by poisoning, even though it was not directly dispensed by anyone. The symptoms of King Sigurðr's disease recall those of ergotism in its hallucinatory form, i.e. hallucinations, melancholia, and a temporary or permanent psychosis. Considering the wide diffusion in the Scandinavian Middle Ages of this kind of food poisoning (Reichborn-Kjennerud, *Vår gamle trolldomsmedesin* III,155), the king's insanity

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<sup>25</sup> According to Kelchner (56), this is one of several variants in which the motif of the family tree appears in dreams reported in Old Norse Literature.

<sup>26</sup> This is probably the *plénáriús* which the Patriarch of Constantinople had given him, which is mentioned in *Msona* (ch. 32). The *Plenarium* contained all the material required for the liturgical services.

<sup>27</sup> Trans. McDougall (52-53): 'At that time Sigurðr was deservedly counted among the best rulers, but later only among those who were middling. Some say that his mind became deranged because he drank some poisonous concoction. But let those who maintain this answer for their own words. I, for my part, leave it an open question.'

could be identified with ergotism, although the sources do not make clear whether this disease was the one that caused his death.<sup>28</sup>

Actually, *Msona*'s text is very concise and does not give any details of Sigurðr's fatal sickness:

*Primr vetrum síðar en Krosskirkja var vígð, fekk Sigurðr konungr sótt. Þá var hann staddr í Ósló. Hann andaðisk þar einni nótt eptir Máriumessu í fǫstu. (Msona ch. 33)<sup>29</sup>*

*Msk* states explicitly that his death was the result of a disease that he contracted in Vík:

*Ok þa er S. Konungr var staddr í Vík austr tær hann sótt. (...). En nú sækir hann sóttin. Oc iþeiri sótt fer hann bana. (Msk p. 400, ll. 1-2; 10-11)<sup>30</sup>*

*Fsk* does link his final sickness to the fact that he had been ill for a long time, but does not actually say that the fatal disease that he suffered in Oslo was the same one that had been afflicting him previously:

*Þá er Sigurðr konungr var staddr í Vík austr, fekk hann sótt ok andaðisk ok hafði þó lengi áður haft mikil vanheilendi. (Fsk ch. 93)<sup>31</sup>*

Apart from this, however, the sources on King Sigurðr's death include some details that convey very important suggestions of the importance attached to the moment of death in arriving at a final estimate of a man's character.

Both Snorri and *Msk* suggest that Sigurðr was inclined to be unreasonably violent, but as long as good (even if lowly) counsellors would stand up to him, he was amenable to reason. Snorri keeps to this line and avoids describing Sigurðr's

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<sup>28</sup> See above the hypothesis of ergotism, pp. 87-8.

<sup>29</sup> Trans. Hollander (714): 'Three years after the Holy Cross Church was consecrated King Sigurth fell sick while in Ósló. He expired one night after Annunciation [March 25th].'

<sup>30</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (358): 'While King Sigurðr was in residence east in Vík, he fell ill. (...), his illness advanced until it became the cause of his death.'

<sup>31</sup> Trans. Finlay (258): 'When King Sigurðr was living east in Vík, he took sick and died, and indeed his health had been failing for a long time before that.'

end in details. Instead, he states that during his lifetime Sigurðr had many buildings erected in Konungahella, thus matching the building activity of his brother Eysteinn (*Msona* ch. 32). Above all, Snorri writes that King Sigurðr was responsible for erecting the Holy Cross Church, a very carefully built wooden church where he deposited many precious relics that he had collected during his campaigns: a splinter of the Holy Cross,<sup>32</sup> the altar-piece he had had made in Greece, a shrine which the king of Denmark had sent him, and the precious *Plenarium* that, in *Msk*'s account, he had actually tried to destroy in one of his fits of madness.<sup>33</sup> It is therefore significant that in his version, Snorri specifies that King Sigurðr's death occurred "three years after the Holy Cross Church was consecrated" (*Msona* ch. 33). This looks like an attempt to link the account of the king's death to his activity as a promoter of the faith, and to a generally sacred atmosphere which Snorri has introduced by including some miracles of St. Óláfr in the chapters that immediately precede the account of Sigurðr's death (*Msona* ch. 30-31).<sup>34</sup>

In *Msk*'s account, by contrast, we are finally confronted with the true interpretation of the dream that King Sigurðr has had at the beginning of the saga, in which the fates of the three brother kings were predicted. In that dream St. Óláfr escorted King Óláfr and King Eysteinn into the church, but he left King Sigurðr

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<sup>32</sup> Actually Sigurðr had failed to fulfil his promise to deposit the splinter of the Holy Cross where St. Óláfr was interred (*Msona* ch. 11). Snorri seems to try to justify his actions, writing that King Sigurðr thought that the Cross would protect Konungahella against the heathens; but he acknowledges that this turned out to be very ill-advised (*Msona* ch. 19). See *MbIHg* chs. 9-12.

<sup>33</sup> See above pp. 124-5 and n. 26.

<sup>34</sup> According to Cormack (*Saints and Sinners* 189) "Accounts of confession or other pious actions preceding a man's death can thus suggest his subsequent fate. An Author can provide evidence of an appropriate spiritual condition by informing his readers that men had attended church, observed a feast day, or recited prayers shortly before death, or that doomed captives asked to speak to a priest."

alone outside it (*Msk* p.358, ll. 17-32). King Eysteinn had interpreted the dream by saying that it meant some bad illness for Sigurðr, and this does indeed come true. But the real reason why St. Óláfr deserted him in the dream turns out to be that at the end of his life the King will be interdicted by the Church. *Msk* reports that towards the end of his life, King Sigurðr wanted to abandon the queen and marry a woman called Cecilia at a great feast in Bergen. When Magni, the bishop of Bergen, hears about this, he forbids him to commit such a sin and to disgrace God's law, the Holy Church and the bishopric.<sup>35</sup> The King becomes monstrously angry, but he does not harm the bishop, who is in fact very happy to have done what he ought (*Msk* pp. 398-399). In order to get round the interdiction the king moves to Stavanger, where he intends to celebrate the wedding. After having warned the King that what he intends to do is contrary to law, the local bishop cunningly asks for a great sum of money, and thus condones king's behaviour and disgraces himself by simony:

*Byscop melti. Ef sva er hera. Þa megoð er sia hve mioc þat er bannat enom smerom monnom. nv er eigi oc vliclict at þer etlit yðr heimilla er meira hafit valldit at lata yðr slicca lvti soma. en þat et þo mioc imoti retto. oc eigi veit ec hve þer villdot þat gera ivaro byscopriki at vanvirþa sva gvþs boð oc hellga kirkio oc varn byscopdom. Nv mono þer vilia til legia noccor stora lvti til þesa staðar i fiarlvtom oc bæta sva við gvþ oc við oss. (Msk p. 399, ll. 18-27)<sup>36</sup>*

In order to be able to marry Cecilia, the King agrees to pay the money, but he recognises the difference between the two bishops:

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<sup>35</sup> A prohibited relation of marriage was a violation of canon law that caused an ecclesiastical excommunication. See Jørgensen (22).

<sup>36</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (358): 'The bishop went on: "If it is true, sire, you may consider how strictly that is forbidden to lesser men. You may well think that such is permissible for you since you have greater power, but it is quite contrary to law, and I cannot imagine why, in our bishopric, you wish to dishonour God's commandments, Holy Church, and our bishopric. Perhaps you wish to endow this church with some great sum of money and thus make recompense to God and my office."'

*Þa melti konvngur. Tac þar fe vpp. Furþo olikir vrþo þer Magni byscop.  
(Msk p. 399, ll. 27-28)<sup>37</sup>*

When King Sigurðr falls ill in Oslo, his friends realise that it will be better for him to renounce sin at the end of his life, and they ask him to relinquish his new wife. Cecilia herself tells him that she wishes to depart because that will serve them both best:

*Oc þa er S. konvngur var staddr i Vík æstr teyr hann sott. Baþo þa vinir hans at hann leti konona læsa. oc hon sialf villdi þa ibrot fara. oc bað konvngin i sottini at hon færi fra honom. oc q. villdo við hann sciliaz. at þat metti honom bezt gegna oc baþom þeim. Konvngur s. Eigi com mer þat ihvg at þv mondir fyrlata mic sem aðrir. Oc [sneriz fra henne oc gærþi dreyrraþan. Hon gecc ibrot. (Msk p. 400, ll. 1-10)<sup>38</sup>*

In *Msk* King Sigurðr's death is as sad as it could possibly be: at the end he is deserted by everyone, and above all by the woman who had vowed to keep him in sickness and in health, though the author of *Msk* might have responded that in a spiritual sense, she does exactly that.<sup>39</sup> The real tragedy is that there is no suggestion that Sigurðr accepts that she and his advisors are right, and therefore her attempt to help him save his soul by leaving him is unsuccessful.

*Msk*, then, interestingly stops using Sigurðr's madness as an excuse when it comes to his "marriage" to Cecilia, and may suggest that he ceases at this point to

<sup>37</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (358): "The king said: "Assess the money, but you are very different from bishop Magni.""

<sup>38</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (358): "While king Sigurðr was in residence east in Vík, he fell ill. His friends urged him to relinquish his new wife, and she herself wished to depart. As he lay ill, she asked to be released because that would serve them both best. The king said: "It never occurred to me that you would abandon me like the others." He turned from her and flushed red as blood. She departed, (...)."

<sup>39</sup> The *Presta-handbók*, i.e. the manual for priests, reports the wedding liturgy as it was celebrated in 14<sup>th</sup> century Norway. It is interesting to note that while the ceremony as a whole was in Latin, the part in which the priest asked the couple if they knew any impediment to the wedding and their declaration of their marriage vows were both in Old Norse:

*Villt þu N. þessa kono taka þer till æignar kono. at gæyma hennar sva sívkrar sem hæillar.  
Vill tu taka þennna man þer till æignar manns at gæta ok varðvæita sva sívkan sem hæillan.  
(Manuale Norvegicum 19-20).*

heed good advice from anyone (i.e. that there is a struggle for his soul, which is finally lost). King Sigurðr's dream has come true: he dies alone, out of the Church, and St. Óláfr does not intercede with God for his soul because he has deliberately chosen to live in sin.

According to all the sources King Sigurðr's body was interred in Saint Hallvarðr's Church, in Oslo: as his dream had predicted, he did not join his brothers, who were buried in the Kristskirkja in Niðarós, together with St. Óláfr.<sup>40</sup>

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According to Fæhn (*Manuale Norvegicum* XLIII), the portions in Old Norse from around 1300 as found in MS. *Thott* 110, 8vo may possibly indicate the dialect of the Trøndelag.

<sup>40</sup> *Msk* p. 400, ll. 11-13; *Msona* ch. 33; *Fsk* ch. 93; *Ágrip* ch. 58. Apart from *Ágrip*, which only specifies the name of the church, the sources also agree in identifying the exact burial place, i.e. in the stone wall on the south site outside the choir.

According to Lange (cols. 444-445), the custom of burial in the wall of the choir was mainly restricted to royalty, and it is oftener found in Norway than in the rest of Scandinavia. According to their class, men were buried on the south side, women on the northern one (Bøe col. 396).

## CHAPTER 7

### HARALDR GILLI (1130-1136) AND MAGNÚS BLINDI (1130-1139)

Nú er heldr svá at halla tekr  
ævi-lok iæfra at telja:  
hét Magnus mægr Sigurðar  
heiptar-giarn, enn Haraldr bróðir.

Þeir miæk róg-samt ríki hæfðo  
nánir frændr í Nóregi :  
allt fór verr an vera skildi  
(þess galt margr) á meðal þeira.

Unz Magnus misti beggja  
sæmdar-laust sigs ok heilso:  
þat veit hverr, at Haraldr Gilli  
var sex vetr sam-fast konungr.

Áðr an lofðung af líf-dægum  
tírar-laust tóko fyrðar :  
Sá er í Kristz kirkjo iarðaðr  
í Biærgin bróðir iæfra.

(*Konunga-Tal* stt. 58-61)<sup>1</sup>

With the death of King Sigurðr Magnússon, the sequence of kings who died natural deaths comes to an end. The following period is characterised by recurrent internal wars and by such chaos and dissolution that Theodoricus decides to be silent and end his account of the ancient history of the Norwegian kings at this point:

*Nos quoque hujus schedulæ hic finem facimus, indignum valde judicantes memoriæ posterorum tradere scelera, homicidia, perjuria, parricidia, sanctorum locorum contaminationes, Dei contemptum, non minus religiosorum deprædationes quam totius plebes, mulierum captivationes et*

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. Guðbrandur Vigfússon (II, 317-318): 'And here this count of the kings' deaths [necrology] is sad for me to tell. Magnus was the name of Sigurd, but Harold was his brother. These kinsmen had a reign of sore feud in Norway. Everything went worse between them that should have been: many a man hád to pay for it; till at last Magnus miserably lost both victory and virility. Every one knows that Harold Gillie-[Christ] was king six years together, till men ingloriously took his life. He is laid in the earth at Christ Church in Bergen.'

*ceteras abominationes, quas longum est enumerare. (Theod. ch. 34, p. 67, ll. 6-12)*<sup>2</sup>

Actually, all the Norwegian kings described from this point onwards in the remaining sources died violent deaths. Moreover, these killings were often perpetrated against some of the most fundamental rules that were active in ancient times; in particular, many of them were perpetrated by close relatives of the victims.

As Cleasby and Vigfússon state in *An Icelandic - English Dictionary* (434), there was an essential difference between a killing perpetrated according to the rules, which was referred to as *víg*, and the sort of killing that was called *morð*. *Morð* was considered to be a crime against common morality and a shameful deed, as for example the slaying of a man while he was sleeping, or a killing perpetrated during the night or in an improper way, as several *Íslendinga sögur* testify:

*Síðan mælti Þorgeirr: "Hvært villtú, at vit vekim þá?" Kári svarar: "Eigi spyrr þú þessa af því, at þú hafir eigi áðr raðit fyrir þér at vega eigi at liggjandi mǫnnum ok vega skammarvíg." (Brennu-Njáls saga, ch. 146)*<sup>3</sup>

*"(...); eigi mun hann [konungr] láta Egil drepa í nótt, því at náttvíg eru morðvíg." (Egils saga, ch. 59)*<sup>4</sup>

This probably implied a sense of solidarity between killer and victim, i.e. giving one's opponent the chance to defend himself, and even if it did not lead to

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<sup>2</sup> Trans. McDougall (53): 'And here I too shall end this little document of mine, since I deem it utterly unfitting to record for posterity the crimes, killings, perjuries, parricides, desecrations of holy places, the contempt for God, the plundering no less of the clergy than of the whole people, the abductions of women, and other abominations which it would take long to enumerate.'

<sup>3</sup> Trans. Hermann Pálsson and Magnus Magnusson (324): 'Then Thorgeir asked, "Do you want to wake them first?" "Need you ask", replied Kari, "when you must already have made up your mind not to attack men in their sleep and thus kill dishonourably?"'

<sup>4</sup> Trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (155): "'(...), and he [the king] won't let Egil be killed at night because a night killing would be murder.'"

mercy being shown, it did affect the rhetoric surrounding the death, the categorisation of it, and the subsequent reputation of those involved.

Both Snorri and *Msk's* author were still clearly sensitive to the ancient rules, although they were living in the political scenario of the Icelandic *Sturlungaöld*, an age that was characterised by an increase of violence and of those actions which deserved the most complete contempt, such as torture and vandalism (Boyer, *Moeurs* 128). The rules that had applied in ancient times, such as those which restricted 'permissible' killings, were still operative in theory during the *Sturlungaöld* (Van Der Toorn 47), but in practice authors had to come to terms with a different political situation. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, when Snorri and *Msk's* author were writing their histories of the Kings of Norway, Icelandic society was slowly changing. While the Icelandic Commonwealth<sup>5</sup> had previously been based on a surprisingly balanced net of relationships and reciprocal support between chieftains (*goðar*) and free farmers (*bændur*), in the *Sturlungaöld* power became increasingly linked to despotism, violence, and wealth (often acquired with the help of the Norwegian crown or by the church).<sup>6</sup> Whereas a chieftain's authority had previously relied very much on the respect of other men, now his power was no longer so tightly linked to his honour, and he could perform dishonourable actions such as tortures, mutilations or killings of women without suffering the social consequences that ignominy had once brought about. The Icelanders of the *Sturlungaöld* were entering a system that had been

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<sup>5</sup> Scholars also use the terms "Free State" and *þjóðveldi* to refer to the peculiar political organisation of early Iceland, but as Gisli Pálsson asserts (3), the notion of Commonwealth "seems more appropriate and ethnographically salient than either 'Free State' or *þjóðveldi*, for the latter terms both contain an anachronistic and misleading reference to 'state' and 'nationhood', respectively."

familiar for centuries in the rest of Europe, where violence was a prerogative and sometimes a monopoly of the state.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, death was losing its human aspect, and killers no longer respected the humanity of their victims or the traditional rules which honoured both the killer and the killed.

