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Source: *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 105, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), pp. 473-513

Published by: [University of Illinois Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27712621>

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The Making of a Missionary King: The Medieval Accounts of Olaf Tryggvason and the Conversion of Norway

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The following article examines the oldest extant accounts of the conversion of Norway, from the Latin works of the late twelfth century until Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* from around 1230. Its aim is not to gain information on what actually happened during the conversion of Norway,¹ but to obtain some idea of how the tradition about it developed, what changes were introduced in the understanding of the conversion during the period covered by the extant works, and finally what characterized the Norwegian-Icelandic tradition as a whole.

The texts show considerable variation in details but tell essentially the same story, which runs approximately as follows: The first attempt at Christianization was made by King Hákon Haraldsson góði (ca. 935–60), who was brought up at the English court and had become a Christian there. This attempt was a failure. Most of Hákon's successors were Christian but did little to promote the new religion. The main credit for Christianizing Norway is given to the kings Olaf Tryggvason (995–1000) and St. Olaf Haraldsson (1015–30). The former is said to have Christianized the coastal regions and Iceland, whereas the latter converted the interior and organized the Church, and additionally re-Christianized the areas where the people had turned away from Christianity after Olaf Tryggvason's death. Although Olaf Haraldsson was the great national saint at the time when these works were composed, the main figure in the conversion historiography is his predecessor Olaf Tryggvason. For this reason as well as because of the problems concerning the relationship between the texts dealing with him, Olaf's life and missionary activity will also be the main subject here.

1. For a discussion of this, see Sverre Bagge, "Christianisation and State Formation in Early Medieval Norway," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 30(2005), 107–34.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE MISSIONARY KINGS

The first stage in the extant accounts of the mission is represented by three Norwegian texts from the late twelfth century, i.e., Theodoricus Monachus's *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* (ca. 1180) and the anonymous *Historia Norwegie* (second half of the twelfth century), both in Latin, and *Ágrip* (ca. 1190) in Old Norse.² From the point of view of narrative, these works do not contain much more than the minimum referred to above. Theodoricus does not even mention Hákon góði's attempts to introduce Christianity, whereas *Historia Norwegie* briefly concludes that he was an apostate who preferred the earthly kingdom to the heavenly one.³ The two Latin works, however, distinguish themselves in other and mutually different respects. *Historia Norwegie*, possibly the older of the two, emphasizes the importance of the conversion by developing the missionary biography, making the story of the conversion of Norway almost identical with the way in which Olaf Trygvason receives God's vocation to act as a missionary.⁴ The work also contains a long story about Olaf's persecution as a child, probably modeled on the Biblical stories of Moses and Christ.

2. They are sometimes referred to as "the Norwegian synoptics"; see Theodore Andersson, "Kings' Sagas," in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature. A Critical Guide*, ed. Carol Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica*, 45 (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), p. 201, referring to Gabriel Turville-Petre. As for the dates, Theodoricus's work must have been composed between 1176 and 1188, i.e., between the last event mentioned in it, the conquest of Nidaros by the Birchlegs, and the death of the dedicatee, Archbishop Eysteinn. Most scholars prefer a date early in this period, i.e., before Eysteinn's exile in England 1180–83; see Sverre Bagge "Theodoricus Monachus—Clerical Historiography in Twelfth-Century Norway," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 14 (1989), 114; Peter Foote, "Introduction," in Theodoricus Monachus, *The Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings* (=Theod.), transl. and annotated by David and Ian McDougall, intr. by Peter Foote, Viking Society for Northern Research, University College of London (London: Viking Society, 1998), p. xiii; and Theodore Andersson, "Introduction," *The Saga of Olaf Trygvason, Oddr Snorrason* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2003), p. 4. No similar evidence exists regarding *Historia Norwegie*, which has been dated between around 1150 and well into the thirteenth century. Recent scholarship has, however, given good arguments for an early date. Lars Boje Mortensen, *Historia Norwegie* (=HN), ed. Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, transl. by Peter Fisher (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2003), pp. 11–24, suggests ca. 1150–75 on the basis of sources and literary background, while Inger Ekrem, *Nytt lys over Historia Norwegie. Mot en løsning i debatten om dens alder?* (Bergen: Universitetet i Bergen, 1998) and "Essay on Date and Purpose," in *Historia Norwegie*, pp. 162 ff., prefers a date around 1150, in connection with the establishment of the archdiocese. The fact that *Historia Norwegie* and Theodoricus's work represent the same ecclesiastical attitude while showing no sign of knowing each other, forms a strong argument that they were written at about the same time in different places, i.e., for a date around 1180; cf. Mortensen, *Historia Norwegie*, pp. 23 f. *Ágrip* is usually dated to ca. 1190 because its author is believed to have made use of Theodoricus's work and because it must have been known to several early thirteenth-century authors; see *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum* (=Ágr.), ed. and transl. by M. J. Driscoll (London: Viking Society, 1995), p. xii.

