Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages

Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes

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

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CHAPTER EIGHT

FAMILY MATTERS?

THE CULTUS OF THE SCANDINAVIAN ROYAL MARTYRS

Joanna A. Skórzewska

1. Introduction

The following discussion focuses on the cultus of three royal saints in medieval Scandinavia, Óláfr II Haraldsson (995–1028/30), Knútr IV Svensson (1043–1086) and Eiríkr Játvarðarson (1120–1160). The main questions addressed in this chapter concern the way in which the veneration of these kings influenced the construction of a specific ideology; the ideology of power which legitimised a particular family’s rights to the throne. In particular, I shall examine the role of the royal successors of Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr in the cults of the three saints. These successors were at the same time close family members: sons, brothers and half-brothers of the dead royal martyrs.

The phenomenon of royal sainthood has often been referred to as a “Germanic” tradition, and research on royal sainthood has focused on the areas of modern Germany, France, and England, to some extent also on Scandinavia.¹ Between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries the majority of the saints who were the object of a local cult in this large region were high-born, powerful individuals.² The phenomenon, however, already began to appear several centuries earlier in those areas. Its manifestations vary greatly, and it comprises a wide spectre of aspects such as objects and rituals as well as the spread of an ideology with the aid of texts.

In discussions of royal sainthood the issues addressed most frequently are: the charismatic aspects of the institution of monarchy as such (that is: the potential saintliness of all sovereigns), the religious

¹ Apart from the leading publications by Graus 1965 and Hoffmann 1975, the issue has been discussed by e.g. Nelson 1973, Rollason 1983, Ridyard 1988 and Klaniczay 2002. As far as Northern Europe is concerned, royal sainthood has been examined by e.g. Steinsland 2000 and Phelpstead 2007.
eagerness of particular kings, the conflict between Christianity and heathenism, and family ties and inheritance. The first issue mentioned, extraordinary religious qualities implied by the very office of kingship, is especially problematic in the case of medieval martyrs, including the three Scandinavian kings under consideration here. As Susan Ridyard has observed, Christian sanctity, unlike the sacrality of pagan rule, was not an assumed attribute of the Christian king. Thus, neither on the Continent nor in the Insular context was sanctity considered an inevitable feature of royal power. A Christian king had to become saintly; he was no saint because of his kingship alone. While their secular leadership was given to a king by God, and while he was the “Lord’s Anointed” and God’s representative on earth; he was not a being equipped with in-born supernatural qualities. Or, in the words of František Graus: “they [the holy kings, especially royal martyrs] were not saints in virtue of their royalty, but in spite of it”. Despite their privileged position, they had to earn their saintliness.

A Christian king could gain saintly fame already during his life through exceptional piety, justice exercised in accordance with Biblical principles, or missionary activity. However, none of these deeds could compete with the most outstanding achievement, death for the Christian faith, which would make the king resemble the saints, or even Christ, ‘the Heavenly King’, himself.

This brings us to the notion of martyrdom. The three Scandinavian royal saints under consideration here, Öláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr, were all proclaimed martyrs. Yet the circumstances of their deaths, however violent, differed significantly from the deaths of early Christian martyrs who suffered brutal executions at the hands of pagans without resistance. Öláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr could thus only have been considered martyrs because the concept of martyrdom had changed substantially in the meantime, potentially to refer to anyone who suffered a violent death. As the analysis of the three Scandinavian kings will show, the hagiographical texts concerning Öláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr present

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3 Those aspects of sacral kingship in the North specifically are discussed in this volume, see e.g. Steinsland.
4 See Hultgård, Steinsland, Sundqvist in the present volume.
5 Ridyard 1988: 74–95, Higham 1997. This issue was debated a few decades earlier, after Karl Hauck had suggested the “continuity” in his seminal thesis from 1950, which was criticized by František Graus in 1965.
7 Gunnes 1972: 191–2, see also Haki Antonsson 2004.
a large number of arguments in favour of the kings' martyrdom and ensuing saintly status. This was supposed to guarantee the respect of the masses for the deceased rulers, as well as for their successors who revered them as their patrons.

Finding the right arguments to prove a king's saintliness, however, could often prove to be problematic already in early Middle Ages. The first hurdle to be taken could, paradoxically, be the life-conduct of the king, as can be seen with the earliest example of a 'holy king' in the medieval period, that of St Sigismund (d. 523), king of Burgundy. He had, rather "unsaintly", strangled his own son Sigeric. Next, the circumstances of the canonisation process might cause controversy. An interesting example here is that of Charles the Great. Frederic Barbarossa (1122–1190) had him canonised in 1165. Yet at the same time, Barbarossa pronounced the new Saint Charles to be his heavenly protector in his conflict with Pope Alexander III (1100/1105–1181)—a rather plain mingling of religious feelings and political interest.

Returning to the death of kings, in order to support a king's saintliness even such an "argument" as a "feeling of pity" might be harnessed. That was, allegedly, the reason for the—albeit little successful—attempts of proclaiming Dagobert II (d. 680), Charles the Simple (d. 929) or Edward II (1284–1327?) holy. These kings, less than popular during their lifetime, were pitied after their miserable deaths. Having been inefficient rulers, their popularity was consequently largely due to their manner of death.8

The differences between the cults of particular kings who were proclaimed holy do not only relate to the context of their lives and deaths as such, but frequently also to the specific situation in which their saintliness was officially announced. The official proclamation also reveals the interests of particular groups: the clergy and the ruling classes with the current monarch (who, at the same time, was also the relative of the potential saint). The typology of sainthood is influenced by the social and political structures of the country or region where it developed, not only by the “dialectical relationship between the clergy and the faithful”.9 In the medieval local cult (as opposed to the universal cult) the influence of the ruling classes was much stronger. The veneration of Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr can be classified

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as (primarily) local, and it may be assumed that it was influenced by the ruling classes in accordance with a specific ideology. Numerous sources concerning those three royal martyrs seem to strongly indicate a leading role of the saints' direct successors: their sons, brothers and half-brothers seem to have been decisive for the creation and development of the cult.

Generally speaking, the texts describing the initiative of the successors may be interpreted as showing the successors' effort to legitimize their right to rule through the *cultus* of the royal martyrs; or, more specifically, through the veneration of their relics. The sources provide us with two types of information about that aspect: on the one hand the "facts", that is, what reportedly happened; and on the other hand the authorial reflections. In both cases an interesting aspect of the *cultus* can be noticed: the tendency to rely on tradition, which may imply pre-Christian past. It is an interesting fact that family ties between particular monarchs which include mythical and pre-Christian ancestors are reported in texts concerning Christian martyrs. It would seem logical to assume that a royal martyr would bring enough status into the genealogy of his successor, thus rendering references to pre-Christian personages superfluous. The latter's inclusion is also particularly surprising since it occurs in texts clearly bearing hagiographical features, and written a century or two after the introduction of Christianity to Scandinavia. On the other hand, we must not forget that the conversion of Scandinavia was a lengthy and complex process. The existence of syncretism for a relatively long period of time must be assumed, and the fact that pre-Christian and Christian motifs intertwined in Scandinavian culture should not be surprising.

This can probably most clearly be seen in the case of Óláfr Haraldsson, allegedly a converted Viking and an eager missionary king. Holiness and leadership were obviously not perceived as opposites in northern European mentality; quite the opposite, these two qualities seem to have been well established in the pre-Christian culture, and might in...
fact be considered the decisive factor in adapting and then accepting Christianity.\footnote{The issue has been thoroughly examined in Steinsland 2000. Such depictions of saints were modelled on the interpretatio norroena of Christ as a mighty king and warrior; an alternative to a forgiving martyr who surrenders to his oppressors. As demonstrated below, these two types of saintliness often intertwined or were juxtaposed in various texts concerning one and the same saint.}

The intertwining of pre-Christian and Christian motifs also concerned other elements. Mentions of acts of his heathen predecessors were clearly important in order to prove the legitimacy of reigning monarch since they referred the reader back to periods of time considered crucial, such as the unification of the country (or at least efforts aiming at it), or the conquest of new territories. In short, the formation of one's identity was achieved, or at least began with these heathen ancestors. This identity was first and foremost dynastic, but later in the Middle Ages it often developed into a national one.\footnote{Geary 2006: 326, Mortensen 2006: 258.}

Therefore those heathen, mythical leaders did not pose any threat to the Christian, holy kings; quite the opposite, their religious affiliation, or, rather, "religious unawareness", would be perceived as a natural course of events which the later saintly monarch changed.