The poignant episode of the killing of Snorri Sturluson himself, as it is described by his nephew Sturla Þórðarson in the *Íslendinga saga* (ch. 151), dramatically illustrates the old ideals and the contrast between the two ages:

*Eftir þat urðu þeir varir við, hvar Snorri var ok gengu þeir í kjallarann  
Markús Marðarson, Símon knútr, Árni beisk, Þorsteinn Guðinason,  
Þórarinn Ásgrímsson.  
Símon knútr bað Árna hoggva hann.  
"Eigi skal hoggva," sagði Snorri.  
"Högg þú," sagði Símon.  
"Eigi skal hoggva," sagði Snorri.  
Eftir þat veitti Árni honum banasár, ok báðir þeir Þorsteinn unnu á  
honum. (Íslendinga saga ch. 151)<sup>8</sup>*

Snorri was murdered during the night, as Haraldr gilli was also to be, and his reaction against his killers was probably not, as Monsen asserts (XIII), a pathetic attempt to confirm his now diminished authority, but rather an appeal to those rules and values which he himself had celebrated in his works.<sup>9</sup>

Confronted with the "abominations", as Theodoricus defines them, that took place after King Sigurðr's death, both Snorri and *Msk's* author seem to cringe in

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<sup>6</sup> On this subject cf. Gunnar Karlsson and Durrenberger.

<sup>7</sup> It is important in this regard to stress that *Grágás*, the Icelandic law *corpus*, does not contemplate the death penalty. Its main penalty is *skóggangr* (forest going), i.e. outlawry. Outlawry did licence private violence, but there was no executive power that could perpetrate state violence (see Byock, *Feud* 90-91).

<sup>8</sup> Trans. McGrew (vol. I, 360): 'After that they discovered where Snorri was. And Markús Marðarson, Símon knút, Árni beisk, Þorstein Guðinason, Þórarinn Ásgrímsson went into the cellar. Símon knút bade Árna strike down Snorri. "You shall not strike", said Snorri. "Strike", said Símon. "You shall not strike", said Snorri. Árni and Þorstein both wounded him, but Árni gave Snorri his deathblow.'

<sup>9</sup> On Snorri Sturluson's death scene see also Úlfar Bragason "The Art of Dying: Three Death Scenes in *Íslendinga saga*." (459).

horror. Sometimes they seem to be willing to accuse their characters, sometimes they try to justify their conduct.

From the very beginning of *Magnús saga blinda ok Haralds gilla* (*MblHg* ch. 1), Snorri expresses a highly negative opinion of King Magnús, describing him as personally unworthy, and writing that his popularity was derived only from his father. In contrast with this, he portrays Haraldr gilli as a good person. Most of all, Snorri attributes to Haraldr the characteristic of being open to advice: "*ráðþægr, svá at hann lét aðra ráða með sér öllu því*".<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to decide whether this characteristic of Haraldr is so much emphasised by Snorri in order to make a contrast with the foolishness of Magnús in not following Sigurðr Sigurðarson's advice (see below pp. 139-140), but it is certain that in this saga the quality of being *ráðþægr* is one that is regarded as extremely important.

Snorri (*MblHg* ch. 1) writes that immediately after King Sigurðr's death Haraldr arranged a meeting with his friends, who advised him to summon the Haugabíng. The assembly's decision is to declare that Haraldr's oath to renounce his claim to the kingdom (referred to in *Msona* ch. 26) was made under duress, and that he is therefore to be considered king over half of the country.

Snorri's suggestion seems to be that Haraldr's disregard of his oath is motivated more by the advice of his friends about what is right, and by the decision of a properly constituted legal assembly, than by his own ambition. His emphasis on how open Haraldr was to advice therefore becomes an important part of his defence of his actions. There may also be an implicit suggestion that the

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<sup>10</sup> *MblHg* ch. 1. Trans. Hollander (715): 'He was open to advice, letting others give him counsel in whatever they would.'

assembly's verdict reflects a common view of the relative characters of Magnús and Haraldr - i.e. that they decide that Haraldr ought to have a share in the kingship because they already regard him more highly than Magnús.

*Ágrip*, on the other hand, does not excuse Haraldr at all, but fiercely criticises him for having violated his oath:

<N>ú vill Mognús enn í ríki setjask, sem honum vísar með réttu tilskipan  
föður hans ok eiðr alþýðu, en Haraldri gezk eigi at því ok kallar til hálf  
ríkis, ok vill hvárki muna eiða sína né skipan bróður síns. (*Ágrip* ch. 59)<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, we do not know how the dispute between Haraldr and Magnús developed in *Ágrip* after this, because the manuscript has a lacuna of four leaves at this point.<sup>12</sup> We cannot even know for certain whether *Msk* contained the same excuse that Snorri makes for Haraldr's acceptance of his office, because here too there is a leaf missing from the manuscript, which leaves out all the events that took place before the battle in Bergen (see below pp. 140-1). But it is important to note that unlike the other sources, *Msk* (p. 400, ll. 17-23) has already emphasised Haraldr's commitment not to claim to the throne just after its narrative of King Sigurðr's death. It looks as if its author did not regard Haraldr's subsequent manoeuvres to obtain the kingdom as acceptable, nor accept the excuse put forward by Snorri, namely that Haraldr's course of action was dictated by the advice of his counsellors.

*Fsk* gives a quite different view. It does not mention Haraldr's oath at all, either before or after the ordeal he undergoes (ch. 93), but simply writes that

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<sup>11</sup> Trans. Driscoll (77): 'It was then Magnús's intention to rule alone, as his father's arrangement and the oath of the people entitled him to, but Haraldr was not pleased with this and laid claim to half the kingdom, choosing to remember neither his oaths nor his brother's arrangement.'

<sup>12</sup> *Ágrip*'s account resumes after the death of Magnús blindi and Sigurðr slembidjárn, when the sons of Haraldr rule over country (see next chapter).

Magnús and Haraldr were both immediately accepted as kings (ch. 94). The compiler of *Fsk* probably had no doubt, as he makes Sigurðr Sigurðarson affirm in ch. 94, that "*hann [Haraldr] á at réttu at hafa*" ('Haraldr ought to have it by right').

At the beginning of ch. 2 of Snorri's saga (*MblHg*), we are told that Magnús started to collect troops in order to remove Haraldr from the kingship. Haraldr started to collect troops too, though Snorri claims that he did this only after he heard that king Magnús had done so.

Both kings seem to have destroyed properties belonging to the other and to have killed people who were living on them. But when King Magnús's army approaches his antagonist's troops, Snorri seems to suggest that King Haraldr shrinks from believing that his kinsman can intend to attack and kill him. Indeed, he says:

*"Hvat mun Magnús konungr frændi vilja? Eigi mun þat, at hann myni vilja beriask við oss". (MblHg ch. 2)<sup>13</sup>*

Haraldr, and Snorri speaking through him, knew that crimes against blood relations were thought to lead to catastrophe. For this reason he cannot believe that Magnús wants to fight him. Yet he must respond to Magnús's attack.

According to Snorri's version, it was during this battle, known as the battle of Fyrileif, that Haraldr gilli came to understand the importance of being a king who does not need to extort support, because the battle is decided in favour of King Magnús when King Haraldr's half-brother Kriströðr is killed by a farmer who has been compelled to come and fight for him. King Haraldr has to flee to

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<sup>13</sup> Trans. Hollander (717): "I wonder what our kinsman, King Magnús, has in mind. He surely does not want to fight us."

Denmark (*MblHg* ch. 3), but when he returns to Norway his way of winning adherents has completely changed. Unlike *Fsk* (ch. 94) which tells us that while going northwards Haraldr "*drap marga menn, en af sumum tók hann fé mikit*",<sup>14</sup> Snorri (*MblHg* ch. 4) explains that Haraldr's tactics were now characterised by generosity and diplomacy. Significantly, he starts regaining Norway from Konungahella, where he has not fought against the farmers who opposed him, but has negotiated with them and won their support.

It is significant that although *Fsk* leaves out some important details regarding the battle of Fyrirleif and how the king started to be accepted after he returned to Norway from Denmark, it does include a peculiar episode, also found in Snorri's work, regarding Neriðr and Ásbjörn. These two brothers are captured by King Haraldr, who tells them to choose which of them wants to be hanged and which to be plunged into the Sarpr waterfall. The elder brother goes into the waterfall because that seems like the worse death.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting that such a brief work as *Fsk* does not leave out this episode, because it bears witness to a particular interest in the process of dying that is linked to that towards death and the afterlife. As Ström writes in his work on the sacral origin of the Germanic death penalties (274-275) "the general human reaction to the critical transition from life to death is greatly enhanced if the transition takes the form of a solemn, dramatic act in which the subject is deliberately put to death." The situation in which the convicts themselves have to choose the manner of their deaths must

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<sup>14</sup> Trans. Finlay (259): 'Then King Haraldr (...) killed many men, but from some he took a large amount of property.'

<sup>15</sup> Ström (172) reports that "according to ancient custom drowning was used preferably against persons versed in magic."

have made a far deeper impression on the audience. At the same time the story reveals important social issues such as the duty of the older brother to care for the younger one, and in more general terms, the solidarity within the kin group at such dramatic and definitive moments. This kind of solidarity is emphatically broken within the family of the Norwegian kings themselves, despite their function of presiding over society. Haraldr was one of the major villains in causing such breaking, and this may explain why the usual kind of 'folktale' resolution of this kind of story, in which the courageous brother is rewarded by the king generously sparing both brothers, does not happen here. The implication would then be that Haraldr fails to apply those rules that are properly kingly or generous, and to that extent he cannot be considered a good king.

The sources (*MblHg* ch. 5; *Fsk* 94. *Msk* still has the lacuna at this point) agree that King Haraldr then proceeded with his advance towards Bergen against King Magnús, who had disregarded Sigurðr Sigurðarson's three different pieces of advice to avert defeat.<sup>16</sup>

The shared account of Sigurðr's advice is quite clearly part of the common tradition and serves as an illustration of the inadequacy of Magnús. In Snorri the sequence is: 1. the good advice (make an agreement with Haraldr and share the kingdom with him); 2. the Machiavellian advice (kill a few of his own supporters who have stayed at home and did not defend him to intimidate the others); 3. the desperate advice (retreat to the Trøndelag and try to gain support). In *Fsk* it is: 1. the good advice; 2. the military advice (retreat to the Trøndelag and raise forces);

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<sup>16</sup> Sigurðr Sigurðarson had previously been King Sigurðr Jórsalafari Magnússon's steward and was the one who had prevented the king from killing an Icelander (*Msona* 28) and who saved Haraldr gilli from being hanged (*Msona* 29). See above pp. 123-4.

3. the wicked advice (described as another possible plan, though not a pleasant one: "*Enn er eitt ráð til ok er illt*").

In Snorri's account these advices are put in descending order of political advantage; in *Fsk* they seem to be in descending order of moral desirability. Anyway, Magnús is in all versions lacking in the basic practicality to accept any plan that will actually work, and this suggests that, whether or not Haraldr is excused by the advice of his counsellors, it was seen as a basic contrast between them that Haraldr would listen to advice and Magnús would not (and that he therefore largely brings his downfall on himself).

Magnús then did not even follow the advice to gather troops and leave Bergen, but ordered defence systems to be prepared in the town. Haraldr arrived at Bergen on the day before Christmas but did battle only on the 7<sup>th</sup> January, because he did not want to defile the holy season (*MblHg* ch. 6; *Fsk* 95). Both Snorri and *Msk*, whose lacuna ends at this point, report that Haraldr invoked St. Óláfr's help and vowed that he would construct a church in his honour if he won the victory (*MblHg* ch. 7; *Msk* p. 400, ll. 27-29).

Unlike the previous encounters between Haraldr harðráði and Magnús góði, Magnús berfœttr and Hákon Magnússon, and Eysteinn and Sigurðr Magnússon, when there had never been a direct conflict, in this case King Haraldr fought, defeated and deposed his brother's son King Magnús. This seems to imply a decline in the power of the traditional 'rules' on which all sources are agreed (even Theodoricus, whose account does not stretch this far precisely for this reason).

In order to make sure that Magnús would not be able to be called a king in the future,<sup>17</sup> Haraldr had him blinded and emasculated (and according to *Msk* they also chopped off his feet). *Fsk* (ch. 95) gives no further explanation of this, but *Msk* (p. 401, ll. 21-22) and Snorri (ch. 8) agree that the maiming was actually carried out by Haraldr's slaves. This may have been done to compound the humiliation of Magnús, or it may have been felt that such 'dishonouring' behaviour damaged those who carried it out as well as its victims.

Maiming was not unknown in medieval Scandinavia, even if it is not often found in the sources. It is certain that this action was considered to be very wicked, even if it was probably not as morally devastating as a murder.<sup>18</sup> *Msk* is the only source that explicitly condemns the mutilation of Magnús as a wicked deed, but it is also the one which most clearly expresses the excuse for it, writing that it was mostly determined by the king's advisors:

*var þetta verc illt oc okonvnglic. Þvi at liðsmenn reþo þvi meir en konvng. (Msk p. 401 ll. 25-27)*<sup>19</sup>

But it is uncertain how far this would excuse Haraldr in the eyes of early readers, since one is forced to conclude either that he was too weak to prevent his men from committing this wicked deed, or that he did not really want to prevent it.

*Msk* (p. 401, ll. 27-31) and Snorri (*MblHg* ch. 8) also report another wicked action by King Haraldr, i.e. the hanging of bishop Reinaldr.<sup>20</sup> Snorri specifies that

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<sup>17</sup> 'at hann mætti eigi kallask konungr þaðan í frá.' (*MblHg* ch. 8); 'at hann metti þa eigi konvng kallaz.' (*Msk* p. 401, ll. 20-21).

<sup>18</sup> For a survey on this subject see Gade (1236: *Órækia meiddr*, 123-126 and 129-130). As regards Magnús being deprived of his attributes as a leader see Bagge (*Society and Politics* 112) and Meulengracht Sørensen (*The Unmanly Man* 81-82).

<sup>19</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (364): 'The deed was wicked and not worthy of a king, but it was determined more by his advisers than by the king himself.'

<sup>20</sup> The hanging of bishop Reinaldr is also cited in *Fsk* ch. 95, p. 326.

the bishop was English and reputed to be very avaricious, and that he was caught up in the search for Magnús's treasure. The bishop had denied that he had Magnús's treasure, and offered to undergo ordeal to justify his word, but Haraldr refused this offer and imposed a fine. According to Snorri the bishop was condemned to pay fifteen marks of gold, while *Msk* reports that the fine was thirty marks of gold (l. 30): the fact that Haraldr is a party to the bishop's execution in return for thirty coins may be a suggestion that he is like Judas betraying Christ.

Snorri writes that when the bishop was about to be hanged, he shook off his boot and revealed one ring, saying it was all the property of Magnús's that he knew of. This suggests that he was 'shaking the dust off his feet' (i.e. consigning Norway to perdition, cf. e.g. Luke 9,5), and possibly that the one ring he has had from the king was his episcopal ring of office.

According to Snorri this action earned Haraldr much reproach, and also *Msk* displays its strongly negative judgement, writing that this deed probably doomed Norway and caused God's wrath and the excommunication of all who were implicated in it:

*Hrygbi hann íþeso allra gopra manna hvgi oc hiorto. oc er gliclict at þetta vvercan hafi dregit Noreg til mikillar vgipto oc þeim er gerþo, oc fello meþ íban oc guþs reiþi. (Msk p. 402, ll. 1-4)<sup>21</sup>*

Nonetheless, *Msk* seems once again to be willing to make excuses for King Haraldr, because it specifies that he had the bishop hanged on the advice of his followers (p. 401, ll. 27-29), and afterwards seeks to counteract the heinous nature of this deed by introducing the story of King Haraldr's gifts to the Icelandic

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<sup>21</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (364): 'With this deed the king grieved the hearts and minds of all good men, and it is probable that this crime doomed Norway and all who were implicated and were subject to excommunication and God's wrath.'