3. Theod., ch. 4; HN, ch. 13.

4. HN, ch. 17.

Historia Norwegie contains no corresponding story of St. Olaf's childhood, but the relatively detailed account of his battles in England indicates that the work must have contained quite a lot about him. However, the extant version breaks off with Olaf's arrival back in Norway. Concerning the mission itself, the author of *Historia Norwegie* confines himself to concluding that Olaf Tryggvason converted the whole coastal region of Norway, in addition to Shetland, the Orkneys, the Faroes, and Iceland,⁵ and that he used persuasion as well as force. The extant part of the work contains no reference to St. Olaf's missionary activity, although the statement that the earls succeeding Olaf Tryggvason almost completely destroyed the Church that "the blessed Olaf had planted so painstakingly,"⁶ clearly implies that this must have been included in the part that is now lost.

Olaf Tryggvason plays a similar part in Theodoricus's account which briefly refers to some of the same events as *Historia Norwegie*, the persecution of him as a child and his conversion in England, although its version of these events differs significantly. Although it contains a considerable number of facts, Theodoricus's narrative is brief and terse. The crucial importance of the conversion is not expressed in a detailed or dramatic narrative, but the insertion of a number of "digressions" serves to bring out the parallel between the history of Norway and the great, universal history of the Christian Church and to show how this distant country to the north is integrated into the history of Christendom.⁷

The third work, the Old Norse *Ágrip*, mostly adds little to the accounts in the two Latin works, except for the earliest phase of the process, where the author deals in some detail with Hákon góði's attitude to Christianity.⁸ In contrast to *Historia Norwegie*, Hákon is not depicted as an apostate, but as a good Christian who is forced to make compromises in a pagan country and who dies as a repentant sinner.⁹ Further, *Ágrip* tells much the same story of Olaf Tryggvason's childhood and early life as *Historia Norwegie*. As for the mission itself, *Ágrip* briefly mentions that Olaf converted five countries—the same as in *Historia Norwegie*—that he built churches on his own estates and that he replaced the pagan feasts with Christian ones. There is thus some change of emphasis, from faith to institutions and customs, compared to the two Latin works. *Ágrip*'s account of St. Olaf is

5. HN, ch. 17, pp. 94 f.

6. "quam beatus Olauus egregie plantaverat," HN, ch. 17, p. 100.

7. Bagge, "Theodoricus," pp. 117–23.

8. *Ágr.*, ch. 5–7, pp. 8–17.

9. On the various accounts of Hákon and his attempts to introduce Christianity, see most recently Fridtjov Birkeli, *Tolu vintret hadde kristendommen vært i Norge* (Oslo: Verbum, 1995), pp. 65–101, and Sverre Bagge, "A Hero between Paganism and Christianity—Hákon the Good in Memory and History," *Poetik und Gedächtnis. Festschrift Heiko Uecker* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2004).

very brief; the author states that he restored Christianity after the earls' attempt to destroy it but gives no further details.¹⁰