The successors of all three Scandinavian royal martyrs discussed here, Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr, attempted to legitimise their power through a focus on the relics, which, amongst other, implied concentration of the territorial power. They are all said to have ordered reliquaries, had churches built in which the relics of their father or brother were buried, to have built new royal residences in proximity to these relics, and, finally, to have planned their own burial \textit{ad sanctos}, close to the relics. We do not consistently see direct succession from father to son or even primogeniture (see the example of Óláfr Haraldsson and Haraldr Sigurðarson), but there was always an agnatic relationship between predecessor and heir—another feature inherited from the pre-Christian period.\footnote{Steinsland 2000. She refers to the agnatic relationship, that is, inheritance in the male line, as characteristic for Nordic society in general (see Steinsland this volume).} The loyalty towards the deceased holy king would legitimise the right of his successor to the throne, and to rule over a particular territory, while the opposition and the victory of an unjust ruler brought disaster to his subordinates. These concepts have been depicted with the use of allusions to pre-Christian beliefs (bad seasons caused by an inappropriate ruler) as well as to Christological
metaphors (the Judas-like betrayal), which once again underlines the role of different types of tradition.

That said, it shall be argued here that the general impression of a leading role played by the successors of the Scandinavian royal martyrs in their cults is not supported by a closer examination of the written sources. On the one hand, there are significant differences between the purely hagiographical texts and in the chronicles. And even when texts suggest influence by the successors, their role does not seem to have been the main force behind the origin of the veneration of Öláfr, Knútr or Eiríkr.

2. The source material

One may argue that all the texts on which this discussion is based bear hagiographical features. Writing, compiling and interpreting texts was mainly in the hands of the Christian priesthood. It is, then, on the one hand tempting to argue that a saint-king was to a large extent "created" by that priesthood. On the other hand, such possible clerical "creation" often seems to have been balanced by significant influence of secular actors on the development of the cultus.

The cult of royal saints could be initiated by and beneficial to both the clergy and the successors of the holy king. In general, a new king might wish to initiate a translatio or commission a saga or a hagiographical text, thus profiting from his predecessor's saintly fame. And without the support of the clergy, the process would obviously not be possible. But in particular, the cases where texts significantly postdate the death of the saint-king are interesting. There the role of the saint's family in the development of the cult is debatable, especially as far as the direct successors are concerned. Did they have an interest in and were they in fact actively encouraging the cult? Descriptions of their efforts might to a large extent be inspired and influenced by the conditions of the time during which the texts were written, and by the kings who reigned at that later time, rather than by old oral and written tradition going back to the period immediately following the saint's death. With this in mind, let us turn to the texts about Öláfr Haraldsson. Öláfs saga helga developed from the confluence of two lines

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16 Ridyard 1988: 77.
of historical writing in medieval Norway and Iceland: the religious-historical tradition of saints’ lives and the secular-historical tradition of royal biography. The saga was composed and copied in many different versions during the period 1180–1230. The growth in number of both the liturgical and non-liturgical texts started in 1150s. The fact that so many sources concerning Saint Óláfr date from the second half of the twelfth century could be interpreted as a natural development of the cult. However, we should not overlook the important political events that took place at that time. The foundation of the archiepiscopal see in Niðaróss in 1152/53 was followed by Scandinavia’s first coronation in Bergen in 1163/64, through which the Church gave divine sanction to Magnús Erlingsson’s (1161–84) royal position, the primary duty of which was to uphold the law as a just ruler. The first two national assemblies in Norwegian history were called in order to set the seal on the aforementioned events. Among others, a law determining the right of succession, which in all probability came out of the meeting of 1163/64, laid down that a national assembly should choose the king. The eldest legitimate son of a deceased king should have the first right to the Crown, and after him, other legitimate sons. The context of the coronation points to a co-operation between the monarchy and the Church, but the Norwegian Church also took the first step towards a position marked out by the Gregorian papacy. This meant the election of bishops/appointment of priests, financial control, and jurisdiction over the Church matters, were left entirely to the Church.

The version of Óláfr’s *vita* ascribed to Snorri Sturluson is the best preserved one. It survives both as a separate saga and as a part of *Heimskringla*, the compilation of sagas about Norwegian kings. The *Separate Saga*’s main part is nearly identical with the saga in *Heimskringla*. Its initial chapters, however, outline the history of the kings of Norway from Haraldr hárfagri to Óláfr Tryggvason, and its final chapters report on Ólafr Haraldsson’s successors down to Haraldr gill. The *Separate Saga* was most probably completed in the years 1180–1230.

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17 Phelpstead 2007: 17. The discussion of sources concerning Óláfr Haraldsson here is based on this publication, which also examines the problematic issue of Snorri’s authorship of the saga (pp. 17–22), as well as on Ekrem et al. 2000.

18 Two groups of *Heimskringla* manuscripts are distinguished: K and J. None of the J manuscripts contains the *Heimskringla* version of Óláfs saga helga. Group K comprises the *Kringla* fragment, dated to c. 1258–1264, the oldest extant manuscript of any part of *Heimskringla*.
1220–1230, and *Heimskringla* around 1235. In both cases the story about St Óláfr was incorporated into narratives on other Norwegian kings. St Óláfr thus served as a historical link between generations of kings. At the same time, his unique position of *rex perpetuus Norvegiae* and of a royal martyr is underlined by a number of hagiographical motifs.

The earliest evidence for the veneration of St Óláfr is preserved in skaldic poetry composed soon after his death, and also quoted in *Heimskringla*, for example Þórarinn loftunga’s *Glaðlogsokiða* (c. 1032). The extant source material shows wide interest in different aspects of Óláfr’s cult from the moment of his death onwards, and the cult’s use for both religious and political purposes. The following discussion is based on the aforementioned sagas as well as on two sources considered purely hagiographical: *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* and *Legendary Saga of St Óláfr*. *Passio* is a *vita* attributed to Eysteinn Erlendsson, Archbishop of Niðaróss 1161–1188, the story of Óláfr’s martyrdom and a collection of miracle stories. The *Legendary saga* is the only saga from Snorri’s time (or before) which survives complete. Snorri’s text concerning St Óláfr and the *Legendary saga* have so much in common that his use of a similar work has been suggested.

The material concerning Saint Knútr is less extensive. The first source, *Passio Saneti Canuti Regis et Martiris*, was written around 1095. E. Albreetsen has suggested that the *Passio* was very likely written by an English priest employed at the church, who must have witnessed the *elevatio* since the ceremony is described so precisely. M. Cl. Gertz has discussed both potential Danish and English origin of the author of the *Passio*. The text most probably postdates Óláfr Sveinsson’s death (18 August 1095), and was probably written in the winter of 1095–96, because it does not mention “the good years” following the bad season.

Secondly, *Historia ortus, vitae et passionis Sti. Canuti*, is a chronicle dating from 1122 and written by the English priest Ælnoth (recte, Ailnoth) from St Alban’s church in Odense. He was born in Kent/
England, and after his arrival in Odense in 1098 or 1099 the chronicle was completed only in 1120s, possibly in 1122. It is the first proper historical work concerning Danish events. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has suggested the dating of this text to the years between 1104 and 1134, most probably 1124. The third legend, the *Younger Passio*, was written down c. 1220 and is based on Ælnoth’s text, but the political perspective and rhetoric is missing. The text is a more general depiction of Knútr’s life and miracles, death and cult.

1095, when the first source, *Passio Sancti Canuti Regis et Martiris*, was begun, saw important events. It was the year when Knútr’s brother Eiríkr I became king and began his career by moving the saint’s body into a wooden coffin which was placed in the newly built cathedral church (whose building Knútr himself had started). Eiríkr I Sveinsson (Evergood/Ejegod/inn góði 1095–1103) applied for his brother’s canonization; and when the new church was finished, an official *translatio* took place on 19 April 1100. Thus, the second source concerning St Knútr, *Historia ortus, vitae et passionis Sti. Canuti*, would seem to mirror the development of the cult. Those two texts, *Passio* and *Historia*, are the main ones on the cult of St Knútr used in the following discussion.

Next to the new stone church finished by Eiríkr Sveinsson where King Knútr’s body was placed, Eiríkr founded St Knútr’s monastery. The majority, if not all of the monks there came from the Benedictine monastery of Evesham in England. Albrechtsen maintains that these monks greatly contributed to the spread of the cult and to the composition of the hagiographical texts. He also suggests that these monks were responsible for the first ever recording of the king’s death, *Tabula Othiniensis* (see below). The text was engraved on a metal plaque and placed in the stone coffin together with Knútr’s remains when the coffin was temporarily placed in the crypt of the new St Knútr’s Church. This plaque was moved on 19 April 1101 with the relics to the new reliquary on the high altar in the newly built church consecrated to the Virgin Mary, St Alban and St Knútr.