Bishop Magnús Einarsson. *Msk*'s author writes that this passage has been included to illustrate King Haraldr's generosity (p. 405, ll. 15-16: '*i þessom lvt ma marca storleti Harallz konvngs*'), but his concern for the future of the king's soul seems to be the major point of it. Actually, *Msk* reports that once the bishop had come back to Iceland, he discussed with his advisers what should be done with the drinking vessel the king had given him, in order to ensure that Haraldr could benefit from it:

*Var þa røtt vm hvat af borþkerino scylldi gera þess er konvngi gegndi bezt. Byscop leitapi raðs við menn. melto svmir at sellt mondi oc gefit fatøkom monnom verþit. Þa melti bys cop. Anat rað vil ec taca. Gøra scal af calec her at staðnom. oc vile c sva firir mela at hann nioti. Oc villda ec at þeir enir helgo menn allir er her er af helgom domom i þessi ine helgo kirkio leti konvng hvert siN niota. er ifir honom er messa svngin. (*Msk* p. 405, ll. 3-12)<sup>22</sup>*

In this passage *Msk* seems to quantify the king's sins, and at the same time to maintain that there was still a possibility of atoning for them: a simple donation would not be enough to make up for his sins, but the intercession of all the saints whose relics were in the church every time mass was sung over the chalice made from the king's drinking vessel seemed more appropriate. This passage therefore not only stresses the *Msk* author's concern for the fate of his characters in the next life, but also a belief in the possibility of intercession for the soul that is also displayed in other parts of his work. It also shows the idea that the prayers that are necessary on behalf of a soul are proportional to the seriousness of the person's sins, and this was to turn into a real calculation in the course of the thirteenth

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<sup>22</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (366): "There was some discussion of what should be done with the drinking vessel that would be most in the king's interest. The bishop sought counsel from his advisers. Some said that it should be sold and the proceeds turned over to the poor. Then the bishop said: "I have a different plan. I will have a chalice made for our church and ensure that he benefit in this way. I would wish that all the saints whose relics are in this holy church might intercede for the king each time mass is sung over the chalice."

century (Binski 25-26).<sup>23</sup> Actually Bishop Magnús, and *Msk*'s author with him, seem not to be sure about the efficacy of the measures he has taken, and he doubts whether the Saints will actually intercede for the king. This is probably another way of saying that King Haraldr has committed a mortal sin, which implies eternal damnation, unless he repents and does penance for it.

Snorri's description of the hanging of the bishop made it clear that it was a tragic mistake, but his opinion about this crime and King Magnús's maiming can also be perceived through the three following chapters about the Wendish attack on Konungahella (*MblHg* ch. 9-11), which do not appear in *Msk*.<sup>24</sup>

To tell the story of this attack, Snorri could rely on the account of his foster-father, Jón Loptsson, because he had been there when the event took place (Bagge 51). In ch. 9 the Wendish attack is introduced with a series of mysterious events that take place almost every night from Easter till Ascension day: there is a great noise in the streets through the whole town, and the dogs are so affected that they run mad, biting all that came in their way. All who are bitten by them turn raging mad.<sup>25</sup> The priest Andréas Brúnsson delivers a sermon at Pentecost (the day of inspiration from the Holy Spirit) at which he urges a trust in God which, as it turns out, ultimately saves his life and liberty.

These symbolic elements seem to point in more than one direction, but clearly represent a breach of nature's harmony. As in *Ynglinga saga*, crimes

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<sup>23</sup> The quantification of sins was institutionalized with the foundation of the *Sacra Poenitentieria Apostolica*, in the second half of the twelfth century. See Jørgensen (19-20).

<sup>24</sup> *Ágrip* (ch. 54) has previously referred to the heathen attack on the church King Sigurðr had built on the frontier, caused by his disregard for his oath to keep the Holy Cross in St. Óláfr's Church in Niðarós. *Ágrip* also relates how the Cross was miraculously saved and moved to the place where it had been sworn on oath that it would be kept (Driscoll 73).

<sup>25</sup> As regards dogs and their association with a pre-Christian underworld see below, pp. 175-6.

against blood relations are the instigators of catastrophe and a sign of moral decay. Snorri himself seems, *mutatis mutandis*, to suggest such an interpretation when, after the sack of the town (*MblHg* ch. 11), he makes the Wendish king say:

*"Þetta hús [Krosskirkja] hefir verit búið með ást mikilli við þann guð, er þetta hús á; ok svá lízk mér, sem gætt myni lítt hafa verit til staðarins eða hússins, því at ek sé, at guð er reiður þeim, er varðveita".* (*MblHg* ch. 11)<sup>26</sup>

As the writer of *Msk* has stated at an earlier point (p. 402, l. 4), God is angry with his stewards and with their people. Actually, Konungahella and its church can be regarded as a symbol of the whole of Norway: it had been built by King Sigurðr, the bearer of "*ár ok friðr*", he had placed the relic of the Holy Cross there, and it was from there that Haraldr had started his campaign to win Norway. But Haraldr had the right to rule only over half of the country, and Magnús should not have used the Holy Cross as an emblem against his kinsman in the battle of Fyrileif (*MblHg* ch. 3). After the clash between the two kings (the two people whose responsibility it was to vouch for the safety and prosperity of Konungahella), the harmony of Norway is broken, and the heathen attack described by Snorri is just the beginning of further catastrophes.

The sources report that after he was maimed, King Magnús entered the monastery of Hólmr,<sup>27</sup> but Haraldr gilli, who became sole king of Norway, immediately had to face another claimant to the throne, Sigurðr slembidjárn, who claimed to be another son of King Magnús berfœttr.

According to the sources, Sigurðr slembidjárn had been consecrated as a deacon when he was a young man, but when he grew older he went abroad and

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<sup>26</sup> Trans. Hollander (729): "This building has been appointed with great love for the god who owns it, and it would seem to me that both the town and this building have not been guarded with much care; because I see the god is angered at those who were to guard them."

stayed in the Orkneys, in Scotland and in Denmark, where he went through the ordeal to prove his paternity.<sup>28</sup> He then went to Bergen to meet King Haraldr and ask him to acknowledge his kinship, but the king, again on the advice of his counsellors, ordered that Sigurðr should be seized. Snorri (*MblHg* ch. 14) and *Msk* (p. 411, ll. 13-14) write that Sigurðr was accused of having been responsible for the death of King Haraldr's friend Þorkell fóstri while he was in Orkney. It is possible that this may have been seen merely as a pretext for killing Sigurðr, but *Msk* (p. 406, ll. 17-18) says that Sigurðr actually was part of the conspiracy that was responsible for Þorkell's death, and Snorri (*MblHg* ch. 14) suggests that a proper legal process took place, which ended with Sigurðr being condemned to death.

However, Sigurðr managed to escape and, with the aid of his supporters, planned to kill King Haraldr.<sup>29</sup>

According to Snorri, some of King Haraldr's servants who had previously been followers of King Magnús managed to discover that on the night between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> December 1136, the king intended to sleep with his mistress Þóra instead of with Queen Ingiríðr. That night King Haraldr was killed by Sigurðr slæmbidjárn and his fellow-conspirators. This is probably the actual historical date of the murder, but it was certainly also a symbolically appropriate one, as the 13th December is the feast-day of St. Lucy, the patron of eyesight, who had suffered the

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<sup>27</sup> *MblHg* ch. 12; *Msk* p. 402, ll. 7-9; *Fsk* ch. 95, p. 326.

<sup>28</sup> *MblHg* ch. 13; *Msk* pp. 405-410. Unlike *MblHg*, *Msk* quotes many stanzas by the Icelander Ivarr Ingimundarson, who was the poet of Sigurðr slæmbi, after having been the poet of Magnús berfœttr and Sigurðr Jórsalafari Magnússon (Guðbrandur Vigfússon II, 257). It also adds the episode of Sigurðr's stay at Saurbœr (*Msk* pp. 409-410).

<sup>29</sup> *MblHg* ch. 14-15; *Msk* pp. 411-412; *Fsk* ch. 96.

same torture as King Magnús blindi. The death of King Haraldr then, seems to be linked to Magnús's blinding and to be a consequence of it.

In line with the decay of moral values that had taken place after the death of Sigurðr Magnússon, King Haraldr's death features all the characteristics which make a killing into a *morð*: it was perpetrated during the night and while the victim was sleeping. This killing was furthermore outrageous from a religious point of view, since the conspirators chose a time when they knew the king was engaged in sin and would have little or no time to repent:

*Sigurðr slembidjárn ok nokkurir menn með honum kómu þar til herbergis, er konungr svaf, ok brutu upp hurðina ok gengu þar inni með brugðnum vápnum. Ívarr Kolbeinsson vann fyrst á Haraldri konungi, en konungr hafði drukkinn niðr lagzk ok svaf fast ok vaknaði við þat, er menn vágu at honum, ok mælti í óvitinu: "Sárt býr þú nú við mik, Þóra". Hon hljóp upp við ok mælti: "Þeir búa sárt við þik, er verr vilja þér en ek". Lét Haraldr konungr þar líf sitt. (MblHg ch. 16)<sup>30</sup>*

*oc þar var ena nesto nott eptir Lvcio messo. At S. Slembir oc nacqvarir menn með honom hosfo stoReþi með hondom. Sigurþr com til herbergis þess er konungr hvilldi. Oc drapo fyrst varðmenn oc brvto vpp hvrþina. oc gengo iN með brvgðnom sverþom. En konungr hafpi drvccin niðr lagz. Oc svaf fast oc vacnaþi við þat er menn vago at honom oc melti þat ivvitino. Sart byr þv nv við mic Þora. En hon liop vpp oc melti. Þeir bva sart við þic er veR vilia þer en ec. Þar let Haralldr konungr lifsitt. Þessir menn gengo in at honom með S. Ogmvndr s. Þrandar scaga. Kolbiorn Þorliotz s. af Batalldri. Erlendr islendingr. (Msk p. 413, ll. 3-16)<sup>31</sup>*

<sup>30</sup> Trans. Hollander (734): 'Sigurth Gadabout-Deacon and some men with him went to the lodgings where the king slept, broke down the door and went in with their swords drawn. Ívar Kolbeinsson was the first to inflict a wound on King Harald. The king had laid down drunk and slept hard. He awoke when they attacked him and said in his delirium, "Now you are treating me cruelly, Thóra!" She started up quickly and said, "You are treated cruelly by men worse disposed to you than I." King Harald lost his life there.'

<sup>31</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (371): 'The day after Saint Lucy's feast Sigurðr slembir and some of his men put the plan into action. Sigurðr went to the lodging where the king was sleeping, and they began by first killing the guards and breaking down the door. Then they entered with swords drawn. The king had gone to bed after heavy drinking and was fast asleep. He awoke only as they attacked him and said, only half awake: "You have prepared rough treatment for me, Þóra." But she jumped up and said: "They treat you roughly who wish you worse than I do." There King Haraldr lost his life. The men who entered with Sigurðr were Ögmundur, the son of Þrándr skagi (Promontory), Kolbjörn Þorljótsson from Bataldr, and the Icelander Erlendr.'

*Á þessi sǫmu nótt gildraði Sigurðr svá til Haralds konungs ok menn hans, at hǫfuðvǫrðr Haralds konungs var fyrir því herbergi, er allir hugðu, at hann svæfi í, en hinnung var varðlaust, sem hann var sjálfr inni. Kom þar Sigurðr um nótt ok menn hans til herbergisins ok kómusk inn fyrr en konungrinn vaknaði ok báru þegar vápn á hann. Lét svá Haraldr konungr gilli líf sitt, at hann hafði mǫrg sár. Þetta var ofarliga á nóttinni. (Fsk ch. 96)<sup>32</sup>*

*Fsk* is the source that seems to emphasise the violation of the ancient rules most strongly. Unlike *Msk* and *MblHg*, where Sigurðr's men break down the door to get in (even if Haraldr does not wake up because he is drunk – another suggestion of his sinfulness), *Fsk* says that they got in before the king woke up, and it does not specify that he was drunk. In *Fsk*'s text then, Haraldr's killing seems to have all the characteristics of a *morð*. *Msk* and Snorri, on the other hand, seem to try to relieve the heinousness of the crime. In their versions Sigurðr's men must be assumed to have made enough noise to have woken Haraldr up by breaking the door down if he had not been sleeping so heavily because of his drunken state. Anyway, *Msk* and *MblHg* both state that the king woke up after the first blows and was able to talk to his mistress Þóra, but in his half-sleeping state he still seems not to suspect that someone might have planned to kill him during the night, far less that his assailants are led by the man who claims to be his brother.<sup>33</sup> Actually, his words to Þóra "*Sárt býr þú nú við mik, Þóra*" ('Now you are treating me cruelly, Thóra!') may suggest that he thought that Þóra herself was striking at him, or perhaps that she wanted to start a sexual intercourse with him

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<sup>32</sup> Trans. Finlay (263-264): 'On this same night Sigurðr contrived it for King Haraldr and his men that the king's bodyguard was outside the room where everyone believed he was sleeping, and the one that he was actually in was unguarded. Then during the night Sigurðr and his men came to the room and got in before the king woke up, and at once made an armed attack on him. So King Haraldr gilli lost his life from many wounds. That was towards the end of the night.'

(in this case it may imply that Haraldr has violent and slightly perverse sexual tastes).<sup>34</sup>

Contrary to the sagas' usual precision in specifying the name of the person who inflicted the mortal blow during an attack (Salvucci 692-693), we are not told either who the slayers among Sigurðr's men were or what wounds the King received. Only Snorri specifies, before Haraldr's death, that Ívarr Kolbeinsson was the first to inflict a wound on him: *Fagrskinna* mentions this only later (as Snorri also does), when Ívarr falls in Magnús blindi's last battle.<sup>35</sup>

*Msk* is the only source that lists the names of all those who went into Þóra's bedroom together with Sigurðr slembidjárn (p. 413, ll. 14-16), but Ívarr Kolbeinsson is not among them. *Msk* agrees with the other sources in mentioning the fall of Ívarr during Magnús blindi's last battle (*Msk* p. 433, ll. 11), but does not say that he was involved in the killing of Haraldr.<sup>36</sup>

Both *Msk* (p. 414, ll. 15-17) and *Hsona* (ch. 1) report that after his death Haraldr started to be considered a saint by some: perhaps the circumstances of his assassination, perpetrated when he was defenceless and unarmed, may have led people to regard his violent death as an actual martyrdom. According to Cormack (*Saints and Sinners* 199), "attempts to establish the holiness of fallen leaders were almost the rule, rather than the exception, during the twelfth century, even when

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<sup>33</sup> See above p. 137, where King Haraldr gilli thought that his kinsman Magnús could not want to attack and kill him (*MblHg* ch. 2).

<sup>34</sup> This scene recalls the killing of Þorgrímr by Gísli while he is sleeping with Þórdís, reported in *Gísla saga* (ch. 16). For an analysis of sexual, cultural and literary implications of this scene see Andersson (*Some Ambiguities in Gísla saga* 37-39); Meulengracht Sørensen (*Murder in the marital bed* 249-253); Hermann Pálsson (*Death in Autumn* 16-19).

<sup>35</sup> *Ívarr gekk inn at Haraldri ok vann fyrst at hónum.* (*Fsk* ch. 99, p. 334).  
*Sá Ívarr gekk inn at Haraldri konungi ok vann fyrstr á honum.* (*Hsona* ch. 10).

<sup>36</sup> On these characters see Bjarni Guðnason (128).

the life of the individual in question had been less than exemplary." In line with its usual concern for the afterlife and its knowledge of Christian ethics and beliefs, *Msk* had taken 'preventive measures' as regards Haraldr's soul, reporting that Bishop Magnús Einarsson had tried to ensure some intercession for him (see above p. 142-3). Notwithstanding this, both *Msk*'s and Snorri's accounts seem to be designed, as Cormack asserts (*Saints and Sinners* 199), to disprove the claim for holiness: Haraldr had died in the bed of his mistress, and he was too drunk to be entirely aware of the sudden attack on him. As the ancient litanies suggest, the so-called *mors repentina* was very much feared in the Middle Ages:

*Ab subitanea et improuisa morte libera.*<sup>37</sup>

Sudden death was considered ignominious and shameful, especially in the case of a murder, because the victim was somehow corrupted by the turpitude of his killing (Ariès, *L'uomo e la morte* 11-12), and this feeling would inevitably be strengthened when the victim's own gluttony and lust had helped to make the murder possible. The fact that *Msk* remains silent about King Haraldr's burial place could be connected not only with the villainous deeds he performed during his life, but also with his disgraceful death. *Msk*'s author must certainly have been aware of King Haraldr's burial place, but perhaps he preferred to keep silent about it because it would have offended the religious sensitivities of himself and his circle to admit that, despite the circumstances of his death, Haraldr had been buried in consecrated ground.