Whereas Théodoricus stands alone in his "universalist" perspective, the biographical perspective is continued in two works from the end of the twelfth century, Oddr Snorrason Monk's *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* (ca. 1190) and the so-called *Legendary Saga* of St. Olaf (ca. 1200).¹¹ These two latter works contain more real storytelling than the earlier ones. They are "biographies" of the two protagonists, combining vivid narrative and pious comments. Their many stories are, however, rarely organized in longer sequences so as to form a plot, and their chronology is often vague or lacking. Thus, they seem chaotic to modern readers, particularly compared to *Heimskringla*. This is hardly because of lack of skill on the authors' part, but rather because their aim was not to create a logical story with plot structure but to collect as many examples as possible of the protagonist's virtues and good deeds in order to show his greatness and piety.¹²

Both the story of Olaf's childhood and that of his conversion are greatly

10. *Ágr.*, ch. 22.

11. Oddr Snorrason Munk, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar* (=Oddr), ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1932); [*Legendary Saga*] *Óláfs saga hins helga, Die "Legendarische Saga über Olaf den Heiligen"* (=Leg. Saga), ed. and transl. Anne Heinrichs et al. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1982). Oddr's saga was originally written in Latin but is preserved only in an Old Norse translation, in two manuscripts and a fragment which show considerable differences. The terminus ante quem for this work is the death in 1206 of Gissur Hallsson who looked through the first draft of the work, whereas the reference to King Sverrir makes his accession to the throne in 1177 the terminus post quem (Andersson, "Introduction," pp. 1–5). The context of this reference makes a slightly later date more likely. Oddr quotes a comment by Sverrir about Olaf being the only king to have stood on the poop deck, visible to all, during a sea battle. The most likely context for such a comment would be during or after one of Sverrir's own sea battles, the first of which took place in 1181. Or, to venture a further guess, an even more appropriate occasion would be after Sverrir's second sea battle, at Fimreiti in 1184, where he behaved in a way exactly opposite to Olaf, being rowed around in a small boat and eventually going ashore. A modern commentator accuses Sverrir of cowardice on this occasion; see G. H. Gathorne-Hardy, *A Royal Impostor* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1956), p. 204 ff. Although Sverrir probably had good tactical reasons for his behavior, as pointed out by Kåre Lunden, *Norge under Sverreætten, Norges historie*, vol. 3 (Oslo: Cappelen, 1976), p. 113 f.; Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed. Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (Odense: Odense Univ. Press, 1996), and "'Sårt biter sulten lus'. Sverre som militær fornyer," in *Krigføring i middelalderen. Strategi, ideologi og organisasjon ca. 1100–1400*, ed. Knut Arstad, *Forsvarsmuseets småskrifter*, no. 35 (Oslo: Forsvarsmuseet, 2003), p. 14 ff., he may have been met with ironical comments which made him point to Olaf as an exception. Further, Oddr would hardly have quoted Sverrir as long as he was only a guerrilla leader, i.e., until 1179. The date ca. 1190 for Oddr's work is based on the assumption that he used Théodoricus's work. As for the *Legendary Saga*, the date depends entirely on how this work is placed in the "stemma" of the very complicated discussion about the development of the saga of St. Olaf. On these grounds, the saga is usually dated to shortly after 1200 (Andersson, "Kings' Sagas," p. 212 ff.).

12. Bagge, "Theodoricus," p. 115 ff. and "Helgen, helt og statsbygger—Olav Tryggvason i norsk historieskrivning gjennom 700 år," *Kongsmenn og krossmenn. Festskrift til Grethe Authén Blom* (Trondheim: Tapir, 1992), p. 22 ff.

extended in Oddr Snorrason's work compared to that of his predecessors. Most importantly, Olaf's conversion is not represented as a single event, but as a series of experiences, gradually bringing him closer to the true religion, from his refusal to take part in the pagan sacrifices in Russia to his baptism by the abbot in the Scillies. Like the majority of other medieval conversion stories, however, Oddr's contains no real psychology. We are not introduced to Olaf's inner life through a story of gradual dissatisfaction with his former life and recognition of Christianity as the true religion and the way to salvation, but there are at least some stages in the conversion. God's intervention comes after some preparation; the desperate situation in Denmark makes Olaf appeal to the Christian God, thus forming a stage in the development from contempt for the pagan gods to full adherence to the Christian religion, which follows as the result of God's intervention through the dream. There is also some emphasis on the intellectual aspect of the conversion; Olaf spends time in learning about the Christian doctrine, which makes him qualified for preaching the message, first in Russia and then in Norway.