Another short account is mentioned in a similar context. In chapter 36 of the chronicle Ælnoth himself writes that an inscription was
placed in the coffin together with the king's body. This statement is made directly before mentioning the contents of a text called *Epitafium*. Gertz suggests, therefore, that Ælnoth himself is the author of it.\(^{27}\) Whether the two inscriptions were engraved on separate plaques or on the same one, is unknown (the latter being more likely).\(^{28}\)

Regarding the sources for Saint Eiríkr, the text of the legend, the main hagiography, dates from the reign of Magnús Birgersson (1275–90), most probably from 1277, but an earlier version must have existed.\(^{29}\) It is assumed that the legend was written for liturgical purposes and based on an earlier work, and the authorship is ascribed the Uppsala canon Israel Erlandsson.\(^{30}\) The text begins with Eiríkr's election as king. Its context clearly suggests that it was written at a time when the country had no ruler (*regnum vacante*). Contrary to the Danish legends, there are no implications that opponents were still alive when the text was composed. The legend was written down more than a hundred years after the saint's death, and it may seem that the author of the legend would rather pass over the conflict between the families of Eiríkr and Sverker: there does not seem to be a pronounced tendency to contrast the two families in order to legitimize Eiríkr's successors to the throne.\(^{31}\)

In the following, we shall examine the role of the close family members in the development of the *cultus* of the Scandinavian royal martyrs in the different stages of this cult: at the saint's death, during his burial, during his translation, and for his legacy.

\(^{27}\) Gertz 1907: 81–2.

\(^{28}\) As far as the poem is concerned, Ælnoth might have been the author himself (fn. 196 on p. 110). Gertz has suggested that the two inscriptions were written on two separate plaques and that there might be no connection between them other than that they were placed in Knútr's coffin (Gertz 1907: 41). Both of the artefacts are missing but copies of the inscriptions have been preserved and taken care of by Ole Worm who published them for the first time in 1626 (Gertz 1907: 27). Other copies have been published in the seventeenth century, but have not been considered particularly reliable (Gertz, pp. 26–36).

\(^{29}\) Westman 1954: 2. Einar Carlsson had previously suggested that the legend was written down for the process of translation in 1170. His main argument was that the act of translation implied the use of elaborate liturgy to commemorate the new saint's day, which would include the use of a legend. However, Toivo Haapanen observed that this was not necessary: the day could be celebrated with a reading and songs (Westman 1954: 96, ft. 220).

\(^{30}\) Westman 1954: 46.

3. The role of family members at the death of royal martyrs

Already the scenes of the holy kings' deaths give us some indications of their successors' participation in the saints' *fama sanctitatis*.

The very first motif which establishes the martyrdom of saintly kings is their death. The circumstances of the king's death are obviously important; yet no less decisive is the presentation of the potential reasons for his death, and of his killers, especially when family is involved. The role of the family in the death of the king is not particularly contentious in the case of Óláfr Haraldsson, since his main enemies were powerful local chieftains. They joined forces with Knútr the Great king of Denmark, and his Norwegian vassal, Earl Hákon Eiríksson, and expelled Óláfr from Norway in 1028. Óláfr fled to Grand Duke Jaroslav of Novgorod. Encouraged by the message that Earl Hákón Eiríksson had died, Óláfr returned from his exile two years later, raised a small army in Sweden, and crossed into Norway. There, he encountered a large peasant army, and fell in the battle at Stiklestad on 29 July 1030.

However, of the three Scandinavian royal saints Óláfr Haraldsson is the only "martyr" who died on the battlefield, opposed by chieftains. Knútr and Eiríkr were killed under different circumstances. With them, the problem of the role their kin played is much more urgent in the context of their deaths. The Danish king Knútr gained enemies among his subjects when he issued laws to protect the weak, orphans, widows and foreigners, but most of all when he tried to enforce the collection of tithe. As the grandnephew of Knútr the Great, who until 1035 was king of England, Denmark and Norway, he considered the crown of England to be rightfully his. His planned invasion of England, however, never took place. Before his fleet could reassemble at the Limfjord, a peasant revolt broke out in southern Jutland, where Knútr was staying in 1086. He fled to the wooden Church of St Alban in Odense. That, however, did not guarantee his safety, and Knútr was slain there on July 10, 1086. King Eiríkr of Sweden's death in Östra Äros (later New Uppsala), on May 18 (or, more probably, May 5), 1160 was the result of a struggle between two kin-groups. His assassin was most probably sent by the Sverkers who were rivals of Eiríkr's kin, and aspired

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32 The accuracy of the date of Eiríkr's death has been questioned, see e.g. Sundqvist 2002: 350.
to the rulership. King Eiríkr's main enemy, who arranged the assault, however, was his direct rival for the throne, the Danish prince Magnús Henriksson (king 1160–1).

Let us return to Knútr's case for a closer examination. Knútr's enemies were not only his chieftains and subjects, but they included close family members of his: his brother Óláfr Sveinsson, who, although he did not attack Knútr directly, was his rival to the throne and opposed Knútr. The quotation from Passio underlines the righteous and legitimate position of Knútr with regard to all his brothers (the king is even compared to the Old Testament's Joseph). Óláfr Sveinsson is specifically mentioned as the one who secretly encouraged people to rebel against Knútr. And in the end, as the author of Passio says, everyone was against "God and his anointed". The opposition started amongst the Wends, then the Jutes, and finally also included the inhabitants of Fyn where the king sought refuge in St Alban's Church. The author of Passio underlines the seriousness of the situation by stating that no king has ever been assassinated in a church by his own men this way. 

Ælnoth elaborates the motif of the king's good brother's, Benedikt's, support for Knútr, and describes a scene of Knútr embracing Benedikt in St Alban's church and giving him a kiss shortly before his death. Ælnoth's text underlines the good character of Benedikt in contrast to the fierceness of Knútr's opponents even more when he devotes an entire chapter to Benedikt's martyrdom: Benedikt died alongside Knútr, an act through which he participated in his brother's glory. Earlier in the chronicle both Benedikt and Eiríkr, Knútr's successor, are merely briefly mentioned as Knútr's companions during his journey around the country when the rebellion against the king was growing. Ælnoth's text therefore expresses the idea that Benedikt's sharing of Knútr's martyrdom was a much more important act than any aid he may offered to Knútr while the king was still alive.

In the texts concerning Knútr the motif of betrayal (by his brother Óláfr and by his subjects) is underlined by the very place of Knútr's assassination, St Alban's Church in Odense, similarly to the case of

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33 Passio Canuti 2.
34 Passio Canuti 5.
35 Passio Canuti 6.
36 Passio Canuti 7.
37 Ælnoth, Historia 28.
38 Ælnoth, Historia 29.
39 Ælnoth, Historia 25.
Saint Eiríkr who was killed at Holy Trinity Church in Östra Äros. In Ælnoth’s chronicle the scene of Knútr’s death in Odense is particularly dramatic and full of significant details which show the king’s piety. Knútr not only participated in services but offered gold and silver to the church.\(^{40}\) Knútr is compared to St Stephen and St Sebastian, since arrows and stones were aimed at him, arms which allegedly killed these two saints. Knútr was first hit by a stone thrown through the window, and then by a spear.\(^ {41}\) Knútr’s death \textit{ad sanctos} raises the significance of his martyrdom to a still higher level when a spear was thrown at the king, and the blood stained the reliquaries of St Alban and St Oswald. They had reportedly had been brought by Knútr from England and placed in that church.\(^ {42}\) Thus the scene emphasises the king’s martyrdom and saintly status in the strongest possible way.

King Eiríkr of Sweden also died of wounds sustained in an attack. The text of his legend underlines his innocence and good will when he met his enemies not suspecting anything wrong. In addition, his assassination reportedly took place on Ascension Day. It is a particularly significant date in this context, since it commemorates Christ’s rising to heaven, that is, Christ’s victory after martyrdom and death. This motif recurs again and again in the legend. Eiríkr’s opponents waited for him outside the church while he was praying. Eiríkr left the church armed, together with his supporters, having made the sign of cross, and began to fight back. When he fell to the ground the Danish prince Magnús Henriksson and his people kept inflicting more wounds on Eiríkr, which led to the earthly death and heavenly birth of the king as a victorious saint.\(^ {43}\) Although the comparison between Eiríkr and Christ is not formulated expressly here, in connection with Ascension Day the symbolism is obvious.

Turning to St Óláfr again, the circumstances surrounding his death on the battlefield are confused. Almost every source concerning Óláfr

\(^{40}\) Ælnoth, \textit{Historia} 26. Ælnoth, \textit{Historia (TO)} also mentions sacraments, p. 3.

\(^{41}\) According to Ælnoth stones were thrown at the king (\textit{Historia} 27). The injury allegedly made the king’s cranium recognizable during the analysis of the relics by A. D. Jørgensen in 1887.

\(^{42}\) The “innocent blood”, as the author of the chronicle underlines (ch. 28). The innocence of the king is also very much underlined by \textit{Passio Canuti} 6. On the influence of English tradition of the shaping of the \textit{cultus} of the Scandinavian royal martyrs see e.g. the discussion in Phelpstead 2006: 65 and 70–71. Phelpstead’s examination of Knútr’s martyrdom is based on \textit{Knytlinga saga}, which, like the other two texts, underlines the aspects of the king’s innocence, piety and holiness (Phelpstead 2006: 72).