Unlike *Msk*, *Fsk* and Snorri state that King Haraldr gilli was buried in the old Kristkirkja in Bergen (Pesch 135-136):

*Lík Haralds konungs var jarðat í Kristkirkju enni fornu. (Fsk ch. 96 p. 329)*<sup>38</sup>

*Haraldr konungr var jarðaðr í Kristskirkju inni fornu. (MblHg ch. 16)*<sup>39</sup>

The murder of King Haraldr by Sigurðr slembidjárn is condemned in all the sources, though in each case this condemnation is expressed through the response of the people rather than the explicit opinion of the author. *Msk* (p. 413, ll. 25-34) says that when Sigurðr asked the men on the quay to accept him as king, they replied that they would never serve a man who had murdered his brother, and if Sigurðr was not King Haraldr's brother, then he had no right by birth to be called a king. The men insist that the perpetrators of the murder should be outlawed and condemned to death, and Sigurðr and his men realise that their only hope is to leave. Snorri's account is very similar to this (*MblHg* ch. 16), except that he reports that there was actual fighting when Sigurðr and his men were declared outlaws.

*Fsk* (ch. 96) expresses the men's objection rather differently and raises an additional issue. Here, they say that they do not believe that Sigurðr really is the son of Magnús berfœttr, but if he were, then his mother Þóra was the sister of Sigríðr, the mother of Magnús berfœttr's son Óláfr, so that his paternity claim would amount to an assertion that his father Magnús berfœttr had committed incest by sleeping with two sisters (*Fsk* ch. 96, *Msk* p. 405, ll. 18-22). In that case, Sigurðr's unpropitious birth has been confirmed in the fact that he has now murdered his brother. On the other hand, *Fsk* does not report any legal

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<sup>37</sup> 'Grant deliverance from sudden and unforeseen death', *Manuale Norvegicum* (p. 14, l. 18).

<sup>38</sup> Trans. Finlay (264): 'King Haraldr's body was buried in the old Christ Church.'

<sup>39</sup> Trans. Hollander (735): 'King Harald was buried in the Old Christ Church.'

proceedings against Sigurðr and his men, so in this account the moral revulsion at the deed is heightened, but there is no element of legal retribution for it, and there is thus a stronger sense that the old 'rules' have broken down and that power is the only law.

In spite of the people's opposition, Sigurðr did not abandon his attempts to find supporters. The sources say that he retreated to Hörðaland and persuaded the farmers there to proclaim him king.<sup>40</sup> To increase his following further, he is said to have gone to take Magnús blindi out of the cloister of Hólmr.<sup>41</sup> Both Snorri and *Msk* say that Sigurðr slembidjárn took Magnús out of the cloister by force and against the will of the monks (and Snorri adds, probably by way of explaining their objection, that Magnús had already received ordination as a monk). But they also say that most people's account is that Magnús went willingly, and *Msk* adds that this was because he would have accepted any improvement in his lot.

Escaping from monasteries was a cause for automatic excommunication (Jørgensen 22), and it seems likely that Magnús and his followers may in historical fact have tried to avoid this by pretending that Magnús had been kidnapped.

Sigurðr slembidjárn and Magnús succeeded in gathering forces, but they had to face the opposition of the chieftains that had chosen King Haraldr's sons as their kings. These were Sigurðr, who was four years old and was elected by the people in Trondheim, and Ingi, the son of Queen Ingiríðr, who was accepted as a

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<sup>40</sup> *MblHg* ch. 16; *Msk* p. 414, ll. 1-3; *Fsk* ch. 96, p. 330.

<sup>41</sup> *Hsona* ch. 2; *Msk* p. 415 ll. 8-13; *Fsk* ch. 96, p. 330.

king at the Borgarþing when he was two.<sup>42</sup> *Msk* and Snorri say that the two children were chosen as kings principally because their father was considered holy (see above p. 149).<sup>43</sup>

What followed was a series of killings and raids into Norwegian territory by the troops of Sigurðr slembidjárn and Magnús blindi, which caused many casualties but which were driven back by King Ingi's supporters. But it was only when King Ingi's chieftains asked King Sigurðr's troops to support them that the final battle was fought. In that naval battle, fought at the entrance of the Oslofjord, by *Hólmr inn grái*, Magnús blindi lost his life and Sigurðr slembidjárn fell into the hands of the enemies who would put him to death.

The three sources agree that on one side, off the coast, Magnús and Sigurðr's fleet was drawn up, with both Danish and Norwegian troops. On the other there were twenty large ships belonging to King Ingi and King Sigurðr. Right at the beginning of the battle the Danes fled southward with eighteen ships, and soon after that the ships of Magnús and Sigurðr were cleared of men.<sup>44</sup>

It was the day after the feast of Saint Martin (November 11<sup>th</sup>), the saint who divided his cloak into two parts and gave one to a poor man - a symbol of heroic charity (and perhaps of the division of Norway between Magnús and Haraldr that might have prevented the present conflict). Both Snorri and *Msk* report that during

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<sup>42</sup> *Hsona* ch. 2; *Msk* p. 414, ll. 11-13 and ll. 7-9.

<sup>43</sup> Actually it seems that *Msk* and Snorri confer immediately moral authority on the two children, because they make them the active subjects of the following events, as for example when they write: *Ingi gathered his army* (*Msk* p. 373); *King Ingi proceeded against him with all his forces* (*Hsona* 2). Moreover, *Msk* (p. 415 ll. 32-33, p. 416 ll. 1-6) and *Hsona* (ch. 2) report that King Ingi was also brought to the battlefield and secured to the belt of Þjóstólfr Álason. Both sources agree that it was this event that caused the king's infirmity: his back became crooked and one of his legs was shorter than the other.

<sup>44</sup> *Hsona* ch. 10; *Msk* pp. 430-433; *Fsk* ch. 99, pp. 333-334.

the battle Magnús blindi was lying in his bed, and when his ship was almost cleared, a man named Hreiðarr Grjótgarðsson took him up in his arms to leap onto another ship with him. Magnús, who had been unwilling to share his kingdom with his kinsman Haraldr, and who had rather handed it over to Norway's enemies, was to share his death with a faithful servant when the same spear transfixes them both:

*En er mjök var hroðit skip Magnús, en hann hvíldi í hvílu sinni, Hreiðarr Grjótgarðsson, er lengi hafði fylgt honum ok verit hirðmaðr hans, hann tók Magnús konung í fang sér ok vildi hlaupa á skip annat; þá var Hreiðarr skotin spjóti milli herðanna ok þar í gognum. En svá segja menn, at þar fengi Magnús konungr bana af því sama sári, ok fell Hreiðarr á bak aftr á þiljurnar, en Magnús á hann ofan. En þar mælið hvern maðr, at hann þætti vel ok þrúðliga hafa fylgt sinum lánardrótni; gott er hverjum er slíkan orðróm getr. (Hsona ch. 10)<sup>45</sup>*

*En þa er mioc var hropit scip M. en hann hvíldi ireckio sine. þa toc Hreiþar Griotgarz s. er lengi hafpi fylgt honom oc verit hirþmaðr hans. toc hann ifaðm ser oc villdi hlapa með hann a anat scip. Þa var Hreiþar scotin spioti milli herþanna oc þar igognum. oc þat sogþo menn at þar fengi M. bana af því eno sama scoti. oc fell Hreiþar a bac aptr apiliornar. en M. ahann ofan. Oc þat melto allir at hann þotti vel oc þrvlliga hafa fylgt sinom lanar drotni. oc gott er hveriom er slícan orþrom getr. (Msk p. 432, ll. 31-32; p. 433 ll. 1-9)<sup>46</sup>*

Among all the other great men enumerated by the sources who died in that battle, the focus here is firmly on a servant who sacrificed his own life in an attempt to

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<sup>45</sup> Trans. Hollander (745): 'Now when Magnús' ship was nearly cleared to where he rested on a couch, Hreiðarr Grjótgarðsson, a man who had long been with him as one of his bodyguard, took up King Magnús in his arms in order to leap with him into another ship. At that moment Hreiðarr was struck with a spear between his shoulders, so that it pierced him; and it is told that King Magnús was killed with the same spear. Hreiðarr fell backward onto the deck and Magnús on top of him. But it was all men's opinion that Hreiðarr had stood by his liege lord bravely and manfully. Fortunate he who achieves such renown.'

<sup>46</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (384): 'When Magnús's ship was nearly cleared and he was lying in his bed, Hreiðarr Grjótgarðsson, who had long been in his company and had been a retainer, picked him up and wanted to leap onto another ship. At that moment Hreiðarr was struck between the shoulders by a spearcast that pierced him. It is told that Magnús was killed by the same cast. Hreiðarr fell backward onto the deck with Magnús on the top of him. Everyone agreed that he had followed his lord well and valiantly, and any man who earns such a reputation should be praised.'

save his lord. This story will also form a lively contrast with the one about the man who betrayed Sigurðr slembidjákn to save his own life.

As we shall see again in the story of the death of Sigurðr Haraldsson (see p. 169 below), there is an ominous silence about the reputation of Magnús after his death, which contrasts with this praise of his loyal servant. Perhaps his reputation as a king had been so seriously damaged by his mutilation, and by his folly before it, that his helpless death disqualifies him from any re-evaluation as a result of his death. The only comment is Magnús's own dying remark, found only in *Msk* (p. 433, ll. 29-30), that "*Þat com .vij. vetrom til siþ*" ('that came seven years too late'): perhaps it would have been better if he had died before committing and/or suffering the crimes that had characterised the last years of his life.<sup>47</sup>

According to *Msk* (p. 438 ll. 19-20) and Snorri (*Hsona* ch. 12), Magnús blindi was buried in Oslo, in Saint Hallvarðr's church, next to his father.

Unlike the other sources, *Fsk* does not actually report the death of Magnús at all, but writes only that his ship was cleared:

*Þá ruddusk skip Sigurðar ok Magnúss. Þeir stóðu lengst fyrir Magnúsi, er hann hvíldi í rekkju sinni, Hreiðarr Grjótgarðssonr ok Saupprúðr, en allir fellu aðrir þar. (Fsk ch. 99 p. 334)<sup>48</sup>*

But whether it happened when he was lying on his bed or in Hreiðarr's arms, all three sources convey a sense of reluctance to give a direct account of how Magnús

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<sup>47</sup> Actually, this raises a further problem, since it is difficult to see what the seven years refer to. According to the *Konungsannáll*, Magnús was killed in 1139, he had been mutilated in 1135 (four years earlier), had taken up arms against his brother in the battle of Fyrileif in 1134 (five years earlier), and had come to the throne in 1130 (nine years earlier). *Msk*'s author might have got information from a tradition that dated the battle of Fyrileif in 1132, the year of a solar eclipse, which is reported, though later than its actual occurrence, in *Lögmannsannáll*. In this case, Magnús's death took place seven years after the battle in which he started subverting the social, political and religious order by attacking his kinsman Haraldr.

was killed by the troops of his kinsmen. It was probably considered too shocking and too close to contemporary political reality, a feeling that is also demonstrated when Theodoricus ends his work because he does not want to relate the "abominations" that took place during that historical period (see above pp. 131-2). The euphemistic evasions used by the three remaining sources in narrating Magnús blindi's death can certainly be ascribed to the same cultural sensibility.

The following torture of Sigurðr slembidjákn was certainly regarded as another abomination (though once again, *Fsk* says nothing about it, perhaps because the author thought it was too disgraceful even to relate). Sigurðr had tried to escape by jumping into the sea when his ship had been cleared, but he was captured in the water because one of his men, in order to save his own life, showed King Ingi's men under which shield Sigurðr was hiding. They would never have hit upon him if they had not been told where he was.<sup>49</sup>

Both Snorri and *Msk*'s author report that what happened next was witnessed by a certain Hallr (*Hsona* ch. 11; *Msk* p. 436, ll. 10-11), who was present at that time, and Snorri specifies that Eiríkr Oddsson wrote down Hallr's account in his work *\*Hryggjarstykki*.<sup>50</sup> The fact that a named informant is included here - and that there is another who reports that Sigurðr was finally buried in St. Mary's Church in Ålborg - suggests that at some stage in the tradition, the descriptive method was heavily influenced by saint's lives of the heroic martyr type. The fact

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<sup>48</sup> Trans. Finlay (269): 'The ships of Sigurðr and Magnús were cleared. Hreiðarr Grjótgarðsson and Saupprúðr withstood longest in the troop of Magnús, who was lying on his bed, but all the others fell there.'

<sup>49</sup> *Hsona* ch. 11; *Msk* p. 434-435. Although Sigurðr slembidjákn has generally been presented as a disgraceful character, both sources present his attempt to escape as brave and resourceful. Both also include the curious detail of how he carried a tinderbox, with the dry tinder inside a waxed walnut shell.

that *Msk* and Snorri both include these features suggests that this element is derived from the account in *\*Hryggjarstykki*.

It is clear that torture was considered an abomination by most of the people, because the chieftains wanted to have Sigurðr killed instantly, and refused to watch the torture.<sup>51</sup> Only the men who were said to be the cruellest, and who thought they had injuries to avenge, inflicted torture on Sigurðr.

The two accounts differ somewhat on the details of the torture and it seems difficult to decide whether *Msk* and Snorri were both omitting different details of what was rather a long account in *\*Hryggjarstykki*, or whether (as may perhaps seem more likely) both of them added unhistorical details for their own literary reasons. The opening detail of the binding that is so tight that it cuts the flesh of his arms is only in *Msk*. The breaking of his arms and legs is shared by both accounts, as is the stripping. *Msk* says that they then scalped him, while Snorri (perhaps more realistically, and therefore more horrifyingly) says that they tried to scalp him, but couldn't because of all the blood (which would presumably prevent them from seeing what they were doing). The whipping is the same in both sources (and perhaps the stripping and whipping were intended by Eiríkr to remind readers of the scourging of Christ, even if they had probably also been done in historical fact). The detail that his back was broken is only in Snorri's account,<sup>52</sup> but the breaking of his bones could be a historical detail, added by the torturers in an attempt to prevent his death from being compared to that of Christ,

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<sup>50</sup> For a review of the sources see chapter 1.3.

<sup>51</sup> *Hsona* ch. 12; *Msk* p. 436. As regards the use of torture and cruelty see Bagge (*Society and Politics* 169-170).

<sup>52</sup> The breaking of the backbone may be connected with the ancient Germanic belief that a dead body can only come back to life if the skeleton is undamaged (Ström, *On the Sacral Origin* 221).

of whom it is said that 'a bone of him shall not be broken' (John 19,36). *Msk* says that they did not hang him until he was already dead, but Snorri omits this, thus giving the impression that he actually died by hanging. The beheading is only in Snorri.

At any rate, it is certain that the final hanging of Sigurðr's body and its burial in a heap of stones were meant to humiliate him. According to Ström (*On the Sacral Origin* 108):

*"this treatment was accorded not only to the corpses of criminals who had been stoned to death, but also to certain other categories of dead persons, chiefly evil-doers, people who had practised witchcraft or in other ways given evidence of an evil character and been deprived of their lives in a way corresponding to their social disgrace."*

This kind of burial must have been recognised as implying deep disgrace, and it probably still had a symbolic meaning: when a priest brought Sigurðr's body to his church to bury it "though he was a friend of Haraldr's sons", as the sources make clear (*Hsona* ch. 12; *Msk* p. 438, l. 12), Haraldr's sons (i.e. probably their advisors) were angry with him, and they had the body carried back to where it had been and made the priest pay a fine.<sup>53</sup> This action must also have been regarded as unjust, since burying the dead was recognised as one of the six corporal acts of mercy, and the priest would therefore be regarded as simply having behaved as a good Christian should. Sigurðr's friends afterwards came from Denmark with a ship for his body, carried it to Ålborg, and interred it there in Saint Mary's church (*Hsona* ch. 12; *Msk* p. 438, ll. 14-18).

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<sup>53</sup> As *Msk* had not written before where Sigurðr's body was buried, it reports that it was brought to the church by the priest, but then it was taken away and covered with a heap of stones. The priest had to pay compensation for his action (*Msk* 438, ll. 10-14).