Oddr chronicles the events of Olaf's reign year by year, thus representing the first attempt to trace the stages in his conversion of the country. Actually, this forms the main content of the middle of the saga, between Olaf's acceptance as king and the events leading to his death in the battle of Svǫldr.¹³ The story opens with a general characterization of Olaf's reign, his efforts and toil in converting the people. Further, Oddr briefly refers to a sermon by Olaf.¹⁴ Although it is unclear whether the sermon should be interpreted as an act performed on a specific occasion—i.e., his election at Eyraþing—or as a general characterization, the episode is probably intended to show how Olaf preached during his missionary campaign. In the sermon Olaf urges the people to give up their former faith, which is dangerous for the soul, as it is false to believe that they can get help by sacrificing to sticks or stones. They should instead turn towards the true God in heaven, who gives men all that is good. Olaf appeals to the wisest men to look to the English and the Danes, who had recently given up the *blót*, and take them as an example. Finally, he describes the difference between serving God and the Devil, the joy for good and just men, and the pain and horror in hell for evil men. Oddr adds that Olaf spoke with great power and God's help, but the chieftains turned away. This sermon is not remarkable; it is a simple and direct appeal, containing neither sophisticated argument nor details about the content of the faith. Without giving any further examples of Olaf's preaching, Oddr stresses

13. Oddr, pp. 83–179.

14. Oddr, pp. 83–88.

the importance of eloquence by stating that St. Martin helped Olaf in preaching the gospel and converting people.

In the following account of the Christianization of the country, Olaf travels through the various parts of Norway according to an extremely complicated pattern, involving frequent journeys from one end of the country to another and back again, a pattern that is greatly simplified in Snorri Sturluson's later account, where Olaf, with a few exceptions, moves systematically along the coast from south to north. Nor is it easy to find a strategic plan behind Olaf's movements.¹⁵ There is, however, another kind of logic in the account, i.e., the steady rise in the difficulty of the task and an increasing challenge of the forces of evil. In the Orkneys and Southern Norway, where Olaf starts, the task is comparatively easy. Olaf wins people for Christianity through his eloquence, by force and threats, or by concluding marriage alliances with the leading men in the region. He also receives supernatural support. St. Martin makes Olaf's adversaries speechless in return for his toast being substituted for those of Óðinn and Þórr, and the discovery of the relics of the people of Selja also proves a great aid in Olaf's mission.¹⁶ Thus, the saints are mobilized at strategic points in the conversion story.

The battle hardens when Olaf challenges the sorcerers who are particularly strong in northern Norway. In a series of dramatic encounters, Olaf manages to exterminate these people by burning or various tortures.¹⁷ During this phase, the Devil himself mobilizes against Olaf, trying to seduce him at Ogvadznes, but he is defeated.¹⁸ This opens up for the final victory of Christianity, the suppression of the last remaining sorcerers, and the conversion of Hárekr ór Þjóttu, which seals the conversion of northern Norway.¹⁹ The destruction of the statue of the god Freyr in Trøndelag²⁰ serves as the final climax, showing the utter impotence of the pagan gods. The idea of a battle between the forces of good and evil is partly developed further in the middle part of the saga, which is the most loosely organized, comprising a characterization of Olaf, a comparison

15. For a comparison between the two versions, pointing to Snorri's superiority in these respects, see Theodore Andersson, "The Conversion of Norway According to Oddr Snorrason and Snorri Sturluson," *Medieval Scandinavia*, 10 (1977), 83–95, who also presents a map illustrating Olaf's movements in the two versions. See also Bagge, "Helgen, helt," pp. 21–38, and Bjarne Fidjestøl, "Óláfr Tryggvason the Missionary. A Literary Portrait from the Middle Ages," in his *Selected Papers* (Odense: Odense Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 201–27. The latter deals particularly with *Oláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, the latest saga of Olaf from ca. 1300.