\(^{43}\) \textit{Legenda}, p. xvi.
gives a different version of the event, mentioning various weapons and assassins. Nevertheless, the general message is that Óláfr’s death was unjust and heroic. As already hinted at, what makes Óláfr’s death substantially different from those of Knútr and Eirikr is that none of the main sources mention the presence of the king’s family or of a rival kin-group at Stiklestad. In Passio Óláfr’s assassins are introduced anonymously as people of ill will and heathens, only the Danish king Knútr is specifically mentioned as the enemy who bribed some people to take sides against King Óláfr. Sagas are the only sources that mention names; The Legendary Saga lists three persons: an anonymous relative of Kálfr Árnason, Þórir hundr and Þorsteinn knarrarsmiðr. It is possible to identify the first character thanks to other individual sagas. Óláfs saga in Heimskringla introduces a man named Kálfr Arnfinsson as the son of Kálfr Árnason’s brother, Arnfinn. In the same saga Kálfr aimed at St Óláfr’s neck, Þorsteinn knarrarsmiðr at the leg, and Þórir hundr put a spear in Óláfr’s stomach, but it is not explicitly stated whether Kálfr Árnason or Kálfr Arnfinsson killed the king. Only Magnús saga göda “reveals” Kálfr Árnason as the assassin.

Also, Óláfr’s behaviour at the moment of death has been portrayed in different ways. While the purely hagiographical texts underline the king’s Christ-like peaceful attitude, Óláfs saga portrays Óláfr as a warrior. Passio Olaví mentions the spiritual weapon: the armour of faith and the sword of the Spirit (the word of God). Also according to the Legendary saga Óláfr decided to face his enemies without any “earthly” weapon and said a prayer for them, while Óláfs saga in Heimskringla mentions that he asked God for help, but did not hesitate to fight. We note similarly ambiguous presentations in the two texts on Knútr’s death: although the comparison of Knútr to Christ is obvious in Historia, only the author of Passio mentions specifically that the king decided not to fight against his enemies and put down the weapon (“arma secundaria deponit”).

44 See the discussion in Rothe 2004: 280–5.  
45 Passio Olaví 1.  
46 Legendary saga 81.  
48 Magnús saga göda 14.  
49 Legendary Saga 82, Óláfs saga 228.  
50 Passio Canuti 7. In Álnoth, Historia only one passage suggests directly that the king might have been directly involved in the fight (Álnoth, Historia 27); see Gertz 1907: 71, ft. 1.
It is a paradox that although martyrs themselves are depicted as fearless and not concerned about the fate of their bodies, these same bodies or their remains were considered highly significant. An important aspect in this context is the elaborate political theology concerning “the king’s two bodies”, that is: the political body and the physical body, which was formulated in 1100s.\(^{51}\) It was rich in parallels between the dual body of Christ and the body of earthly rulers, which played a particularly significant role in stories about martyrs, especially royal martyrs. The rulers achieved their holiness through the mortification of their bodies, and the relics served both as a religious and as a political symbol (as shall be especially visible in the example of Öláfr Haraldsson discussed below).

It is, therefore, not a coincidence that the death of royal martyrs, especially those involved in the process of Christianisation, is usually depicted with rich Christological symbolism. Many examples could be listed here: in addition to explicit parallels and examples in the texts, the motif of being pierced with a spear/lance, dying with arms stretched out in the form of the cross or praying for the enemies are obvious allusions. However, other motifs such as betrayal could also be debated in a different context.\(^{52}\) Especially Ælnoth’s Historia and (Snorri’s?) Heimskringla make it clear that the kings were representatives of God on earth, thus, a crime against the king was a crime against God. The image of a sanctuary covered with blood seems as horrifying to Ælnoth as the fact that the king was killed by his people.\(^{53}\) The author’s appeal “Fear God, honour the king”, seems to be the motto of his work.\(^{54}\)

In order to be able to compare the kings to Christ and other martyrs, their death had to meet certain requirements: it had to be the result of an unjust fight. Consequently, the royal martyr is usually depicted as surrounded by no or few supporters, and the family members are often absent from that group. This was certainly the case with Eiríkr, who at the moment of death was the only representative of his kin present. Knútr’s story is an exception here, since his struggle was to a large extent a family struggle. As far as Öláfr is concerned, it is

\(^{51}\) Kantorowicz 1997.
\(^{52}\) The motif of thirst and the Judas motif (Historia 26). The day of Knútr’s death was Friday, the same as Christ’s, according to Passio Canuti.
\(^{53}\) Ælnoth, Historia 28.
\(^{54}\) Ælnoth, Historia 28. The author was inspired by the biblical texts, see 1. Pet. 2, 17.
worth mentioning that his son was absent from the battlefield. Óláfr’s half-brother Haraldr Sigurðarson was present and wounded, but that information is given only in an individual saga devoted to Haraldr.\textsuperscript{55} Clearly, Haraldr’s role at Stiklestad was not perceived as significant. This, in fact, is a general impression: usually, the role of family members, and thus of the successors of the Scandinavian royal saints at the moment of their death is described as insignificant, unless that death was directly caused by a conflict between family members or rival kins.

Does this general absence of family members which the sources hint at correspond to reality, or is it due to authorial decisions? St Óláfr’s closest relative, his son Magnús, was six years old and in a foreign country when his father was slain and buried. Magnús was born in 1024 and in 1028, when his father went in exile, the boy accompanied him to Sweden and then to Russia. There he stayed till 1034 when Einarr \textit{pambarskelfir} and Kálfr Árnason came to King Jaroslav with their following, declared their loyalty to Magnús and took him back to Norway to have him proclaimed the king. St Óláfr’s other close relative, his half-brother Haraldr Sigurðarson, was fifteen years old and present at Stiklestad, but seems not to have played any significant role. St Eiríkr’s son must have been around ten years old at the time of Eiríkr’s death, and the \textit{Legend} does not contain any information about him.\textsuperscript{56} St Knútr’s brother Eiríkr Sveinsson is only briefly mentioned as his companion on the way to his last battle at Odense.\textsuperscript{57} The next time Eiríkr Sveinsson appears in the text is much later, in the description of his rule.\textsuperscript{58} Thus, the absence or insignificant role in the texts of the close relatives of the Scandinavian royal martyrs at the moment of their death might, in majority of cases, indeed correspond to facts: it might have been due to the relatives’ young age. The only exception here would be Eiríkr, who was overshadowed by another brother, Benedikt. Why the texts do not grant Eiríkr Sveinsson a more important role than the participation in Knútr’s last expedition is difficult to answer.

In general however, even if Óláfr’s, Knútr’s and Eiríkr’s relatives did in fact historically not play an important role in their deaths, this can,

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar} 1 and 99.
\textsuperscript{56} It is assumed that he lived ca. 1150–1195.
\textsuperscript{57} \AElnoth, \textit{Historia} 25.
\textsuperscript{58} \AElnoth, \textit{Historia} 32.
in our view, not quite explain their utter insignificance in our sources. That no writer mentions any single divine sign or other miraculous circumstances connected to the closest relatives of the royal martyrs is surprising: it would be a more than credible adherence to “nothing but reality” in such texts. Thus, the obvious next question is: were the family members given a different role or function?

4. The Saint’s burial: arranged by family or strangers?

The choice of burial place of a medieval king was not something that was decided arbitrarily or on sentimental grounds. It was a decision loaded with religious and ideological significance.59 It would be difficult to disagree with Evans’s statement. In our context the question of whose initiative the burial was is interesting. In case of the royal martyrs who died a violent death, the decision was frequently taken by the followers of the deceased king who wished to save the body from being disposed of, or by anonymous people who had supported the king during his lifetime. Interestingly, the Scandinavian examples are quite different. Ólafr Haraldsson’s story definitely stands out with its element of secrecy. After Ólafr’s death his body was abandoned on the battlefield at Stiklestad until the same evening. According to Ólafs saga in Heimskringla, the body was then taken by Þorgils Hálmuson and his son Grímr who were afraid that Ólafr’s enemies might desecrate it.60 Ironically, the sign of the king’s holiness, a bright light burning right above the spot where his body laid, might easily have betrayed the location of the body. Þorgils and Grímr made two coffins (one of which was filled with stones and straw) and rowed across the sea to Niðaróss. There they left the coffin which did not contain Ólaf’s body with Bishop Sigurðr, and then, with the real coffin, rowed up the river to a place called Sauðhlið where the king was buried, far away from the inhabited area.61 They were not disturbed by anyone as the Bishop disposed of the coffin he had received immediately (it was thrown into the river), without checking its contents.

Ólaf’s remains were subsequently moved several times before they were secretly buried. At first the body was taken to an abandoned

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60 Ólafs saga 238–239.
61 Ólafs saga 238.
house within a certain distance from the town where it had rested for one night, then to Niðaróss, finally back to Saurhlið for one night, where it was buried in a sand hill nearby.\(^{62}\)

This secretive burial of a saintly king is rather extraordinary. None of the extant texts concerning Knútr and Eiríkr mentions acts similar to those in Óláfs saga. Nevertheless, a certain tension is present in all texts. Knútr's body was buried immediately after the assassination in St Alban's Church in Odense 10 July 1086.\(^{63}\) Ælnoth's Historia reports that when the fight was over, the enemies left the church and the priests who served there as well as the king's faithful servants took care of the body.\(^{64}\) King Eiríkr's death seems to have been all his assassins cared about as well; it does not seem as if the potential value of the monarch's body occurred to them. When the killers retreated, the king's body was taken by some of the king's men to the house of a poor widow who lived nearby, and then buried in the church.\(^{65}\)

Just as above in the case of the kings' deaths, so now again regarding their burials, the relatives are unimportant in our texts.