Even though he was neither a successful nor a virtuous leader, Sigurðr slembidjárn assumed an heroic dimension through his extraordinary death, which, as Bagge asserts (*Society and Politics* 170), seems to show a combination of Germanic stoicism with Christian piety:

*Svo sagði Hallr að hann mælti fátt og svaraði fá þótt menn orti orða á hann, en það segir Hallr, at hann brásk aldri við, heldr en þeir lysti á stökk eða stein. En það lét hann fylgja, at þat mátti vera um góðan dreng, þann er vel væri að þrek búinn, að svá mátti standask piningar að því, að maðr heldi munni sínum eða brygði sér lítt við, en það sagði hann, at aldri brá hann máli sínu og jafnléttmæltr sem þá, at hann væri á qlbekk inni, hvárki mælti hann hæra né lægra eða skjálfhendra en sem vanði hans var til. Mælti hann allt til þess, er hann andaðist, ok sǫng þriðjung ór psalteriό, ok lézk honum þat þykkja um fram eljan og styrk annarra manna. (Hsona ch. 12)<sup>54</sup>*

*Msk*'s text, quoting the verses by Ívarr Ingimundarson, adds that Sigurðr prayed for his enemies before dying (s. 244), while the verses themselves add that this was despite the fact that they had not even allowed him to be shriven by a priest before they tortured him to death (s. 245). This detail would by itself have been enough to make the manner of his killing into a wicked act. It is true that Ívarr appears to have been the poet of Sigurðr slembidjárn (Guðbrandur Vigfússon II, 257), and he obviously tries to extol his acts, but it seems strange that *Msk* has not been careful enough to omit a detail that could have turned Sigurðr into a saint. It is clear beyond doubt that the story of Sigurðr's death has been influenced by many translated saints' lives, and the author of *Msk* was probably conscious of this. He seems to have been willing to imitate the literary models of a Christian death, which is not passively accepted, but it is an "act of

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<sup>54</sup> Trans. Hollander (749): 'According to Hall he did not budge anymore than if they struck stone or wood. But he added that it took a man of rare strength of mind to stand being tortured in such fashion as not to say a word or to budge; nor did he raise his voice anymore than if he sat drinking. He did not speak with a higher or lower voice, nor more tremulously, than was his custom. He

death", resembling the death of Christ. Although this does not amount to any sort of suggestion that Sigurðr slembidjárn was a saint, it does probably imply that the *Msk* author (and probably also Eiríkr Oddsson and Snorri) thought that even the most wicked of men might save his soul by a conspicuously Christian death.

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spoke until the very last, and sang a third part of the Psalter. Hall thought that betokened endurance and strength beyond that of other men.'

## CHAPTER 8

### SIGURÐR (1136-1155), EYSTEINN (1142-1157) AND INGI (1136-1161), SONS OF HARALDR GILLI

Frá ek land vörn ept liðinn ræsi  
Sygna grams at synir tœki :  
var Eysteinn Inga bróðir  
sóknar-giarn, enn Sigurðr annarr.  
Náði frægt í friði at standa  
þeygi lengi þeirra ríki :  
þvi-at þeir bræðr, er bruto scéri,  
bana-spiót bárosk eptir.  
Varat saklaust þá-er Sigurðr hæfðu  
frékinn mann fiærvi ræntan:  
sá er í fold hiá feðr sínom  
í Biærgin buinn at liggja.  
Var Eysteinn austan-Fiarðar  
lífi rænt af liði Inga :  
nú er sá gramr grundo ausinn  
andar sparr austr at Forsi.  
Stóð einart Inga ríki  
áttíán vetr ok aðra siau:  
unz Hákon með her-liði  
austr í Vík Inga felldi.  
Sá er gunn-diarfr gramr í Oslo  
hauðri hulðr at hæfoð-kirkjo.  
(*Konunga-Tal* stt. 62-67)<sup>1</sup>

The murder of Haraldr gilli by Sigurðr slembi and the killing of Magnús blindi by followers of his cousins King Ingi and Sigurðr had obviously touched a raw nerve of public sensibility. This can be vividly seen in the decision by Theodoricus to end his narrative before these events, and in the way the other

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. Guðbrandr Vigfússon (318-319): 'I know that after the king's death his sons took charge of the land – Eystan and Sigurd, the brothers of Ingi. Their rule did not long endure peacefully, for the brothers broke their oaths, and took up the spear of deadly strife. It was not guiltlessly that Sigurd was robbed of his life; he was duly laid by his father in Bergen. Eystan was robbed of his life by Ingi's following east of the Firth [of Christiania]. He lies lifeless with the earth heaped above him east by Force. Ingi's sway endured eighteen winters and seven to boot, till Hakon with his army struck him down east in the Wick. He is shrouded in mould at the cathedral at Oslo.'

sources seek to soften the devastating reality by using euphemistic expressions, excuses and justifications in their narrative.

After Magnús's death the situation worsened, and the issue of strife between kinsmen became more and more immediate. The sons of Haraldr gilli, the Haraldssonar, started fighting and killing each other and each other's followers, and they upset the delicate political equilibrium during the so-called civil wars of the 1150s.

According to the sources Eysteinn, another son of Haraldr gilli, came from Scotland when kings Sigurðr and Ingi had ruled over Norway for about six years.<sup>2</sup> He obtained one third of the realm, because King Haraldr himself had testified to his paternal descent.

Snorri also gives a brief account of a fourth brother, Magnús, who is only mentioned elsewhere in the final genealogy in *Fsk* (ch. 29, p. 372), quoting a stanza by Einarr Skúlason in praise of the Haraldssonar in which Magnús is named:<sup>3</sup>

*Auð gefr Eysteinn lýðum.  
Eykr hjaldr Sigurðr skjaldar.  
Lætr Ingi sløg syngva.  
Semr Magnús frið bragna.  
Fjöldýrs, hafa fjórir,  
folktjald, komit aldri,  
ryðr bragnings kyn blóði,  
bræðr und sól æðri. (Hsona ch. 14, v. 217)<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> *Hsona* ch. 13; *Msk* p. 440; *Fsk* ch. 99, p. 334.

<sup>3</sup> Einarr Skúlason was one of the most important poets of the twelfth century. He was an Icelander, but seems to have lived most of his life in Norway (Guðbrandur Vigfússon II, 258). He wrote in praise of King Sigurðr Jórslafari, Haraldr gilli and the Haraldssonar. His most famous poem was a praise poem on St. Óláfr, alluded to in *Msk* p. 446 ll. 2-7 and named *Geisli* in *Flatjarbók*. On *Geisli* see Weber.

<sup>4</sup> Trans. Guðbrandur Vigfússon (II, 269): 'Eystan gives men riches, Sigurd makes the shield-fray to rise, Ingi lets the arrows ring, Magnus brings peace to men. Four such noble brethren of royal blood have never come beneath the sun's canopy.'

Perhaps Magnús had to be mentioned simply because of the verse, but Snorri must have relied on some documents that the other sources did not know, because he reports precisely that King Magnús was diseased in his leg and died a natural death (*Hsona* ch. 14). Einarr Skúlason probably did not know much about Magnús either, but he had to praise his main quality as well as those of the other three brothers, so he attaches to him the characteristic of ‘bringing peace to men’. Snorri specifies that Magnús lived only for a short time (*‘lifði litla hrið’*); despite this, the fact that he had died a natural death caused him to have the same positive quality attributed to him as was given to those of his predecessors who had shared the same kind of death.<sup>5</sup>

In marked contrast with this, the description Einarr Skúlason provides of the other brothers corresponds with the usual rhetoric of praise for military achievement. King Sigurðr, according to Einarr, is the one who ‘makes the shield-fray to rise’, but in the prose sources he is described as an overbearing man: *Msk* writes that he was like that from his youth, while *Ágrip* and Snorri specify that he began to be a very ungovernable and restless man as he grew up.<sup>6</sup>

King Eysteinn, in Einarr’s poem, is said to ‘give men riches’, but in the prose sources he is described as being avaricious and covetous, and it is probably for this reason that he lost the support of his people at the end of his life.<sup>7</sup> *Msk*

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<sup>5</sup> Namely the kings who are said to have been brought wealth and peace to his country are Óláfr kyrr (*Ólkyrr* ch. 8; *Fsk* ch. 79 p. 299; *Ágrip* ch. 43, 56; *Theod.* ch. 29); Eysteinn and Sigurðr Magnússon (*Msona* ch. 33; *Msk* p. 381, ll. 33-34, p. 382, l. 1; *Ágrip* ch. 52; *Theod.* ch. 32).

<sup>6</sup> *Msk* p. 445 ll. 27-28; *Ágrip* ch. 60; *Hsona* ch. 21.

<sup>7</sup> *‘hann var sinkr ok fégjarn.’* (*Hsona* ch. 21); *‘allra var hann fegiarnastr.’* (*Msk* p. 445 l. 30); *‘[hann var] fastr ok fégjarn.’* (*Ágrip* ch. 60). *Fsk* does not directly express a negative judgement on Eysteinn, and significantly, it omits the sentence in which Hallkell húkr accuses the king of being mean with his men (*Hsona* ch. 31; *Msk* p. 461 l. 15). *Fsk* gives no direct judgement on the characters of Sigurðr and Ingi.

states that King Eysteinn was a great friend of Einarr, and it reports two episodes involving the two of them in which the poet shows his great skill in composing verses (*Msk* pp. 446-448). Einarr also wrote a poem about Eysteinn, which is preserved in *Hsona* (ch. 19-20) and *Msk* (pp. 442-445).

King Ingi is described by the prose sources as having been popular with the people. Moreover, *Ágrip* and Snorri write that he was friendly and generous, and that he had a very handsome countenance despite being short, lame and humpbacked.<sup>8</sup> As Bagge has noted (*Society and Politics* 157), Snorri's portrait of Ingi is fairly sympathetic, and he thus "seems to be more indulgent toward weak kings than toward those who are ruthless and aggressive." Moreover, Andersson and Gade (*Morkinskinna*, 69-70) specify that aside from the quoted passage (*Msk* p. 446 ll. 1-2), in *Msk* "there are other indications of a pro-Ingi bias". These include the good relations he is said to have maintained with Cardinal Nicholas, the pope-to-be Adrian IV, who visited Norway during the reign of the Haraldssonar.<sup>9</sup> Above all, *Msk* seems to exonerate King Ingi from the charge of having abetted the killing of his brother Sigurðr (see below pp. 169-170).

The events that characterised the rule of the sons of Haraldr gilli can only be followed in the texts of Snorri, *Msk* and *Fsk*, because the *Ágrip* manuscript breaks

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<sup>8</sup> *Msk* p. 446 ll. 1-2; *Ágrip* ch. 60; *Hsona* ch. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Cardinal Nicholas's visit to Norway is described in *Msk* pp. 453-454, *Fsk* ch. 99 p. 335 and *Hsona* ch. 23. Nicholas (Adrian IV) was pope from 1154 to 1159. Before achieving the Papal See, Nicholas studied in France and was abbot of St. Rufus in Avignon, a monastery belonging to the Austin canons. In 1152 Nicholas was sent on a delicate and important mission to Scandinavia, as papal legate. On his return to Rome he was hailed as the Apostle of the North, and, after the death of Anastasius IV (1154), he was elected the successor of St. Peter. See Bunson (s.v. 'Adrian IV'). As the only ever English pope, Adrian IV probably had a better understanding of the politics of northern countries than was usual in the college of cardinals.

off soon after the description of the brothers, when writing about the dispute between Geirsteinn and Gyða (this episode is reported in *Msk* pp. 448-453).

The sources write that good peace was maintained in Norway in the first years of the rule of the Haraldssonar, as long as their old counsellors and foster fathers were alive,<sup>10</sup> but that when these advisors were all dead a furious dispute arose between the brothers. Above all, when King Sigurðr and King Eysteinn met to bring about a reconciliation between them, they ended up by planning to depose King Ingi, because they thought he lacked the physical good health to be an effective king.<sup>11</sup> They arranged a meeting in Bergen: King Ingi and Grégóriús got there first with a large force, King Sigurðr arrived a little later with a smaller force, and King Eysteinn was delayed.

King Ingi, supported by his friend and counsellor Grégóriús, used the meeting to denounce the plot of his brothers and appeal for popular support. When the people said they were willing to support King Ingi, King Sigurðr pleaded not guilty to his brother's charge and accused Grégóriús of having spread a false rumour about him. A few days after the meeting a follower of Grégóriús was killed by a follower of King Sigurðr. King Ingi succeeded in demurring at Grégóriús's desire to attack King Sigurðr, but when a retainer of King Ingi was also killed by a follower of King Sigurðr (that same evening according to *Hsona* ch. 27; a few days later according to *Msk* p. 456, ll. 7-8) he could not oppose the arguments of his mother and Grégóriús any longer.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Hsona* ch. 21; *Msk* p. 445 ll. 18-19; *Fsk* ch. 99 p. 334.

<sup>11</sup> *Hsona* ch. 26; *Msk* p. 454 ll. 27-31 – p. 455 ll. 1-7; *Fsk* ch. 99 p. 335.

<sup>12</sup> *Hsona* ch. 26-27; *Msk* pp. 455 -456; *Fsk* ch. 99 pp. 335-336.

The sources report that when Queen Ingiríðr was leaving vespers, she passed by as his son's retainer was killed. She then went directly to King Ingi and told him the news, urging him to seek revenge because if he allowed his courtiers to be killed one after another he would not be much of a king. Afterwards Grégóriús goes to the king, clad in helmet and coat of mail, ready to attack King Sigurðr. When most people try to dissuade the king from attacking, Grégóriús accuses Ingi of being too reluctant to support his friends: they will be picked off one by one, and eventually Ingi himself will be removed from the throne. He also says that he himself has no intention of waiting to be slaughtered like an ox, and seems to imply that the king's poor health makes him unable and unwilling to defend his men as he should - i.e. that the view of him taken by his brothers is to some extent justified.<sup>13</sup>

Following Grégóriús's determination to fight, and probably because he wants to show that his accusations are unfounded, King Ingi decides to attack his brother King Sigurðr in Bergen. The assault on King Sigurðr shows the same dynamics in all three medieval compendia of Norwegian history (*Hsona* ch. 28; *Msk* pp. 457; *Fsk* ch. 99 pp. 336). King Sigurðr is attacked when he is in Sigríðr sæta's lodgings. Although the sources do not specify whether she was his mistress, as this is the only occurrence of her name, the circumstances of King Sigurðr's death recall the motif of death in the midst of one's sins that we have already seen in the story of Sigurðr Magnússon, who contracted a controversial marriage with Cecilia (*Msk* p. 399), and in the killing of Haraldr gilli, who was sleeping with his

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<sup>13</sup> *Hsona* ch. 27; *Msk* p. 456-457.

mistress Þóra when he was attacked (*MblHg* ch. 16; *Msk* p. 413, ll. 3-16, *Fsk* ch. 96).

Snorri and *Msk* specify that King Sigurðr was prepared for an assault, but he thought that nothing would come of the attack ('[*Sigurðr konungr*] ætlaði, at ekki mundi af at göngunni verða').<sup>14</sup> Right from the beginning of the tale of King Sigurðr's killing then, it seems that the sources want to stress that the possibility of a direct conflict between the two brothers is regarded as very remote by both of them. King Sigurðr probably thinks that his brother is unable to lead an attack because of his poor health, or that he will never have the nerve to overstep the natural rules of loyalty between kinsmen, and indeed it does prove very difficult for Grégóriús and Queen Ingiríðr to convince King Ingi that he must attack his brother.

Nevertheless the fight begins. Both Snorri (*Hsona* ch. 28) and *Msk* (p. 457, ll. 10-13) report that King Ingi's men attack the house from all four sides, which clearly diminishes the idea of Sigurðr's courage when outnumbered, since he clearly has no option but to fight. The same two sources also make it clear that the most difficult and dangerous attack, that from the street, is made by Grégóriús and his men, and not by Ingi, who is once more characterised as less martial than Grégóriús.

King Sigurðr and his men try to hit back against the enemy offensive but Grégóriús and his men succeed in breaking down the house gate:

*Þeir hjoggu húsin, ok gekk lið Sigurðar af hendi honum til griða. Þá gekk Sigurðr á lopt eitt ok vildi beiða sér hljóðs, en hann hafði gullroðinn skjöld, ok kenndu menn hann ok vildu eigi hlýða honum. Menn skutu at honum, svá sem i drifu sæi, ok mátti hann eigi þar vera. En þá er liðit var*

<sup>14</sup> *Hsona* ch. 28; *Msk* p. 457, ll. 9-10.