16. Oddr, pp. 94–103.

17. Oddr, pp. 114–20.

18. Oddr, pp. 131–34.

19. Oddr, pp. 134–43.

20. Oddr, p. 147 ff.

between him and St. Olaf, various comments and stories serving to demonstrate his greatness, and the first preparations for his fatal expedition to Wendland.²¹ This part of the saga contains some episodes that can be understood as evidence of the final success of Olaf's mission. He disappears from his men in such a way that they believe that he is an angel; he is surrounded by a miraculous light while praying alone at night; he is approached by the god Þórr who has to run away from him. Finally, two of his retainers come across a meeting of demons (*troll*) who complain about all the harm Olaf has done to them.²² In between there are some stories repeating earlier ones about the mission, namely the confrontation with the people of Trøndelag, when Olaf kills Járnskeggi and threatens to sacrifice the leading men of the region to the gods, and Olaf's killing of the sorcerer Hróaldr of Goðey and another enemy of Christianity in Møre.²³ Oddr has already told about the conversion of Trøndelag, including the threat to sacrifice the leading men, although without the story of Járnskeggi and about the death of Hróaldr.²⁴

The *Legendary Saga* is also very much a portrait of a holy king, but the Christianization of Norway plays a more subordinate part. The author of the saga clearly accepts the earlier accounts of the "division of labor" between him and Olaf Tryggvason and mainly credits St. Olaf with restoring Christianity after the lax period following the latter's death and with converting some of the inner parts of the country. The main story deals with the conversion of the Guðbrandzdalar, governed by the eponymous leader Dala-Guðbrandr who has to accept defeat and convert after Olaf has destroyed his idol. The story is told in great detail and illustrates Olaf's cleverness as well as his zeal for Christianity, while at the same time showing the spectacular triumph of Christianity over a religion trusting in impotent gods.²⁵ The story is followed by some other examples of Olaf's work for Christianity in the interior,²⁶ whereas his re-Christianization of the coastal regions is only mentioned briefly. The *Legendary Saga* does not contain a conversion story, as the author accepts the tradition that Olaf was baptized as a child by Olaf Tryggvason.²⁷ The relatively detailed account of Olaf's youth emphasizes his preparation for becoming a king rather than a missionary. As a whole, the portrait of Olaf in the *Legendary Saga* conforms more to the conventional portrait of a *rex iustus* than to that of a missionary.

21. Andersson, "Introduction," pp. 14, 16 ff.

22. Oddr, pp. 151–57, 173–79.

23. Oddr, pp. 161–67.

24. Oddr, pp. 105 ff., 117–19.

25. *Leg. Saga*, ch. 31–36.

26. *Leg. Saga*, ch. 37.

27. *Leg. Saga*, ch. 8.

OLAF TRYGGVASON THE MISSIONARY—
A TWELFTH-CENTURY INVENTION?

As we have seen, the division of labor between Olaf Tryggvason and St. Olaf is more or less the same in all the sources discussed here. However, the two oldest written sources, *Passio Olavi*, the official legend of St. Olaf (ca. 1160/70), and the even older account of the Scandinavian countries by Adam of Bremen (1073–75), depict St. Olaf as the one who introduced Christianity to Norway. Adam's comments on Olaf Tryggvason are few and mostly negative; he even expresses doubts about his Christianity.²⁸ Based on these works, Lars Lönnroth has questioned the role of Olaf Tryggvason and regarded his conversion of Norway partly as an Icelandic invention, an expression of his importance in the conversion of Iceland, and partly as an invention by the anti-clerical or "National Church" faction in Trøndelag, i.e., the adherents of King Sverrir (r. 1177–1202) and his predecessors.²⁹