None of the Scandinavian royal martyrs seems to have been buried by a family member, nor do the texts report that any of the bodies or graves was at some point attended by the son or brother before the process of translatio. Only the case of Knútr seems an exception here. It is, however, not a blood-relative of the king, and certainly not a relative in the agnatic line, but Knútr's wife, Queen Áðalheiðr, who wished to exhume the body of her husband and bury it in her fatherland, in Gent (at Blandinium monastery).\(^{66}\) When she entered the church together with a group of men who were going to move the body, a miraculous light filled the church. It was shortly before midnight and the Queen took it as a sign to abandon her plan. The story was most probably constructed later than the main body of the text in order to dramatise the event, similarly to Knútr's brother's (Benedikt's) martyrdom.\(^{67}\)

Before the bodies of the deceased kings became relics venerated in shrines, their saintliness, so the sources claim, was particularly strongly

\(^{62}\) Óláfs saga 236 and 238.

\(^{63}\) Passio Canuti 8 does not mention any specific spot.

\(^{64}\) Ælnoth, Historia 30. The bodies of the retainers were, however, never found during the excavations—see Albrechtsen 1984: 94–95.

\(^{65}\) Legenda, p. xiii.

\(^{66}\) Ælnoth, Historia 31.

\(^{67}\) Albrechtsen 1984: 97 (ft. 174).
demonstrated by proto-miracles which occurred due to the power of their blood. Óláfr's blood healed the wound of Þórir hundr, one of his assassins, shortly after the king's death on the battlefield. The next person it healed was a poor blind man close to Stiklestad, where Óláfr's body rested for one night. The man touched the body of the deceased king, and the blood of the martyr cured his blindness. An almost identical story is recorded in Eiríkr's legend—after the fight the king's body was taken to the house of a poor blind widow who lived nearby. The woman regained her eyesight by touching her eyes with her fingers stained by the royal blood. Knútr's blood did not serve as a means of healing in any proto-miracle, but it was sanctified by being spilt on the altar in St Alban's Church, close to the relics.

Thus we note the same pattern as for the deaths of the royal saints. Again, the male relatives and successors of Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr are not included in the descriptions of the first miracles. Rather than the family, members of lower classes and even the kings' enemies are said to have been the first ones to witness the first signs of holiness. Looking for possible reasons, one should look at the function of these first proto-miracles. The consistent motif is a beam of light, in the next step, someone receiving his eyesight. This symbolises enlightenment. Might the kings' relatives therefore not be included amongst the first witnesses of miracles, that is, amongst the recipients of this enlightenment, because they would not have required to be enlightened? Their knowledge of the holy kings' merits and their religious awareness would thus be shown as inherently sufficient anyway. This in turn would have been an important tool for legitimising their right to royal power.

Regarding those who did witness the first miracles, with the exception of Þórir hundr the people who really benefited from these proto-miracles were in fact not notorious sinners or the kings' enemies. Rather, they were poor, anonymous people. Their role in the cult is symbolic. The predominant convention used in the sources is the spread of saintly fame through poor, otherwise unnoticed individuals, according to the principles of the New Testament.

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68 Ólafs saga 230.
69 Ólafs saga 236.
70 Legenda, p. xvi.
5. The role of the Saint's successors in his translatio and canonisation

Having analysed and offered explanations for the insignificant role of family members at the royal saints' deaths and burials, let us now turn to their role in the translatio of the kings' bodies and in their canonisation.

Already when his wound was miraculously healed at Stiklestad, Þórir hundr noticed that the deceased St Óláfr looked "sem þá at hann svæfi". The same observation was made by Bishop Grimkell who decided to open the coffin a year after the burial. He made this decision because of signs and miracles, but also because the coffin containing Óláfr's body twice came out of the ground on its own accord, looking brand new. The motif of the uncorrupted body as a sign of holiness is well known in the hagiographical material. It has been linked to the idea of resurrection, vital for Christianity, a religion which decrees the burying corpses (as opposed to cremation) and the preservation of bodies for their resurrection. A. Angenendt refers to Paul the Deacon (d. 787) who, at the translation of Saint Benedict from Monte Cassino to Fleury, argued that only Christ's body had not seen corruption; all other corpses were subject to corruption, with the exception of those that had been preserved without a stain through a divine miracle.

Bodily death and decay were connected with original sin, but the sanctified body was different. The lack of corruption symbolized the inversion: those who on earth mortified their bodies in their attempts to follow the teachings of Christ were able to preserve them. The unusually pristine state of Óláfr Haraldsson's body was mentioned already in Glaðognskviða, a skaldic poem from 1031/32 by Þórarinn loftunga, the first text proclaiming the king's saintliness, very soon after his death. That does not only confirm the popularity of the motif in northern Europe at the time, but also the early initiative of popularising the cultus in a skaldic poem.

71 "as if he were asleep" (Óláfs saga 230).
72 Óláfs saga 244.
73 Angenendt 2002: 30. See also Angenendt 1991.
74 Of special importance for the lack of corruption was the absence of sexual activity, hence the phenomenon is usually mentioned in the lives of abbots or bishops, but kings, such as Charles the Great are no exception (Angenendt 2002: 30-31).
75 Roest 2002: 166.
Ólafr Haraldsson’s body was translated into a reliquary in St Clement’s Church in Niðaróss on 3 August 1031. The Separate Saga in Heimskringla and the Saga of Magnús Óláfsson report:

Magnús konungr lét gera skrínu ok búa gulli ok sifri ok setja steinum. En skrínu þat var svá gört bæði at mikilileik ok at öðrum vexti sem likkista, en svalir undir niðri, en yfir upp vítt vaxit sem ræfr ok þar af upp höfuð ok burst. Er þar véttingu lámur á bak, en heispor fyrir ok þar læst míg lúkli. Síðan lét Magnús konungr leggja í skrínu þat helgan dóm Ólafs konungs. Urðu þar margar jarðgir í skrínu þat helgum dömi Ólafs konungs (…) Pá var þat í lög tekít um allan Nóreg at haldag heilagat hátið Ólafs konungs. Var þá svá dagr þegar þar svá haldinn sem inar æztu hátiðið.  

Here now, contrary to death and burial, the role of a close relative and successor is finally prominent.

The text leaves no doubt about the fact that that Magnús Óláfrsson was determined to invest substantially in the veneration of his father. The reliquary certainly could be compared to its numerous impressive counterparts from the continent or the British Isles, provided that the description quoted above is reliable. However, Magnús’ role begins only with the ordering of the shrine. As discussed above, it was again non-family members, Þórir hundr and Bishop Grimkell, who noticed the first signs required for a translatio, the uncorrupted body and coffin. Thus, while in the case of St Óláfr’s translatio his son Magnús plays a significant role, he still only comes “second”.

In Denmark St Knútr’s body was taken out of the ground already in 1095 and buried in a new, stone coffin. Ælnoth’s Historia mentions that the king’s body rested in the same place for eight years and almost nine months. It was put in the stone coffin and placed in the crypt of the unfinished stone church (a side chapel in the new cathedral church, later dedicated to St Knútr). After the canonisation process was completed in 1100, the king’s body was put in a reliquary decorated with gilt silver on 19 April of the same year. The Historia informs us that

76 “King Magnús had a shrine made and mounted with gold and silver, and studded with jewels. This shrine was made so that in shape and size it was like a coffin. Under it was an arched way, and above was a raised roof, with a head and a roof-ridge. Behind were plaited hangings; and before were gratings with padlocks, which could be locked with a key. In this shrine King Magnús had the holy remains of King Óláfr deposited, and many were the miracles there wrought. (…) It was also appointed by law that King Óláfr’s holy day should be held sacred over all Norway, and that day has been kept ever afterwards as the greatest of Church days” (Ólafs saga 253, Magnúss saga 10).