*gengit af hendi honum ok menn hjoggu húsinn mjök, þá gekk hann út ok Þórðr húsfreyja með honum, hirðmaðr hans, vikverskr maðr, ok vildu þannug, sem Ingi konungr var fyrir, ok kallaði Sigurðr á Inga, bróður sinn, at hann skyldi selja honum grið, en þeir váru þegar högggnir báðir. Fell Þórðr húsfreyja með orðlofi miklu. (Hsona ch. 28)<sup>15</sup>*

*En þeir Ingi konungr hiogo hvsin til þeira. oc gecc liþit Sigvrþar af hendi honom til griða. Þa gek S. konungr alopt eitt oc villdi beiða ser hliops. oc hafði sciold gvlloþin. oc kendo menn hann þegar. oc villdo eigi hlyða honom oc scvto at honom sem idrifo sei. oc matti hann eigi nv þar vera. oc er nv liþit mioc gengit af hondom honom ..... oc Þorþr hvsfreyja með honom hirþmaþr hans .... oc kallapi Sigurþr konungr aInga konungr broþor sinn at hann scylldi selia honom grið. En þeir voro þa baþir hognir. oc fell þar Þorþr hvsfreyja með orþlofi miclo. (Msk p. 457 ll. 18-30)<sup>16</sup>*

*Þeir Ingi hjoggu hús til þeira, ok gekk liðit mjök til griða. Þá gekk Sigurðr konungr út ok beiddisk hljóðs. Hann hafði skjöld gullroðinn, ok kenndu menn hann brátt ok vildu eigi hlýða honum, ok skutu menn at honum svá sem í drifu sæi. Þá er liðit var mjök gengit af hendi honum, þá hjoggusk húsinn fast; þá gekk hann út fyrir honum Þórðr húsfreyja. Þeir vildu þangat til sem Ingi var, ok kallaði Sigurðr til griða við bróður sinn, ok hann vildi gefa honum grið, en því var eigi hlýtt ok váru þeir þegar högggnir. (Fsk ch. 99, p. 336)<sup>17</sup>*

The judgement on King Sigurðr seems to be very unfavourable in all three sources, because he is not made to die an honourable death. First of all they agree

<sup>15</sup> Trans. Hollander (762-763): 'Then they tore down the house; and then Sigurth's men deserted him and asked for quarter. Then Sigurth went up to the loft and wanted to talk to the attackers; but he carried a gilt shield, and so was recognized, and they did not want to listen to him. They shot at him, and their arrows came as thick as falling snow, so he could not stay there. And when his men had deserted him and the houses were being broken down he came out with Thórhth Húsfreyja, one of his henchmen, a man from Vík. They went in the direction where King Ingi stood, and Sigurth appealed to Ingi to give him quarter. But both were cut down. Thórhth Húsfreyja fell after a brave fight.'

<sup>16</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (400): 'King Ingi and his men cut their way through the houses to them, and Sigurðr's troops deserted him and asked for a truce. Then King Sigurðr went to an upper room and wanted leave to speak. He had a gilt shield, and people recognized him immediately. They had no wish to listen and loosed a hail of arrows at him so that he could not remain there. By this time his troops were much depleted \*and the buildings in shambles. King Sigurðr then went out\* together with Þórðr húsfreyja, \*a man from Vík. He went to the place where King Ingi was located\*. King Sigurðr called on his brother King Ingi to grant him a truce, but both were hewn down. Þórðr húsfreyja fell there with great renown.'

<sup>17</sup> Trans. Finlay (271): 'Ingi's men broke into the house to get at them, and much of the troop accepted quarter. Then King Sigurðr went out and asked for a hearing. He was carrying a gilded shield, and people quickly recognised him and would not listen to him, and men shot arrows at him that looked like driving snow. By the time most of his troop had left his side, the buildings were very much torn apart; then he went out with Þórðr húsfreyja (Housewife) in front of him. They were trying to get to where Ingi was, and Sigurðr called out to ask his brother for quarter, and he was willing to give him quarter, but no notice was taken of this, and they were cut down at once.'

that most of Sigurðr's men deserted him to save their own lives - which suggests his unpopularity as well as their lack of loyalty. Second, they all agree that the reason why Sigurðr cannot obtain a hearing is because of his gold-adorned shield - which may suggest his habitual arrogance. Third, all agree that Sigurðr is cut down when he desperately tries to ask for a not very heroic *grið* (i.e. to be spared in return for surrendering).<sup>18</sup> Fourth, in *Fsk*'s text it seems that Sigurðr even shelters behind Þórðr húsfreyja, his one loyal retainer, when he tries to get to where Ingi is, probably because he does not dare to expose himself to danger (*'þá gekk hann út fyrir hönunum Þórðr húsfreyja'*). Þórðr húsfreyja, who dies together with the king, is explicitly praised in both *Msk* and *Hsona* (*'fell með orðlofi miklu'*): their corresponding silence on the subject of King Sigurðr's death is remarkably meaningful.

The verdict on King Ingi, however, seems to be more problematic, since he could be seen either as an honourable Christian who tries to forgive the provocations against him for as long as he can, or as a weakling who fails to control his men (as Grégórífús implies and as the fact that he is not in the front line of the fighting suggests). Anyway, there was probably much debate after the killing of King Sigurðr, especially about the extent to which King Ingi was responsible for it.

*Fsk* (ch. 99 p. 337) is the only source to write that this action was criticised, and that people held King Ingi responsible (*'Þá var illa um þetta verk rætt, ok kenndu menn ráðin Inga konungi'*). However, it is also the only one to state explicitly that he was willing to grant King Sigurðr a truce (*'ok hann vildi gefa*

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<sup>18</sup> As regards the use of *grið* see Guðrun Nordal (*Ethics and Action* 192-198).

*hónum grið*). It quotes Einarr Skúlason's *Ingadrápa* to witness that King Ingi was not to be blamed, as most people believed:

*Alls engi þarf Inga  
ulfgrennir þat kenna  
-hverr spyri satt af snerru  
seggr- at gram bitu eggjar.  
Bøð gatat stillir stöðvat  
styrjarmildr þótt vildi;  
fús vas fjörspell ræsi  
fylkis sveit at veita. (Fsk ch. 99 p. 337 v. 269)<sup>19</sup>*

This is an interesting and a rather rare example of a skaldic poet having to excuse his lord rather than praise him. *Msk* (p. 458 ll. 4-11) uses the same poem in a different context, writing that when King Eysteinn arrived and anchored off Bergen, he consulted Einarr Skúlason to find out who was to blame for the killing of King Sigurðr, and Einarr recited his poem in order to justify King Ingi.<sup>20</sup> Both *Msk* and *Fsk* also quote two other stanzas of Einarr's poem, in which it is reported that Grégóriús was carrying the king's standard and that King Sigurðr would have not been killed if King Eysteinn had arrived in time for the meeting in Bergen.<sup>21</sup>

What certainly is clear from Einarr's poem is his judgement on the onslaught: '*brøðr hafa barz a vipri / Biorgyn fyr osynio*'.<sup>22</sup> This fratricidal battle had been fought for no good reason, and moreover it had caused many casualties,

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<sup>19</sup> *Hsona* (s. 228). Trans. Finlay (272): 'To blame Ingi no wolf-nourisher / has need –let all learn / the true story of the skirmish- / that swords cut down the ruler. / The war-eager king was not able / to end the fight, though he wished to; / keen was the ruler's retinue / to wreak death on the king.'

<sup>20</sup> This last point may cast doubt on the historicity of the account in *Msk* - it seems rather unlikely that a court poet who had been asked to recite by a king would criticise that king so severely to his face, especially when they were and remained friends.

<sup>21</sup> *Fsk* ch. 99 p. 337 s. 270-271; *Msk* p. 458 s. 262 and p. 459 s. 263.

<sup>22</sup> *Fsk* ch. 99 p. 337 s. 270; *Msk* p. 458 s. 262. Trans. Finlay (272): 'In the middle of Björgyn brothers fought for no reason.'

including some who had belonged to neither party, but had been shot on the piers or out in the ships, as both *Hsona* and *Msk* report.<sup>23</sup>

King Sigurðr was buried in the old Kristkirkja in Bergen (Pesch 136).<sup>24</sup> The sources do not add whether anybody mourned for his death.

Although Kings Ingi and Eysteinn were formally reconciled after King Sigurðr's killing, they were soon accusing each other of not fulfilling what had been promised, and on both sides they killed each other's friends. Both kings gathered their troops, but King Ingi and Grégóriús enticed many people away from King Eysteinn.<sup>25</sup>

When the opposing fleets faced each other, King Eysteinn asked people to support him, but there was no applause at his speech, and in the night many of King Eysteinn's ships rowed secretly away. *Msk* and Snorri seem to explain King Eysteinn's lack of popularity among his people as resulting from his avarice, because they both say that after the king's speech, Hallkell húkr, father of Símon skálpr, the one who would afterwards kill him, shouted at him: "Let your chests of gold support you now and defend your land!" (*'Fylgi gullkistur þínar þér nú ok veri land þitt!'*).<sup>26</sup>

The conclusion was that King Eysteinn's men did not think themselves sufficiently strong to oppose King Ingi's force. They retreated to the forest, and every one fled his own way, so that the king was left with only one man.

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<sup>23</sup> *Hsona* ch. 28; *Msk* p. 457 ll. 33-34 – p. 458 l. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Hsona* ch. 28; *Msk* p. 457 ll. 30-31; *Fsk* ch. 99 p. 338.

<sup>25</sup> *Hsona* ch. 30; *Msk* p. 460-461; *Fsk* ch. 100 p. 339.

<sup>26</sup> Trans. Hollander (765). *Hsona* ch. 31, *Msk* p. 461, l. 15. The two sources diverge as regards Símon skálpr: *Msk* (p. 461, ll. 12-13) writes that when Hallkell húkr pronounced that sentence he was there with his father, while Snorri (*Hsona* ch. 31) states that he had already joined King Ingi.

All three sources agree that King Eysteinn was pursued and found in Viken by Símun skálpr, his brother-in-law, who was the husband of Mária, Haraldr gilli's daughter (*Hsona* ch. 22):

*Símun skálpr hitti hann, er hann gekk undan hrisrunni einum at þeim. Símun heilsaði honum: "Heill, lávarðr," segir hann. Konungr segir: "Vetka ek, nema þú þykkisk nú minn lávarðr," segir hann. "Er nú sem gerisk," segir Símun. Konungr bað, at hann skyldi honum undan skjóta, kvað honum þat byrja - "því at lengi hefir með okkr vel verit, þótt nú sé annan veg." Símun kvað þá ekki mundu af því verða. (*Hsona* ch. 32)<sup>27</sup>*

*en Simon scalpr hittir hann [er hann gecc vndan hrisrvni einom. oc þeir Simon melti oc heilsapi honom. Heill lavarþr s. hann. Konvngv svarar. Ec etla nv at þv þicciz min lavarþr. Hann svarar. Nv er sem geriz s. hann. Konvngv bað hann coma ser vndan. oc q. honom þat byria. þvi at lengi hefir [með ocr ... (*Msk* p. 462 ll. 1-7)<sup>28</sup>*

*Símun skálpr hitti hann, er hann gekk undan í hrisrunna einum. Þeir Símun váru margir saman, en er þeir hǫndluðu konunginn, þá beiddi Eysteinn konungr <hann> at skjóta hǫnum undan ok kvað hǫnum þat betr bera. Símun svaraði, kvað munu ekki verða. (*Fsk* ch. 101p. 340)<sup>29</sup>*

The detail in *Msk* and Snorri of Eysteinn's remark that Simon actually considers himself to be *his* lord now is rather like the passage in Shakespeare's *Richard II* (Act 4, scene 1. lines 253-5) where Northumberland (the instrument of Richard's fall) calls Richard 'My lord', and gets the reply: 'No lord of thine, thou haught insulting man, / Nor no man's lord'. Criticism of *Richard II* often makes the point that Richard often gets carried away by the force of his own rhetoric to

<sup>27</sup> Trans. Hollander (766): 'Símun Skálpr found him issuing from a thicket by himself to meet them. Símun greeted him, saying, "Hail, my lord." The king replied, "I don't know but you consider yourself my lord now." "That is what it turns out to be," said Símun. The king asked him to help him escape, saying that would be seemly in him- "because for a long time we were on good terms, even though that isn't the case now." Símun said that couldn't be done now.'

<sup>28</sup> Trans. Andersson and Gade (403): 'Símun skálpr found him as he was fleeing in the scrub brush with his lone companion. Símun spoke and greeted him: "Greetings, lord," he said. The king replied: "I imagine that you now think you are lord." "It will be as it may," he said. The king asked for his help in escaping and said that such help behooved him - "For we have long been ...'

<sup>29</sup> Trans. Finlay (274): 'Símun skálpr found him as he was going off into a bush. There was a large party with Símun, but when they laid hands on the king, King Eysteinn begged him to let him escape and said that would become him better. Simon answered and said that that would not happen.'

the point where he says things that are politically damaging to himself, and this is an example of this. Similarly, Eysteinn seems to be admitting something that is damaging to his authority and his chances of survival, merely for the sake of scoring a debating point over Símon. However, on King Eysteinn's capture, all accounts seem to go out of their way to make it look cowardly and incompetent on his part.

The story of his death, on the other hand, seems to be contrasted with his cowardly and mean life. Unlike the narrative of King Sigurðr's death, which is presented as a missed opportunity to show courage and bravery, that of King Eysteinn's end actually seems to alter his reputation very much for the better.

Its description is only to be found in *Hsona* and *Fsk*, because unfortunately *Msk*'s manuscript breaks off just before this point:

*Konungr bað, at hann skyldi hlýða messu áðr, ok þat var. Síðan lagðisk hann niðr á grúfu ok breiddi hendr frá sér út ok bað sik hoggva í kross á milli herðanna, kvað þá skyldu reyna, hvárt hann mundi þola járn eða eigi, sem þeir hǫfðu sagt lagsmenn Inga. Simun mælti við þann, er hoggva skyldi, bað hann til ráða, kvað konung hǫlzt lengi hafsa kropit þar um lyng. Hann var þá hoggvinn ok þótti verða við þrúðliga. (Hsona ch. 32)<sup>30</sup>*

*Þá beiddi konungrinn at hlýða messu áðr en hónum væri bani veittr, ok svá gærðu þeir. Síðan lagðisk hann niðr á grúfu ok breiddi hendr í frá sér ok bað hoggva sik í kross meðal herða, ok þat fram fór, ok þótti konungr verða vel við, (...). (Fsk ch. 101 p. 340)<sup>31</sup>*

<sup>30</sup> Trans. Hollander (766): 'The king asked to hear mass [before being slain], and that was granted him. Then he laid himself with his face down, spreading out his arms, and asked them to slash him crosswise between his shoulders - then they would find out whether he could stand cold steel as King Ingi's followers said he could not. Simun spoke to the man who was to hew him, asking him to go to work, and saying that the king had crept all too long through the heather. Then he was beheaded and was considered to have behaved manfully.'

<sup>31</sup> Trans. Finlay (274): 'Then the king asked to hear mass before he was done to death, and they arranged that. Then he laid face-down on the ground and spread out his arms away from his body and asked that he be struck with blows in the shape of a cross between the shoulders, and that was done, and the king was considered to have behaved with dignity, (...).'

Before being executed, King Eysteinn is allowed the time to take care of his soul and to repent of his sins. Moreover, in order to demonstrate his dignity, he chooses to show his ability to endure physical suffering and maintain a manly and cool attitude at the moment of death. He lies down on the ground in the usual position for a beheading, spreads out his arms like the dying Christ,<sup>32</sup> and asks to be struck between his shoulders in the form of a cross. Apart from the symbolic meaning of the stroke that cuts the sign of the cross in his body, this way of striking was probably meant to make his death look more like Christ's passion, because it seldom caused instant death, as beheading did.<sup>33</sup> We read in *Sturlunga saga* for example, that Guðmundr Ormsson was struck like King Eysteinn:

*Gekk Þorsteinn þá at með reidda öxina. Hann hjó til Guðmundar, ok kom höggit þar, er mættist hálsinn ok herðarnar, ok sneiddi mjök út á herðarblaðit. Var þat allmikil sár. Gekk sú hyrnan miklu lengra niðr, er út vissi á herðarnar ok á öxlina. (...). Þá gekk at Brandr Guðmundarson ok tók hendi sinni ofan í sárit ok vildi vita, hversu djúpt var, ok leitaði með fingrunum. Síðan mælti hann við Ögmund ok Jón, son hans: "Eigi vilið þér Guðmund feigan, ef ekki skal meira at vinna." (...). Þorsteinn reiddi þá upp öxina hart ok hátt ok hjó á hálsinn, svá at af tók höfuðit. (Sturlunga saga III, 163-164. Svinfellinga saga ch. 11).<sup>34</sup>*

According to Cormack (*Saints and Sinners* 214), Snorri describes King Eysteinn's death "in worldly, rather than religious terms", and she wonders whether his source "may have read more like a martyrdom". Actually Símon

<sup>32</sup> A similar position is taken by jarl Valþjófr (Waltheof) when he is executed by William the Bastard's men, as reported by *Fsk* (ch. 26). After his death he was considered to be a saint. On Waltheof's alleged sanctity see Finlay (25-26).