Further, Lönnroth as well as several earlier scholars point out that a number of the stories told of Olaf in the sources are derived from the Bible, various saints' legends, and stories of kings or heroes. This applies to several of the episodes relevant in the present context. Olaf is persecuted as a child in a similar way as Moses and Christ in the Bible.³⁰ He is captured by pirates and sold as a slave like Joseph in the Bible (*ibid.*). He is convinced of the trustworthiness of the hermit or abbot in the Scillies when the latter sees through the trick of dressing up a servant like himself in the same way as is told in Pope Gregory I's story about the Gothic King Totila's meeting with St. Benedict.³¹ The legend of St. Martin who, like Olaf, started as a warrior and later became a missionary, seems to have been particularly important, as is indicated by the direct reference to St. Martin in Oddr's work. Olaf's appeal to the cross during the ambush before his conversion corresponds to St. Martin's behavior in a similar situation,³²

28. Adam Bremensis, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores in usum scholarum (=Gesta)*, II, ed. Bernhard Schmeidler (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1917). Adam writes that Olaf was baptized in England and brought Christianity to Norway, but mentions later that according to some people's opinion he turned away from the faith, and further, that he was generally known as a practitioner of magic and was therefore nicknamed Craccaben, i.e., crow's leg (*Gesta*, II, 36; II, 40). These hints should probably be understood against the background of Adam's previous statement, that the Danish-Swedish coalition against Olaf was formed in order to protect Christianity.

29. Lars Lönnroth, "Studier i Olaf Tryggvasons saga," *Samlaren*, 84 (1963), 54–94; cf. also his "The Baptist and the Saint: Odd Snorrason's view of the two king Olafs," *International Scandinavian and Medieval Studies in Memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber*, ed. M. Dallapiazza (Trieste: Parnaso, 2000), pp. 257–64.

30. Lönnroth, "Studier," p. 68.

31. Lönnroth, "Studier," p. 60 f.

32. Lönnroth, "Studier," p. 70.

but the source here could also be the stories of the Emperor Constantine and the Frankish King Clovis. Further, St. Martin destroys idols, is visited by the Devil, and appears to his followers in a miraculous light.³³ In addition to these specific examples, Lönnroth correctly points to the common repertoire of legends and stereotypes current all over Europe at the time, which in many cases makes it difficult to find exact models.³⁴

Against this background, there are good reasons to question the picture of Olaf Tryggvason the missionary in the extant sources. However, it can hardly be pure fiction. Adam may have had good reasons for celebrating the merits of St. Olaf rather than those of his predecessor, as he tells that this Olaf submitted to the rule of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen,³⁵ whereas Olaf Tryggvason brought his clerics with him from England and had no connection with Hamburg-Bremen.³⁶ Despite some conciliatory words about missionaries being God's servants wherever they come from,³⁷ Adam is strongly biased in favor of Hamburg-Bremen and against its competitors, and his account of Olaf's conflict with the king of Denmark which led to his death clearly depends on Danish tradition. Moreover, Adam is not particularly well informed about Norwegian matters. There is therefore hardly any reason to pay attention to his hint about Olaf's apostasy. *Passio Olavi* is a portrait of a saintly king and a missionary, based more on commonplaces about such persons than on factual information and can therefore hardly be representative of the information existing in Norway at the time it was written.³⁸

Further, there is evidence of Olaf Tryggvason the missionary in a contemporary skaldic poem by Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld,³⁹ as well as evidence from the late eleventh and/or early twelfth century in the works of the

33. Lönnroth, "Studier," pp. 69–72.

34. Lönnroth, "Studier," p. 72.

35. *Gesta*, II, 57.

36. Cf. Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, "Olaf Tryggvason och Olaf Haraldsson in den äldsta historieskrivningen," in *Kongemøte på Stiklestad. Rapport fra seminar om kongedømmet i vikingtid og tidlig middelalder*, ed. Olaf Skevik (Verdal: Stiklestad nasjonale kultursenter, 1999), pp. 105–17. Lönnroth, "Studier," p. 58, is also aware of this objection to Adam, but points out that both Olafs brought their missionaries from England. He has thus missed the crucial point, the remark about St. Olaf's relationship to Hamburg-Bremen.