77 Ælnoth, Historia 32.
Knútr’s brother Eiríkr initiated the canonisation process. This is clear evidence for a prominent role of one of the saint’s family members.\textsuperscript{78} The same text contains an explicit entry concerning the active role of another individual related to Knútr, although again, as above, it is his widow Queen Ádalheiðr, thus someone not related to Knútr by blood. She supposedly sent precious stones to decorate the reliquary which was made after the canonisation process had been completed.\textsuperscript{79}

For Sweden, Eiríkr’s legend ends with a proto-miracle. The dates of translation as well as the names of individuals who initiated it or who financed the making of the reliquary must be taken from other sources. When compared to the cases of Óláfr and Knútr, the evidence for the veneration of Eiríkr’s remains and his family’s participation in this process is rather weak. The translation is often dated to 1257, but the date is problematic. The archiepiscopal see was moved to Östra Äros (the “New” Uppsala) and on this occasion the new cathedral church was consecrated to St Eiríkr, St Lars/Laurentius and St Óláfr. It is rather probable that the king’s relics were moved there from Gamla Uppsala at the same time.\textsuperscript{80} Arthur Bygdén, however, argues that since the Vallentuna calendar mentions Eiríkr’s death anniversary as a holiday in 1198, it must be assumed that his remains had achieved the status of relics already then.\textsuperscript{81} The first information concerning the reliquary is, in fact, a note in Sverris saga, dated to around 1220. In the Swedish source material the first information appears only in the second half of the thirteenth century. No source mentions Knútr Eiríksson explicitly as the initiator of his father’s cultus; it is unknown whether he financed the making of the reliquary or contributed to the veneration in any other way.\textsuperscript{82} Thus regarding St Eiríkr, the role of the family members for the martyrs’ canonisation and translatio does not seem prominent—contrary to the cases of St Óláfr and St Knútr. This perceived insignificance of Eiríkr’s relatives

\textsuperscript{78} Árnóth, Historia 33.
\textsuperscript{79} Árnóth, Historia 35.
\textsuperscript{80} There is a disagreement among scholars as far as the dates of translatio are concerned because of the inconsistency of the source material. Lauritz Weibull dates the ceremony of translatio to 1273 and the moving of relics to 1290. Einar Carlsson suggested the translation and elevatio already in 1170s. See also Ahnlund 1954: 121–5. An examination of the relics which took part in 1946 provided information that could support Carlsson’s hypothesis; the bones were most probably taken up from the grave within a decade or two after death (Sands 2008: 207).
\textsuperscript{81} Bygdén 1954: 321.
\textsuperscript{82} For the most recent discussion on the subject see Sands 2008, esp. pp. 207–14.
may, however, at least partially be due to the problematic nature of the sources.

Let us now turn in more detail to the role of the family members in the propagation of miracles connected to the uncorrupted body of the saints.

As mentioned above, the motif of the uncorrupted body was well known in Germanic tradition; the first king whose body supposedly never decayed was Charlemagne. The best-known instances are the reports on the opening of Charlemagne’s grave at Aachen by Otto III: the deceased king was found sitting on the throne and Otto ordered his fingernails, which had grown through the glove, to be cut off. Another example is St Edmund, the English king and martyr. Edmund was beheaded by the Danes, but his head was miraculously re-attached to the body, the entire body remained uncorrupted; the head and nails continued to grow and were groomed by a pious woman who cared for the body.

There are no accounts of any special qualities of Eiríkr’s remains in the Legend, which distinguishes that holy king from his two Scandinavian counterparts.

A story similar to the one about Charlemagne and St Edmund is told about Óláfr Haraldsson, whose hair and nails reportedly kept growing after his death. Apparently, the clipping of both became an annual ritual—and one which was the duty of close relatives. St Óláfr’s son Magnús Óláfsson, and later his half-brother Haraldr Sigurðarson were responsible for the care of his body. In Magnús saga góða 1, it is stated that Magnús Óláfsson should win back his inheritance.83 Most probably Haraldr hárfagri’s legacy is meant by that.84 Thus, Magnús should follow Haraldr’s and his father’s position as the ruler of a large, unified country. The father-son relationship, underlined in Heimskringla, is there in order to legitimize Magnús’s right to Haraldr hárfagri’s heritage, with Óláfr a natural link in this chain. The making of the reliquary supposedly took place immediately after Magnús had become the King of Norway in 1035.85 From then on he also took on the duty of clipping St Óláfr’s hair and nails. Since Magnús was the one to continue the process of unification after his father, also this act

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83 The word ættland is used here.
84 See e.g. the discussion in Rethe 2004: 214.
85 “Magnús konungr för um haustit allt austr til landsenda ok var hann til konunnings tekinn um allt land” (Magnúss saga góða 5, the shrine making is described in ch. 10).
refers to the story of Haraldr hárfagrí and his vow not to cut his hair before he would unify the entire Norway. In short, a close relative, Magnús, clearly had a significant duty regarding his father’s uncorrupted body.

Haraldr Sigurðarson, Óláfr’s half-brother, continued the hair and nail clipping. However, in 1066, without any explicitly stated reason he threw the keys to the reliquary into the river.86 This act was symbolic in two ways: first, it took place shortly before Haraldr’s expedition to England in that year, during which he was killed in a battle; second, as the most successful conqueror directly succeeding Magnús and Óláfr on the throne, he had completed the task of the unification of the Norwegian kingdom. Hence, the ritual was no longer needed.

It is interesting that Heimskringla uses the motif of posthumously growing hair and nails already mentioned in Glelognsvíða, a poem from 1031/2. Again, as mentioned above, it may simply be a reference to a certain tradition known from the past, even if that past had been preserved in a skaldic poem influenced by foreign hagiographical texts. At the same time, it might be a reference to a pre-Christian tradition of kin and of a meaningful, predestined death of a ruler, which agreed with the biblical ideas of a similar type.87

Yet despite Óláfr’s miraculously undecayed body, there were doubts about Óláfr Haraldsson’s saintliness. In Óláfs saga (Hkr) Queen Áláfía suggested that the growing hair and nails of the king may suggest heathen magic. Óláfs saga is by no means the only text suggesting this. In the Old Norwegian Christian Law there was a specific command against the preservation of hair and nails with the intention of using them in magical rituals.88 The discussion of (especially) the trial by fire by the Queen, as Rethe interprets it, shifts the focus from the King’s body through which God’s power is demonstrated, to the fire, or the act of putting a spell on it, so that it would not burn the relics.89

Also St Knútr’s bones were submitted to the ordeal by fire as it was a common wish of the clergy and other people.90 The ritual, in which the author of Passio claims to have participated, meant applying fire to Knútr’s bones four times, but it would stop burning every time it

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86 Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar 80.
88 Ngl II: 490.
90 Passio Canuti 32.
touched the bones. No explicit doubts about the king’s holiness are mentioned, but the fact that the procedure was demanded indicates that they seem to have existed.

Queen Alífa’s attitude seems to be even more blasphemous when the act of obtaining Óláfr’s hair and nails in the same saga is recalled. Contrary to Magnús saga góða and Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar, the clipping of the king’s hair and nails was entrusted to a bishop. The saint’s relatives or any other laymen are not mentioned in this context at all, the privilege belongs to the clergy. The direct relationship to the holy predecessor’s relics was a confirmation of a king’s right to the throne. Óláfr Haraldsson’s son, Magnús, and his half-brother Haraldr Sigurðarson, were granted a particular role in the care of the martyr’s body, which went far beyond the simple ordering of a reliquary. The body’s good condition and wholeness was either perceived as representing the indivisibility of the country the king ruled, or it symbolised the king’s strive for the country’s unification. In Heimskringla Óláfr is frequently referred to as following in Haraldr hárfragri’s footsteps: as a ruler whose life mission was to rule over the whole of Norway. Even after translatio the context in which Óláfr’s relics are mentioned in the medieval source material never suggests that his body was partitioned, and that can hardly be a coincidence. Although Óláfr Haraldsson’s actual connection with Haraldr hárfragri’s kin is, in fact, a debatable issue, the symbolic meaning of his role has been well used. Knútr is another saint who might fit this pattern. His ambition made him claim the crowns of both England and Denmark, the idea of a joint kingdom being his goal. He was also supposed to have christianised and joined two new areas to his territory: Kurland and Livland (Livonia). Like Óláfr’s body, also Knútr’s remains were not partitioned.

In Knútr’s case, the brotherly relationship is vital. Immediately after Knútr’s burial, his brother Óláfr Sveinsson was elevated to the throne; and Óláfr is usually described as a usurper. Significantly therefore, Knútr’s translation only occurred when his brother lost his power and died. The author of Passio explains that Óláfr’s usurpation of

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91 Passio Canuti 9.
92 “Byskup varðveitti helgan dóm Óláfs konungs, skar hár hans og negl” (Óláfs saga (Hkr)), 245.
93 Krag 1999 and 2002, Bagge 2002. Cf. for the body of the ruler representing the territory, and for a comparison between Óláfr and Hálfðan svarti, Steinsland in this volume.
94 Passio Canuti 9, Ælnoth, Historia 32.
the crown was the reason for Knútr's death being followed by natural disasters and hunger, a punishment sent by God.95 Numerous signs and prodigies suggested that Knútr's translation would be the right remedy against this state of affairs, which proved to be true. Apparently, according to the author of Passio the Jutes (who previously opposed the king) were the first ones to come and negotiate the translation with the priests and bishops.96 On the other hand, Ælnoth suggests that conditions improved as soon as Eiríkr inn góði became king. Eiríkr is portrayed by Ælnoth as the righteous king whose reign initiated a change of conditions in the country, and Ælnoth praised Eiríkr's wisdom to the extent that he compared him to King Salomon.97 Thus in Knútr's case, in Passio we might again see the pattern that the king's enemies or at least subjects (the Jutes)—and thus not the family members—initiated his translatio. Ælnoth's version, by contrast, does ascribe an important role to Eiríkr.