<sup>33</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson (81) wrote that those who, in *Sturlunga Saga*, choose a slow and painful death, are willing to atone for their sins and to imitate Christ.

<sup>34</sup> Trans. McGrew (340-341): 'Þorstein went up to him with his axe raised; he struck at Guðmund and the blow landed at the junction of his neck and shoulder, cutting deep into the shoulder blade. This was a severe wound: the head of the axe cut farther down so that his shoulder and shoulder-joint showed through. (...). Brand Guðmundarson now went forward, put his hand down into the wound to find out how deep it was, and felt with his fingers. Then he spoke to Ögmund and his son Jón: "You do not intend Guðmund to die unless you do something more about it." (...). Þorstein raised the axe high and steady, then struck him in the neck so that he cut off his head.'

skálpr seems to make fun of the solemnity of the king's position on the grass ('*konung hælzti lengi hafa kropit þar um lyng*'). Perhaps Snorri thought of Símon as trying to prevent Eysteinn from setting up a 'martyrdom' for himself, or maybe he is seen as unwittingly contributing to it, just as the bystanders mock Christ during the crucifixion. In the first case, Snorri was probably anticipating his opinion about King Eysteinn's alleged sanctity; in the second, it is presumably a literary embellishment. Moreover, in *Hsona* it seems that the king is simply beheaded ('*Hann var þá höggvinn*'), unlike *Fsk*, which states that he was struck as he had asked to be ('*ok þat fram för*'). Anyway, both sources write that King Eysteinn behaved manfully, so his death was probably considered Christian and heroic by most people.

As in the case of Haraldr gilli, Snorri reports that King Eysteinn was regarded as a saint, and that miracles were performed through the water that sprang up from the spot where he was beheaded, and under the slope where his body had rested for the night - presumably before burial.<sup>35</sup> Miracles were, and for the Catholic Church still are, a decisive factor in proving sanctity. It is therefore significant that Snorri reports that the miracles at King Eysteinn's tomb stopped, according to the people from Vík, when his enemies poured broth made from a dog into it (*Hsona* 32). It is difficult to determine whether this episode bears

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Something similar happened during Þórðr Þorvaldsson's execution (*Sturlunga saga* vol. II, p. 217. *Íslendinga saga* ch. 85).

<sup>35</sup> King Eysteinn's body was buried in Fors Church (*Hsona* ch. 32; *Fsk* ch. 101 p. 341). It is interesting to note that Snorri attests the existence of a peculiar custom, because he specifies that the tomb was in the middle of the church floor with a rug spread over it. The miraculous spring at the place of death following execution with a weapon is very reminiscent of the traditional story of the death of St. Paul, whose attribute was a sword. The implication intended by Eysteinn's followers may, then, have been that he had been a martyr who, like Paul, had refused to flee from persecution - even though this hardly squares with the account we get from the surviving prose sources.

witness to the survival of heathen rituals. Certainly, the dog has often been associated with the pre-Christian underworld, as in the examples of the mythical *Garmr* who keeps guard at Hel's gate (*Völuspá* s. 44), and the dogs that have been found buried together with their masters in Viking graves as 'equipment' that the dead man will need in the next world (Chiesa Isnardi 570-571). This connection of the dog to pre-Christian myths and rituals was probably intended to damage the dead man or his reputation: on one side it could represent a charge that King Eysteinn's enemies had blasphemously violated his tomb; on the other, Snorri may be using this episode to suggest that the king's alleged miracles were obscure or spurious, since they could be stopped by similarly obscure rites.

As Cormack suggests (*Saints and Sinners* 200), King Eysteinn's cult was probably encouraged by his supposed nephew King Sverrir,<sup>36</sup> whose version of King Eysteinn's death is reported by Snorri:

*En sumir segja, þá er Eysteinn konungr var handtekinn, at Símun sendi mann til fundar við Inga konung, en konungr bað Eystein eigi koma í auglýsín sér. Svá hefir Sverrir konungr rita látit. (Hsona ch. 32)<sup>37</sup>*

If Ingi's words '*konungr bað Eystein eigi koma í auglýsín sér*' were interpreted (as Hollander does in his translation) to mean that Ingi intended his brother's death, then King Sverrir wanted to lay the blame for King Eysteinn's death on his brother Ingi. Contrary to this, Snorri seems to report the "official" version of King Eysteinn's death authorised by King Sverrir, in order to suggest that the reason why this version is believed by some people is that King Sverrir

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<sup>36</sup> Sverrir Sigurðarson was king of Norway from 1177 to 1202. His claim to be the son of Sigurðr Haraldsson was almost certainly false. On this subject see Gathorne-Hardy 80-6, 91-2, 94-7.

<sup>37</sup> Trans. Hollander (767): 'But some say that when King Eystein was captured, Símun sent a messenger to King Ingi, but that the king said he never wanted to see Eystein again. That is what King Sverri ordered written.'

himself ordered it to be written, rather than that it was true.<sup>38</sup> However, King Ingi could hardly be completely exonerated of his brother's killing because he was, at the very least, too weak to prevent his men from killing Eysteinn, and there is no suggestion that he punished Símon for the execution. Símon is, indeed, in charge of one wing of his army when he later fights Hákon herðibreiðr (*Hákherð* ch. 17).

If King Ingi was not entirely to blame for King Eysteinn's death, then the responsibility of his murder falls mainly on Símon skálpr:

*Símun skálpr var it mesta óþokkaðr af verki þessu, ok var þat alþýðumál.  
(Hsona ch. 32)<sup>39</sup>*

*en Símon fekk þar illan orðróm af því máli, svá sem váttar Einarr  
Skúlasonr:*

*Mun sás morði vandisk*

*margillr ok sveik stilli,*

*síð af sliikum rjóðum*

*Símon skalpr of hjalpask. (Fsk ch. 101 p. 341 v. 272)<sup>40</sup>*

Einarr's stanza, which is also quoted by Snorri, has been interpreted in slightly different ways by modern scholars. Guðbrandur Vigfússon (II, 270) for example, translates 'the wicked Simon Scalp, who betrayed him, will be long ere he is helped out of torment', and he adds in parenthesis that this means that he will be in hell for ever. In Andersson and Gade's translation of *Msk* (404) we find: 'Wicked Símon skalpr (Sword-sheath), who made murder his trade and betrayed

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<sup>38</sup> Andersson and Gade suggest that if *Msk*'s tale of King Eysteinn's death was similar to the one in *Heimskringla*, "the favour lavished on Ingi and, at least preliminarily, on Erlingr skakki may reflect not only a personal loyalty on the part of the author but also a political viewpoint", concluding that "*Morkinskinna* may be designed not only to fill the gap between *Óláfs saga helga* and *Sverris saga* but also to counteract a new danger posed by Sverri's dynasty" (*Morkinskinna* 70-71).

<sup>39</sup> Trans. Hollander (767): 'Símun Skálpr was much reproached for his action, and it became the talk of the people.'

<sup>40</sup> Trans. Finlay (275): 'Simon was condemned for this affair, as Einarr Skúlason bears witness: 272. The man accustomed to killing, / who the king betrayed, most evil, / Símon skálpr, will but slowly / for such deeds get absolution.' Einarr's stanza is also quoted in *Hsona* (v. 228).

the king, will hardly obtain absolution for such actions', while Finlay (275) translates 'Símon skálpr, will but slowly / for such deeds get absolution.'

I think that Guðbrandur Vígfússon's interpretation is self-contradictory, because if the author wanted to express the duration of the torment, it is possible to read in these verses another reference to the Purgatory: Símon skálpr *will* get absolution for his grievous sin, but it will be only after a long period of atonement in the Third Realm.<sup>41</sup>

Since *Msk* breaks off just after King Eysteinn's death and *Fsk* has an unfortunate lacuna at this point, the following events and above all the tale of King Ingi's death can only be read in Snorri's text.

According to *Hákherð* (ch.1) after King Eysteinn's death, his friends and chieftains chose as their king Hákon, nicknamed herðibreiðr, the son of King Sigurðr Haraldsson.

Very soon Grégóríús troops have to face Hákon's supporters, who lose a first battle in Konungahella (*Hákherð* ch. 2-3), then start harrying in the territory between Trondheim and Bergen, and killing some of King Ingi's followers (*Hákherð* ch. 4). Snorri comments that there had never before been plundering between the two towns. When King Ingi hears of this he sails after them, and they meet in eastern Norway at the Gaut river. Both armies prepare for a battle: among King Ingi's chieftains, Grégóríús is the one who wants to attack immediately (*Hákherð* ch. 5), while Erlingr skakki, the husband of Kristín, King Sigurðr

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<sup>41</sup> The time spent by an individual's soul in Purgatory was thought to depend on the gravity of their sins in this life (Binski 25).

jórsalafari's daughter, counsels against the attack (*Hákherð* ch. 6). King Ingi decides to fight, and follows Erlingr's plan to manage the naval attack.

Hákon's troops are spurred on by Sigurðr of Reyrr, who expresses in his speech what was probably the common opinion about King Ingi's responsibility for the deaths of his brothers:

*"Er sú ván bezt í vǫru máli, at guð veit, at vér mælum réttara. Ingi hefir áðr höggvit niðr bræðr sína tvá, en þat er engum manni blint, hverjar fjoðurbætr hugðar eru Hákonni konungi: þær at höggva hann niðr sem aðra frændr sína, ok mun þat sýnask þenna dag."* (*Hákherð* ch. 8)<sup>42</sup>

Sigurðr of Reyrr does not question the legitimacy of Ingi as king, and specifies that Hákon has only demanded a third of Norway, as his father used to have; but he imputes to King Ingi the mortal sin of having killed his brothers, which makes him unworthy to bear the name of king:

*"Mörgum mundi svá litask, þeim er sálu sinni vildi þyrma ok hefði þvilikir stórglæpir á hendr borizk sem Inga, at eigi mundi þora fyrir guði at kallask með konungsnafni, ok þat undrumk ek, er guð þolir honum þá ofdirfð, ok þat mun guð vilja, at vér steypim honum."* (*Hákherð* ch. 8)<sup>43</sup>

On the other side of the river King Ingi's troops are addressed by Erlingr skakki, who, unlike Sigurðr of Reyrr, does not appeal to God but to the importance of putting an end to Hákon's band of robbers, in order that people may cultivate the land in peace. Erlingr's speech than counterpoints that of Sigurðr, especially when he emphasises Ingi's non-martial attitude, and his attempts to bring peace to the country. Contrary to what was probably the common opinion, his speech

<sup>42</sup> Trans. Hollander (773): "The best hope we have for our cause is that God knows that we have the right on our side. Ingi has already cut down his two brothers, and no one is so blind as not to know what atonement for the death of his father is in store for King Hákon, and that is, to be cut down like his other kinsmen, and that will become apparent this very day."

<sup>43</sup> Trans. Hollander (774): "To many who are anxious for the salvation of their soul and who are committed such monstrous misdeeds as has Ingi, it would seem overweening before God to call themselves kings; and I marvel that God abides his audacity, and it may be that God will cast him down through us."

seems to be another attempt to justify King Ingi's conduct, which aims for peace and wealth.

The fight starts and turns out to be a victory for King Ingi's troops. Eventually Hákon flees while Siguðr of Reyri is given quarter, because he is said to have been closely related to Grégóriús (*Hákherð* ch. 11).

The battle of the Gaut river seems not to have made the political situation any less complex. Instead, the rivalry between Grégóriús and Erlingr led to a direct fight which the king had difficulty in resolving (*Hákherð* ch. 12), and the confrontation between Grégóriús on one side and Hákon and Siguðr of Reyri on the other took on more and more the form of a personal feud. Grégóriús even set fire to the house where he thought that Hákon and Siguðr were, and killed many innocent people as a result. Hákon and Siguðr, in their turn, set fire to the estate of his brother in law, Halldórr Brynjólfsson, killed nearly twenty men but let Grégóriús's sister escape (*Hákherð* ch. 13). When Grégóriús heard the news he went to look for Hákon and reached him in Fors. Snorri specifies that before attacking his enemy Grégóriús had matins and the gospel read for him, thus informing his readers about Grégóriús's spiritual condition before he died (*Hákherð* ch. 14). Hákon's troops were just on the other side of a frozen river. Grégóriús thought that the ice was unreliable, so he advised the people to go to the bridge, but his army of farmers (*'bónðalið'*) urged him to go across the ice. He immediately went out on the ice with the men, but as soon as the farmers found that the ice was unsound they turned back. Grégóriús fell through the ice and a man from King Hákon's troop shot an arrow which hit him under the throat and killed him (*Hákherð* ch. 14).

It is impossible to tell whether the story of Grégóriús's death was similar in the other sources, and whether they specified, as Snorri does, that his army was a 'bóndalið'. However, in *Hákherð*'s tale the farmers seem in a way to contrive their leader's fall, and Snorri probably wanted to imply that they did not want to risk their lives for something that was no longer a battle to defend their land and their work, but merely a personal feud. The following battle between King Ingi and Hákon seems to have the same character.

Snorri reports (*Hákherð* ch. 15) that when King Ingi heard the news of Grégóriús's death he cried like a child and vowed to avenge him. He regretted not having joined him as soon as he heard of Halldórr's killing, because he knew that Grégóriús would have taken an immediate revenge, and he blamed his court for having persuaded him to stay for the Yule banquet, which seemed to them the most important thing to do. His declaration of war against Hákon is explicitly meant as a revenge for Grégóriús:

*"Nú skal ek einn við leggja at fara til fundar við þá Hákon, ok skal annat tveggja, at ek skal hafa bana eða stíga yfir þá Hákon ella. En eigi er sliks manns at hefndra sem Grégóriús var, þótt þeir komi allir fyrir." (Hákherð ch. 15)<sup>44</sup>*

Unlike his account of Grégóriús's pious actions before his death, Snorri says that King Ingi asked his cousin Kristín Sigurðsdóttir to attend to his body in case he was killed in battle. There is then no clear evidence in Snorri's account about King Ingi's spiritual condition immediately before his death.

When Hákon's army approached Oslo, King Ingi is unwilling to follow his advisors' counsel to refrain from entering the fight, as he did at first in the battle

of the Gaut river (*Hákherð* ch. 9), and declares that he is willing to avenge Grégóriús on the battlefield (*Hákherð* ch. 16).

The battle soon goes Hákon's way, mostly because two of King Ingi's chieftains, Jón and Guðrøðr, King over the Hebrides, betray him: they let Hákon know where their wings are, and when Hákon's men approach, some of them flee and some turn against King Ingi. Snorri also reports the rumour that Hákon used the illegal prophecy of a woman 'sitting out' to discover how he could defeat Ingi. She foretold that in order to win they had to fight during the night (*Hákherð* ch. 16).

King Ingi was killed when it was near daybreak, after he had refused to flee:

*En er þeir Jón hans félagar höfðu rofít fylking Inga konungs, þá flýðu þeir ok margir, er þar höfðu næst staðit, ok skilðisk þá ok riðlaðisk fylkingin, en þeir Hákon sóttu þá fast. Þá var ok komit at dagan. Þá var sótt at merki Inga konungs. Í þeiri hrið fell Ingi konungr, en Ormr, bróðir hans, helt þá upp orrostu. (*Hákherð* ch. 18)<sup>45</sup>*

His brother, after a praiseworthy stand, had to flee at last: Snorri specifies that the casualties among King Ingi's men included Símun skalpr, Hallvarðr hikri and Guðbrandr Skafhögsson (*Hákherð* ch. 18).

According to Snorri's account then, King Ingi's fall was mostly caused by the treason of his chieftains and King Hákon's intrigues (and perhaps even by sorcery), circumstances that certainly are not very favourable to Hákon. Snorri's final verdict on Ingi, in contrast with this, sounds rather favourable: he is the non-

<sup>44</sup> Trans. Hollander (782): "Now I shall do my utmost to proceed against Hákon and his band, and then one of the two things will happen: either I shall fall or else triumph over Hákon and his men. Nor is a man like Grégóriús avenged sufficiently, even though all of them perish."