37. *Gesta*, II, 37.

38. *Passio Olavi et miracula beati Olavi*, ed. F. Metcalf (Oxford: 1881). See most recently Lars Boje Mortensen and Else Mundal, "Erkebispesetet i Nidaros—arnestad og verkstad for Olafslitteraturen," *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537. Søkeby på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*, ed. Steinar Imsen, Senter for middelalderstudier, NTNU. Skrifter, no. 5 (Trondheim: Tapir, 2003), pp. 365–68.

39. Hallfreðr refers to Olaf as his godfather and asks Christ to save his soul in heaven; see *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning (=Skj.)*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, A1–B2 (1908–14; rpt. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1973), B I, p. 156 ff. Cf. Peter Hallberg, rev. of Lars Lönnroth, "Studier i Olaf Tryggvasons saga," *Samlaren*, 86 (1965), p. 159, and Fidjestøl, "Óláfr Tryggvason," p. 138.

Icelanders Sæmundr and Ari, i.e., contemporary with or not much later than Adam and earlier than *Passio Olavi*. Oddr twice mentions Sæmundr as a source, whereas Ari depicts the conversion of Iceland as the result of Olaf's initiative. Ari may have had similar reasons for exaggerating Olaf Tryggvason's role as Adam had for exaggerating that of St. Olaf. Ari wrote some decades later than the establishment of the Nordic archdiocese in Lund, at a time when Hamburg-Bremen wanted to reassert its authority. Consequently, he may have preferred the "thoroughly English" missionary Olaf Tryggvason to St. Olaf who was loyal to Hamburg-Bremen. Actually, he barely mentions St. Olaf in his work.⁴⁰ Whatever Ari's bias, however, he is unlikely to have an equally strong engagement in the question of church provinces as Adam. Further, he seems to have given detailed information about his oral informants in a series going back to Olaf Tryggvason's lifetime. His pragmatic account of the conversion of Iceland, with exact chronology and precise information about persons and names, also has a ring of authenticity.⁴¹ And if Olaf was involved in the conversion of Iceland, he must certainly have been involved in the conversion of Norway as well. As for the Norwegian sources, Lönnroth points to the large number of place names in Trøndelag as evidence for the local origin of the tradition about Olaf.⁴² This fact may also be an indication of authenticity.

There are thus good reasons for the Icelanders to exaggerate Olaf Tryggvason's importance, but there is also evidence to make it unlikely that this is the whole explanation for the accounts of him in the sources. Given his strong position even in Norwegian sources, Lönnroth finds it necessary to find a Norwegian ideological explanation as well. Here the evidence is weaker than in Iceland, but so also are the ideological reasons. It would seem far more likely for the national saint and martyr, St. Olaf, to have been credited with more than his due in the Christianization of Norway than for his predecessor to be so.⁴³ Lönnroth's "National Church" argument is unable to counter this objection. Of the three early Norwegian authors, Theodoricus Monachus, who attributes great importance to Olaf Tryggvason's missionary work, represents the very opposite of this ideology. He dedicates his work to Archbishop Eysteinn, and he clearly belongs to

40. Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, "Olaf Tryggvason," pp. 112–14.

41. Ari Þorgilsson fróði, *Islendingabók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1887), ch. 7 (=Ari).

42. Lönnroth, "Studier," p. 64, referring to Johan Schreiner, *Trøndelag og rikssamlingen* (Oslo: Det norske videnskapsakademi, 1928).