This analysis of the role of the family members with regard to the uncorrupted body of the saints so far seems to point to another possible pattern:

The successors of the holy kings who did have a role, acted only after they had become kings themselves. The one exception is Magnús Óláfrsson, although only according to one source, Óláfs saga in Heimskringla.

However, an overall assessment of the role of relatives and successors versus that of unrelated people—be they enemies, subjects, or clergy—indicates that even active relatives and successors were at best only one group amongst the initiators of the dead king's canonisation and translatio. This is very clearly expressed in Óláfs saga:

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\text{Var þat þá byskups atkvæði ok konungs samþykki ok dómur alls herjar, at Óláfr konungr væri sannheilagr.}^{98}
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The saga leaves no doubt about the division of rights among the bishop, the king and the assembly. Obviously, elements of the struggle

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95 Passio Canuti 8.
96 Passio Canuti 8. This motif is not to be found in Ælnoth's Historia, where the author hardly indicates any particular individuals or groups as initiators of the translatio. Its aim might be the depiction of the former enemy as the witness of the king's holiness. Similarly Flórir hundr was granted the proto-miracle in Óláfs saga.
97 Ælnoth, Historia 35.
98 "After the bishop's recognition, with the king's approbation and the decision of the Thing, it was determined that King Óláfr should be considered a man truly holy" (Óláfs saga (Hkr) 244).
between *reignum* and *sacerdotium*, an important issue in the 1200s, influence the saga's description. In our context the saga implies that the decision was "democratic"; but in particular, it shows plainly that the bishop was the first element in the process, having to recognise the dead king's saintliness. Only afterwards does the new king—and relative—approve, which in itself is at least officially not enough; since a decision by the Ping is also required.

Thus in the case of St Öláfr, the strong influence of the clergy was exercised by the secular church—the bishop. In St Eiríkr's and St Knútr's cases, we also note the significant role of the clergy, here however played by the regular church.

It has been suggested that the cathedral chapter of Old Uppsala had Benedictine origins. Allegedly, the Benedictine monks from England had been brought there by King Eiríkr himself. Like the Benedictine monastery at Odense which was the centre for the cult of Saint Knútr (who had brought monks from England there), also Old Uppsala contributed greatly to the veneration of St Eiríkr. They exerted strong influence on the origins of the cult of the king, their benefactor. Clerical interest grew even stronger in the archdiocese of (New) Uppsala. As a potential rival of Niðaróss, it might have served as a pilgrimage site and attracted the faithful, which would provide both immaterial and material benefits.

A cult continuity in the veneration of Eiríkr has been suggested in connection with the placement of his remains in Old Uppsala, supposedly an important site for pre-Christian beliefs associated with sacral kingship. Unlike in the case of Öláfr, it is, however, difficult to make any direct connection between a strong pre-Christian cult and the veneration of Eiríkr.

In sum thus, obviously, clerical interests frequently agreed with the royal aspirations of the potential candidates to the throne. Still, there

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100 Hoffmann (1975: 38–45 and 1981: 36–38) has suggested the influence of English spirituality on Eiríkr's legend, which was also discussed by Hallencreutz 1996: 137. See also Nyberg 1981: 103–4 and Fröjmark 1996.
101 Ingrid Lundegärdh has suggested that the *cultus* of St Eiríkr was meant to replace the *cultus* of Saint Öláfr in the northern Swedish provinces, which paid Olavsskatt to Niðaróss, although they were under the ecclesiastical authority of Uppsala (Lundegärdh 1997).
102 See e.g. Lindqvist 1996: 236–7.
103 The issue has been discussed by e.g. Lindqvist 1996, Fröjmark 1996, Steinsland 2000 and Sundqvist 2002.
is no doubt that the holders of secular power depended on the decisions of the clergy in terms of proclaiming the holiness of the deceased kings. Thus we hardly ever see family members described as initiators of translation or canonisation. It was the secular or regular clergy who began the process, possibly after the dead king’s saintliness manifested itself to poor anonymous members of their flock. Óláfr’s, Knútr’s and Eiríkr’s family members and successors then merely joined them.

Their male relatives who wished to be perceived as the righteous rulers and followers of the saints, relied on external symbols of power which, at the same time, underlined the connection with the saints. Financing reliquaries and appeals to the Pope, but also church building and planning their own burial in the proximity of relics became almost standard.

6. The family and the legacy of the Saint

It was customary for the king to bury his predecessor.\textsuperscript{104} As discussed, the three Scandinavian examples, however, show another pattern: Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr were buried by random people, while their successors only took an active role in the cult later, at some stage in the process of translation. Although the circumstances under which the royal martyrs died go a long way towards explaining the relatives’ absence at the martyrs’ burial, it is still rather surprising that the sons and brothers of the holy kings were not accorded a greater role in spreading the \textit{fama sanctitatis}. As argued here, it was other laymen who witnessed the first miracles and the final decision about the status of the deceased was left to the clergy. The translation of relics was literally the removal of them from one place (a more or less temporary grave) and placement in another one (on an altar, in a church, preferably a newly built one).\textsuperscript{105} Until the official process became standardised and the prerogative of the Pope, it was treated as the outward recognition of heroic sanctity, equal to canonisation.

The contribution of the successors of the royal martyrs in the \textit{cultus} of Scandinavian royal martyrs seems to be a symbolic act. It seems significant that there are parallels between the beginning of their reigns and the official recognition of the sanctity of their predecessors. The

\textsuperscript{104} Evans 2006: 142–4.

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Translatio primo, translatio secundo}. 
texts under consideration appear to follow the same scheme: death—burial—miracles (most often spread by anonymous people, the so-called “common opinion”)—approval of the clergy—translatio, and only at this last stage the relatives/successors become active. Why did they assume an active role precisely then? The desire to be buried ad sanctos, that is, among the saints, was a common practice in medieval Europe, which gained in significance after the doctrine of purgatory had spread. However, for the members of royal families, being buried next to their forefathers who had the reputation of being holy, had an additional meaning. It could serve the manifestation of their power as legitimised in two ways: by royal blood and by spiritual power. An extreme example of the manifestation of royal power by family ties is the case of Westminster Abbey in England. It was founded by Edward the Confessor, whose body, according to the legend, never corrupted. He was the first king buried there. Westminster became the rival of Canterbury, the pilgrimage site which commemorated Archbishop and Saint Thomas Becket, killed by King Henry II’s knights. Westminster Abbey may safely be called “a consistent royal necropolis from the thirteenth century onwards.”

It is hardly a coincidence that Henry III, the son of Henry II, promoted the cult of Edward as a dynastic saint of the English kings. He developed the Abbey and chose to be buried there.

The very act of burying kings within abbey churches indicated the sacral element of medieval kingship; it has even been suggested that the practice of burying royalties in raised tombs “mimicked the burial of saints.” David Rollason maintains that in the tenth and eleventh centuries the English church was not disposed to regard royal confessors as saints and gives the example of Edward the Confessor as a proof of this hypothesis. However, considering the way Westminster Abbey developed it is difficult to agree with Rollason’s argument.

A necropolis as big as Westminster Abbey never existed in Scandinavia. Yet certain tendencies to concentrate royal power around the relics of

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107 It is also rather interesting in this context that Henry III tried to popularize the idea of “the royal touch” in England and, apparently, performed miracles himself, although Guibert of Nogent (1124) clearly stated that while the French kings had the ability, their English counterparts certainly did not (Evans 2006: 179). Thomas Becket was clearly perceived by many as an “anti-royalist” saint (Evans 2006: 190).
109 Rollason 1989: 140.
the royal martyrs can be observed. *Haralds saga Sigurdarsonar* mentions the following:


According to *Óláfs saga kyrja*:

> Ólafur konungur lét gera steinmusteri í Níðarósi og setti í þeim stæð sem fyrst hafði verið jarðað lík Ólafs konungs og var þar yfir sett altarið sem gróft konungs hafði verið. Þar var vigð Kristskirkja. Var þá og þannug flutt skrin Ólafs konungs og sett þar yfir altari. Úrðu þar þá margar jartegnir”.\(^{111}\)

These “family burials” gain even more significance having considered the fact that, according to various source material, Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr were initially buried in the churches which were either built at their command, finished during their reign, or to which the kings had

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\(^{110}\) “King Magnús Óláfsson built Óláfr’s church in the town (Níðaróss), on the spot where Óláf’s body was set down for the night, and which, at that time, was above the town. He also had the king’s house built there. The church was not quite finished when the king died; but King Harald had what was wanting completed. There, beside the house, he began to construct a stone hall, but it was not finished when he died. King Haraldr had the church called Mary Church built from the foundations up, at the sandhill close to the spot where the king’s holy remains were concealed in the earth the first winter after his fall. It was a large temple, and so strongly built with lime that it was difficult to break it when the Archbishop Eysteinn had it pulled down. Óláf’s holy remains were kept in Óláfr’s church while Mary Church was building. King Haraldr had the king’s house erected below Mary’s Church, at the side of the river, where it now is; and he had the house in which he had made the great hall consecrated and called Gregorius Church” (*Haralds saga Sigurdarsonar* 38).