<sup>45</sup> Trans. Hollander (785): 'Now when Jón and his followers had broken the battle array of King Ingi, the men there and many in positions near them, fled, so that the ranks broke and fell into disorder, and then Hákon's troops attacked strongly. By that time it was almost dawn. Then an attack was made on the standard of King Ingi, and in this charge fell King Ingi; but Ormr, his brother, kept up the battle.'

warrior who, however, can say before his last battle that he has never fled from his enemies and won't start to now. In the absence of other synoptic histories at this point it is not possible to decide whether King Ingi's final speech was composed by Snorri himself or derived from one or more of his sources, but it certainly has an important impact on the final view of his character. Some of his men have urged him to take flight, but in this speech he is shown looking back over his life and choosing his own death for himself:

*"Ópt hefi ek heyrt yðr þat mæla ok þykki mér satt, at lítit lagðisk fyrir Eysteinn konung, bróður minn, síðan er hann lagðisk á flóttu, ok var hann vel at sér górr um alla hluti, þá er konung friða. Nú kann ek þat sjá við vanheilendi mitt, hversu lítit fyrir mik mun leggjask, ef ek tek þat til, en honum skyldi svá mjök vefjask, jafnmikit sem atferð okra skilði ok heilsu ok allt eljan. Ek var þá á annan vetr, er ek var til konungs tekinn í Nóregi, en nú em ek vel hálfþrítøgr. Ek þykkjumk vandræði ok ábyrgðir hafa meirr haft í konungdóminum um heldr en skemmtan ok indæli. Ek hefi margar orrostur attar, stundum með meira liði, stundum minna. Hefir sú mín gæfa mest verit, at ek hefi aldri á flóttu komit. Ráði guð lífi mínu, hversu langt vera skal, en aldri mun ek á flóttu leggjask." (Hákherð ch. 17)<sup>46</sup>*

This speech shows what is left of the ideals of a man who is tired and diseased and knows he has little chance of survival. If his brother Eysteinn's flight did him no good even though he was gifted with health and strength, it will certainly be a disaster for Ingi himself to flee. If he is destined to die, he wants to die an honourable death, as he has never had to flee so far. He has been a king since he was less than two years old, but his kingship has been characterised by sorrow and misfortune. He has hardly been able to choose his manner of life,

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<sup>46</sup> Trans. Hollander (784): "I have often heard you say, and I think there was truth in it, that Eysteinn, my brother, was little favored by fortune, once he took to flight, and he was well equipped with the qualities that adorn a king. Now it is easy to see how, with my disability, I shall have little success, if I do what caused him so much trouble, considering the difference between us in health and strength in every respect. I was two years old when I was chosen to be king in Norway, and now I am fully twenty-five. It seems to me I have had more difficulties and responsibilities in my kingship than pleasure and ease. I have had many battles, sometimes with a bigger force [at my command], sometimes with a smaller one. I have been most fortunate in that I never had to flee. May God dispose of my life, how long it shall last; but I shall never take to flight."

having always been urged on by his followers or simply by the turn of events, but he certainly wants to choose his death for himself. God is left to decide when it will take place.

The fact that King Ingi, the disabled hunchback, is portrayed by Snorri as more of a genuinely heroic figure than either of his brothers is rather striking. One might perhaps see in it a sequence of improvement: the aggressive Sigurðr dies the death of a sinful and arrogant coward; the mean Eysteinn brings his own death on himself, but meets it well in both secular and religious terms; but Ingi, despite his personal limitations and his partial responsibility for the deaths of his brothers, dies fighting against an unjust aggressor who is thought to use sorcery, and he dies well in both heroic and religious terms.<sup>47</sup>

He was buried at Hallvarðs kirkja in Oslo, just like Sigurðr Jórsalafari and Magnús blindi, in the stone wall on the south site outside the choir (*Hákherð* ch. 18; see above p. 130 note 40).

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<sup>47</sup> Two details in *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða* in *Sturlunga saga* also seem to suggest that Ingi's post-mortem reputation was very good: in ch. 2 (I, 192), Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson returns to Iceland after Ingi's death, saying that he will not serve any earthly king after Ingi because he thinks Ingi will have no equal; and in ch. 12 (I, 221), Þorvarðr's son Ögmundur says that if Ingi were still alive, he would not allow the brothers of Þorvarðr to be plundered - which suggests King Ingi's reputation for looking after his men.

## CONCLUSIONS

### The Political Use of Death

The Old Norse synoptic histories of Norway discussed in this piece of research agree about the importance attached to the moment of death in arriving at a final estimate of a man's character. The ways in which the authors relate the deaths of their royal characters and those who gravitate around them convey strong and unmistakable judgements on their political actions, together with important information about what their final destiny in the other world was believed to be.

Haraldr harðráði's death at the Battle of Stamford Bridge, for example, was certainly regarded by the sources as spectacular, but according to *Msk*'s account it was the result of the king's absurd plan, and he bore the main responsibility for the deaths of many other valiant men (pp. 72-85). The same can be said for the fall of Magnús berfœttr, which in Snorri's account is manly and glorious, while in *Msk* and *Fsk* it is depicted as the death of a frantic king who displays poor leadership qualities and blames others for his own mistakes (pp. 101-112). According to Snorri, Ingi Haraldsson also made a 'beautiful' death, fighting against an unjust and unfair aggressor, and despite his partial responsibility for the deaths of his brothers, he is somehow redeemed by it in both heroic and religious terms (pp.182-184).

Sometimes the synoptic historians shift their attention from the king's death and emphasize the death of a companion who dies together with the king. To deprive the king of a close-up at such an important moment is certainly meant to imply a negative judgement on the main character himself. This is true in the case

of King Sigurðr munnr, whose loyal retainer Þórðr húsfreyja's death is explicitly praised in both *Msk* and *Hsona* instead of his (pp. 167-169), and of Magnús blindi, who dies together with the servant who is trying to save him (pp. 154-155). The opposite of this is Snorri's description of Haraldr harðráði's death: the author of *Hsk* seems to be so fascinated by it that he forgets to mention the deaths of the co-protagonists of the battle (pp. 81-82).

The sources show an awareness that the importance attached to the description of a king's death is partly due to its ability to influence the opinions held about him by those who survive him. They also show that ideas about the final destiny of particular kings in the afterlife could be made political use of after their deaths. For example, all the sources seem to agree that the standing and power of Magnús góði were greatly increased by the fact that his father was acknowledged as a saint and martyr. In the same way, political considerations probably explain why *Msk*'s author adopts 'preventive measures' to suggest that there is a possibility that Haraldr gilli's soul may have been saved, despite his sinful life and ignominious death (pp. 142-144). Sigurðr Jórsalafari, on the other hand, seems to be unmistakably condemned to Hell. In fact, as the Christian faith became firmly established, its insistence that a king should be morally worthy of his role became more important. Sigurðr Jórsalafari's fate is revealed by a dream of his reported in *Msk* (p. 358, ll. 17-32), in which St. Óláfr does not intercede with God for him. Snorri also resorts to a dream to show that Magnús góði will be greeted by St. Óláfr in the other world (*Hharð* ch. 28).

A king who was thought to be living in a state of mortal sin or to be suffering damnation in Hell after his death was seen as being in fundamental conflict with his royal function, as for example in the criticism of King Ingi

Haraldsson who, according to Sigurðr of Reyr's words, should not have dared to call himself king because of his mortal sins (p. 179). This political use of the afterlife becomes explicit, just after the period covered in this study, in Snorri's *Magnúss Saga Erlingssonar* (ch. 10) where the people of Víken are said to have passed a resolution that condemned Sigurðr, son of King Sigurðr Haraldsson gilla, and his followers to hell, whether they were living or dead. This resolution is defined as an *ódæmaverk* ('unheard-of act') by Snorri and *Fsk* (ch. 103), yet it was probably considered to be an efficacious slur against a claimant to the throne of Norway.

### ***Bræðravíg***

Ideologically, the sources consistently differ from each other, though this is easier to trace in the longer accounts – so that *Fsk* and Snorri seem more interested in worldly (and especially military) glory than *Msk*, which is mostly concerned with spiritual virtues and the ultimate fate of the soul of each king. Theodoricus, by contrast, is interested in the moral evaluation of his characters' actions, as the rather emotional ending of his work suggests.

On the other hand, the sources are strikingly unanimous in their horror of killings between blood relatives (*bræðravíg*). After Tostig's declaration before the Battle of Stamford Bridge that he would prefer to be killed by his brother than to be his killer (reported in *Msk* (p. 275) *Fsk* (ch. 68) and *Hharð* (ch.91)), Norwegian kingship starts to be undermined by incidents that slowly break the taboo of *bræðravíg* and lead to the civil wars of the 1150s.

At first the possibility of being attacked and killed by their own kinsmen seems to be considered very remote by the kings themselves, and Haraldr gilli and

Sigurðr Haraldsson gilla seem to find it impossible to believe that it is really happening (p. 137 and 167). The sources often go to considerable lengths to avoid acknowledging this possibility, or to try to explain it away or make excuses for it. Theodoricus is so determined to avoid it that he chooses to remain silent about the events that took place from the maiming of Magnús blindi up to his own time, while the other sources seem to be constantly trying to justify and excuse their royal characters somehow. *Msk* (p. 401, ll. 25-27) writes explicitly that Magnús's maiming was a wicked deed, but it was determined more by his advisers than by the king himself. King Ingi Haraldsson is also said to have decided to attack his brother Sigurðr only after his friend Grégóriús and his mother Ingiríðr had spent much effort in convincing him (*Hsona* ch. 26-27; *Msk* pp. 455 -456; *Fsk* ch. 99 pp. 335-336).

The decline in the power of the traditional 'rules' of conduct and the rise of a new amoral world in which the most ruthless claimant for the crown was usually the most successful really seems to have touched a raw nerve of public sensibility.

### **The Emergence of the Idea of Purgatory**

This study of the deaths of kings in the Old Norse synoptic histories of Norway has shown that the authors were fully involved in the cultural and religious environment of medieval Europe and that the idea of purgatorial fire was known in thirteenth century Scandinavia and Iceland.

A number of passages in the texts show an awareness of an intermediate time after death, i.e. the time that comes between death and the individual judgement of each soul, and between then and the Last Judgement, and of a period

in which it will be necessary to make atonement for sins.<sup>1</sup> In *Hharð* (ch. 28), Snorri reports a dream experienced by King Magnús góði in which it is implied that crimes may either be capable of being expiated or not, and that the period of expiation required for them may vary according to their gravity (pp. 36-37). The same idea is expressed in the verses of Einarr Skúlason quoted in *Fsk* (ch. 101, st. 272) and *Hsona* (st. 228), where it is said that Símon skálpr, who betrayed King Eysteinn Haraldsson, will get absolution for his grievous sin only after a long period of atonement (pp. 177-178).

The medieval European cultural community was also familiar with the idea that 'intermediate time' might in some cases be quantified, as we can see in Dante's notion of Ante-Purgatory (*Purgatory*, cantos III-VIII). Snorri's account of Haraldr harðráði's ritual of trimming Saint Óláfr's hair and nails before his departure for England also shows knowledge of this concept, since it was performed thirty-five years after St. Óláfr's death, the same number of years as his age when he died (*Hharð* ch. 80, see above p. 66).

*Msk* makes it clear that intercession by the saints is needed to ensure a soul's benefit, and that the prayers that are necessary on its behalf are proportional to the seriousness of the person's sins. This can be seen in its story of King Haraldr gilli's gifts to the Icelandic bishop Magnús Einarsson (pp. 142-144). Both *Msk* and *Ágrip* show an awareness of the importance of prayers for the dead as a means of hastening their admittance to Heaven when they relate that Haraldr harðráði's body was moved into the care of the monks at Elgjustr *hreinlífis mönnum undir hendr* 'under the care of men of pure life' (pp. 84-85). Haraldr's soul would have

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<sup>1</sup> On the concept of "intermediate time" see Le Goff (*L'immaginario* 99-108), Vovelle (*La Mort* 62-64), Schmitt (43).

needed care from the monks because it was believed that it could still benefit from their prayers: his soul was not considered to be in Hell or in Heaven, but somewhere in between, in a place in which the process of salvation continued through a purgatorial fire.

### **Burial Customs**

If the living could care for the souls of the departed through their prayers, proximity of burial to the shrine of a saint could certainly ensure protection and intercession for the dead person from that saint. *Msk* and *Hsk* bear witness to a change of burial customs that gradually moved the burial places of important people from outside to inside the church, and later to positions inside the choir of the church.<sup>2</sup> *Ólhelg* (ch. 244) seems to confirm that until the end of the eleventh century, noble burials in Norway took place in churchyards and not inside churches, because King Óláfr's shrine was moved to Clemenskirkeja only after he had been recognised a true saint. However, there was probably no strong distinction of value between the interior of the church and the sacred space of the *atrium* around its walls (Ariès, *L'uomo e la morte* 59). It is therefore difficult to know whether Óláfr kyrri, Hákon Magnússon, Óláfr and Eysteinn Magnússon berfætts were buried inside or outside the church, because the sources only relate that they were buried at Kristskirkja in Niðaróss.<sup>3</sup> The same is true of Harald gilli and his son Sigurðr, who are only said to be buried at Kristskirkja in Bergen (see pp. 150-1 and 171).

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Vovelle (*La Mort* 74); Ariès (*L'uomo e la morte* 52-53, 88-90).

<sup>3</sup> See above respectively p. 89; p. 95; p. 118; p. 122.

We are provided with more detailed information in the cases of Sigurðr Jórsalafari and Ingi Haraldsson gilla, who are both said to be buried at Hallvarðs kirkja in Oslo, in the stone wall on the south side outside the choir.<sup>4</sup> The transition from burial outside to inside the choir is shown in *Msk* (p. 147, ll. 27-29), which says first that Magnús góði was buried "outside the choir" at Kristskirkja in Niðaróss (and cf. also *Fsk* ch. 54), but then that at the beginning of the thirteenth century ('nu', i.e. when *Msk* was written), he lay "inside the choir" (see p. 51). Snorri also provides evidence for burials inside the church, when he reports that Eysteinn Haraldsson gilla was buried at Fors, in the middle of the church floor with a rug spread over his tomb (p. 175 note 35).

As this piece of research has tried to demonstrate, the synoptic historians' concern with death does not appear to be casual and tangential, but deliberate and central. The king's death seems to be considered a very delicate moment not only with respect to questions related to the succession and continuity of government. It might also influence the legitimacy of his successors, the dignity of his dynasty, and following events. The synoptic historians are clearly aware of contemporary discussion about the afterlife, and their texts can be used as evidence for the changing patterns of burial customs that took place in Europe between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. The research material presented in their work, which is full of spiritual, ethical, social and political clues, certainly deserves to be investigated further by modern thanatology.

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<sup>4</sup> See p. 130 and note 40, and p. 184. The location '*fyrir utan kor*' is discussed above, p. 51.

## APPENDIX

### Chronology of the Norwegian kings (1035-1161)

**Magnús góði Ólafsson helga (1035-1047)**  
(disease)

**Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson (1046-1066)**  
(killed in the battle of Stamford Bridge)

**Magnús Haraldsson ins harðráða (1066-1069)**  
(disease)

**Óláfr kyrri Haraldsson ins harðráða (1066-1093)**  
(disease)

**Hákon Magnússon (1093-1094)**  
(disease)

**Magnús berfættr Ólafsson kyrra (1093-1103)**  
(killed in battle by an Irish army)

**Óláfr Magnússon berfætts (1103-1115)**  
(disease)

**Eysteinn Magnússon berfætts (1103-1122)**  
(disease)

**Sigurðr Jórsalafari Magnússon berfætts (1103-1130)**  
(disease)

**Haraldr gilli Magnússon berfætts (1130-1136)**  
(murdered by Sigurðr slembidjákn)

**Magnús blindi Sigurðarson Jórsalafara (1130-1139)**  
(killed in battle against the Sons of Haraldr gilli)

**Sigurðr munnr Haraldsson gilla (1136-1155)**  
(killed by his brother Ingi's men)

**Eysteinn Haraldsson gilla (1142-1157)**  
(killed by his brother Ingi's men)

**Ingi Haraldsson gilla (1136-1161)**  
(killed in battle against Hákon herðibreiðr Sigurðarson munns)

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