\(^{111}\) “King Óláfr had a church of stone built in Níðaróss, on the spot where King Óláfr’s body had first been buried, and the altar was placed directly over the spot where the king’s grave had been. This church was consecrated and called Christ Church; and King Óláfr’s shrine was removed to it, and was placed before the altar, and many miracles took place there” (*Óláfr kyrres saga* 6).
a particular connection of some other kind. Óláfr had St Clement's Church built in Níðaróss; Knútr had allegedly brought St Alban's relics from England and placed in Odense church where he later was murdered and buried. Eiríkr finished building the cathedral church in Gamla Uppsala which his predecessors had begun to build. He also installed priests there. This is where he was buried and where his reliquary was placed for a hundred years, before it was moved to the new Uppsala.

There seems to be a strong connection between succession to the throne directly after the royal martyr and burial in the proximity of the relics. While Óláfr's son and half-brother succeeded him directly, the situation was quite different for Knútr's and Eiríkr's relatives. Knór Eiríksson did not succeed his father on the throne directly, but came to power only after Magnús Henriksson (1160–1161), the assassin of his father, and Karl Sverkersson (1161–1167). Unlike his father, Knútr was not buried in (New) Uppsala, but in Varnhem. The successor of Saint Knútr, his half-brother Eiríkr did not follow him directly either, as mentioned above, as Knútr's other brother, Óláfr, who opposed Knútr, "usurped" the throne 1086–1095. Eiríkr was not buried in the proximity of his brother, but the circumstances of his death are rather unique; Eiríkr died on a pilgrimage which led to Jerusalem via Rome, where he supposedly applied for his brother's canonisation. The place of his death, Paphos in Cyprus, was also the place of his burial.

Again it must be underlined that it is interesting to observe that of the sources concerning Saint Óláfr, it is only the separate Óláfs saga in Heimskringla that mentions his successors as contributors to Óláfr Haraldsson's saintly fame. As far as church building is concerned, the Separate Saga does not mention Magnús's contribution. The text only refers to the reliquary making and the establishment of the feast as well as to the keeping of Óláfr's reliquary, also by Haraldr Sigurðarson. Of all the three kings praised by their individual sagas, only Óláfr kyrri's church building is described in Óláfs saga in Heimskringla. It is a significant fact that all those kings related by blood to Saint Óláfr built new churches and moved his relics to them, were also buried ad sanctos, in the proximity of those relics. This information, however, is also available only in the individual sagas devoted to those kings.

112 Óláfs saga 253 and 270.
Heimskringla's royalist ideology concerning the Norwegian monarchs is certainly shared by Ælnoth's Historia, dedicated to King Níkulás Sveinsson of Denmark. According to this source King Eiríkr Sveinsson applied to the Pope for Knútr's canonization (ch. 33). In the letter to King Níkulás, which at the same time is a prologue to the Historia, it is underlined that the King is St Knútr's brother. He is encouraged to imitate Knútr's honourable deeds and is presented not only as the saint's follower, but also a participant in his saintliness. It is quite clear from the prologue that Ælnoth's aim was to write the history of the royal family and of the country. Although the story is, in principle, about Saint Knútr, the saint's glory is without doubt beneficial for the current monarch, to whom the chronicle is dedicated. Ælnoth's aim was to spread the idea of the royal power as sent from God. Also the role of Knútr's brother Benedikt and his burial ad sanctos, close to Knútr, is only mentioned by the Historia, the source according to which Benedikt participated in Knútr's glory through his own violent death.

In sum, it appears that the relatives/successors of Sts Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr become actively involved in the dead kings' sainthood only at the moment of translatio, not before. There are on the one hand probably reasons relating to the power-sharing between regnum and sacerdotium for this: a cleric was required for the first steps of the cults. In addition, it was at the stage of translatio that the cult gained real ideological significance for the successors, with the physical creation of a centre for the royal cult and its consequences for ensuing royal burials. Whether we want to call such a site a royal necropolis also in a Scandinavian context, can be discussed.

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113 The first appeal was directed at Pope Urban II in 1098, during Erik's trip to Italy, but without much success as the pope died a year later. Then it was renewed and sent to Pope Paschalis II (1099–1118).

114 Albrectsen 1984: 122–3.

115 A. D. Jørgensen disagrees on this with Gertz, see Gertz pp. 74–5. Jørgensen maintained that the passage concerning the martyrdom of Benedikt and the 17 supporters which is to be found on Tabula was originally a part of Passio but was removed as the Pope refused to have them canonised together with Knútr. Could the "illegal" enshrinement of Benedikt by Eiríkr Sveinsson, against the Pope's decision be emphasised only to underline the family ties (Gertz 1907: 94–5)?
7. Conclusion

Saints' cults, especially the cults of the royal martyrs, can symbolise both the strength and the weakness of their successors. As Janet Nelson argued, "royal saints, manipulated by the living, provided not just a model but a yardstick of kingly conduct and performance in office". In the first instance royal saints can be seen as heightening still further the standing and prestige of the royal line, and in the second as a means by which doubtful or unreal claims to rule were legitimised or reinforced through reference to the authority and power of the saints.

Three aspects of the cult of saints are significant here: first, the making of saints from the royal line; second, the association between the kings and particular saints (not necessarily royal); third, the royal role in the cult of relics, especially collections of fragmentary relics. With a few changes, this classification suggested by D. W. Rollason in the discussion of medieval English monarchs could be applied to the Scandinavian context. First, this chapter has consistently argued that the making of royal saints was not initiated by their successors. The clergy and a wider network of people of different backgrounds and affiliations took a more active part in it. Second, hardly any non-royal saints seem to have been of importance for the Scandinavian royal families or for the identity of a growing/developing kingdom (unlike St Cuthbert in England). Third, there are instances of kings distributing relics and building their power on imported saints, including the royal martyrs themselves. Saint Knútr's import of St Alban's relics proved to be of great importance for his fame.

As Patrick Geary has observed, in the period c. 1000–1300 in Scandinavia kings were "not at all obvious as the only form of political authority". This statement proves true both as far as the actual rule and decision-making is concerned, and when it comes to authority in the religious sphere. The examination of the way in which the cults of Saint Óláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr were initiated shows that blood ties with the royal martyrs were only to a minor extent used as an argument by their successors to the throne. And in Denmark St Knútr the

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117 This seems to apply especially to England after c. 850 (Rollason 1989: 137).
118 Geary 2006: 327.
king had a rival in the family; it was Knútr the duke (Knútr Eiríksson lávarðr) who became the patron saint of the Valdemarian dynasty and according to some source material almost outshone his own paternal uncle.119

In general, it is clear that the successors of the three holy kings took some advantage of the ability to legitimize their right to rule with the help of the cultus. But, as discussed above, they required the approval of clergy.

Admittedly, some texts do suggest that the participation of sons, brothers and half-brothers was meaningful. Here we have to be critical and ask to which extent these suggestions were made under the influence of certain powerful individuals. This chapter certainly argues that the relatives/successors participated in the cult rather than initiated it. Although all the prose texts cited agree upon the idea that a king is Lord’s anointed, and are rich in Biblical metaphors, only the pseudo-historical texts make a link between the saintliness of the holy kings and particular families. This is connected to the problem that the sources represent different genres: "pure" hagiographies would generally be focused more on the person of the main character and the aspects of his holiness rather than on all the events and persons from his surrounding. The boundary between the two types is, however, often very thin and difficult to define; Óláfssaga in Heimskringla could be an example here.

Again admittedly, de facto the clergy were in principle responsible for a variety of actions and rituals, such as the process of beatification or canonisation, the translatio, and possibly even the very act of opening a coffin would not take place without their permission. Thus the kings depended on the clergy, they did not have total control of all stages of a saint’s cult, or even of the definition of their (legitimate!? ) family ties to their dead ancestor. The relatives/successors needed to co-operate with the clergy who were in charge of the process of sanctification.

What this chapter has shown is that this de facto situation is also mirrored in our texts: the overall impression is that the Scandinavian

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119 As in Saxo’s History of Denmark (Friis-Jensen 2006: 195–216). See also Phelpstead 2006: 75 and 2007: 184–193. An elaborate study of the cultus of Earl Magnus of Orkney by Haki Antonsson provides another example of a Scandinavian nobleman who enjoyed the status of a saint. The analysis proves that also in this case the impact of the family members had been overrated so far (Haki Antonsson 2007).
successors of the saints might have financed the making of reliquaries and churches, but that the clergy had the decisive influence on how their right to the throne and the family ties to the holy martyrs would be defined. The role of the relatives in the cults of Öláfr, Knútr and Eiríkr was rather more limited than hitherto assumed.

Bibliography

Sources


Studies