43. Later, Lars Lönnroth, "The Baptist," argued for the priority of Oddr over the *Legendary Saga*, which would seem to imply that the tradition about Olaf Tryggvason at least to some extent must have influenced that of St. Olaf. This is developed further by Theodore Andersson, "The First Icelandic King's Saga: Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* or *The Oldest Saga of Saint Olaf?*" *JEGP*, 103 (2004), 139–55.

the internationally educated “brain trust” that led the ecclesiastical reform movement in the twelfth century. *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip* probably represent the same attitude.⁴⁴ Further, Lönnroth exaggerates the long-term ideological divisions in Norway at the time.⁴⁵ Finally, there is absolutely no evidence that a possible national church faction would prefer Olaf Tryggvason to St. Olaf. On the contrary, St. Olaf played a crucial role in the propaganda of the very incarnation of the national church ideology, King Sverrir,⁴⁶ to the extent that he explicitly opposed “the law of St. Olaf” to the program of the ecclesiastical reform movement. By the end of the twelfth century, St. Olaf was sufficiently well established as the national saint to be a common hero to both factions, who in various ways tried to use him for their own purpose. We must therefore conclude that Olaf Tryggvason most probably did play some role in the Christianization of Norway. At least it is quite clear that this role was not invented during the second half of the twelfth century for some ideological purpose. There must be some older tradition. The character of this tradition, however, is not easy to detect.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TEXTS: THEODORICUS AND ODDR SNORRASON

The works referred to above have enough in common to show that they cannot be completely independent of one another, but the exact nature of this interdependence is a very difficult question that has been subject to much discussion. There seems to be general agreement about the connection between *Historia Norwegie* and Theodoricus on the one hand and *Ágrip* on the other, whereas the two Latin works are apparently independent of each other. However, the most difficult question in the discussion

44. Torfinn Tobiassen, “Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sögum,” *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, I (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1956), col. 60 ff.; Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965), p. 198; Mortensen, “Introduction,” HN, p. 9 ff.

45. Lönnroth points to such a division already in the 1160s, corresponding to the papal schism at the time (Lönnroth, “Studier,” p. 91), but there is no evidence for this; see Knut Helle, *Norge blir en stat, Handbok i Norges historie*, III (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1974), p. 47, and Sverre Bagge, “The Structure of the Political Factions in the Internal Struggles of the Scandinavian Countries During the High Middle Ages,” *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 24 (1999), 310–12.

46. This objection is also brought forward by Hallberg, *Samlingen*, p. 163 f., and Julia Zernack, “Vorläufer und Vollender. Olaf Tryggvason und Olaf der Heilige im Geschichtsdenken des Oddr Snorrason munkr,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 113 (1998), 90. Zernack points to the close connection between Olaf Tryggvason and St. Olaf, notably in the analogy between the two kings and St. John the Baptist and Christ (Zernack, “Vorläufer,” pp. 83–89; cf. Oddr pp. 156–57). Nevertheless, she accepts a connection between Oddr’s and Sverrir’s national church ideology.

concerns the lost works known to have existed (i.e., the two histories by the Icelanders Sæmundr [1056–1133] and Ari [1067/68–1148]) from the late eleventh or early twelfth century, as well as an apparently Norwegian *Catalogus regum*, mentioned by Theodoricus. Sæmundr probably wrote in Latin, whereas Ari is explicitly mentioned as the first historian writing in Old Norse. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson maintained that the three Norwegian writers only knew the *Catalogus* and consequently that there existed an independent Norwegian historiographic tradition parallel to the Icelandic one.⁴⁷ Svend Ellehøj came to the conclusion that the authors of *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip*, but not Theodoricus, knew Ari's work and that the author of *Ágrip* also knew Sæmundr,⁴⁸ but this conclusion has been questioned.

Despite much hard work and considerable ingenuity, we may be as far from a solution to the difficult questions about the relationship between the early narratives on Norwegian history as fifty or a hundred years ago.⁴⁹ Quite possibly, there may be no solution. It is not easy to distinguish between similarities resulting from dependence between two known texts on the one hand and common borrowing from lost texts on the other, and even less to trace the particular lost text from which a particular passage has been borrowed. It may be pointed out, however, that a general weakness in the whole discussion has been the strong focus on similarities in detail. The relationship between the texts has largely been discussed in a way similar to that of establishing a stemma in textual criticism. Even if the difference between an author and a scribe was less in the Middle Ages than today, the authorial perspective is a more important factor in the kind of studies we are dealing with here than in pure textual criticism. Consequently, more should be done to examine the aims, composition, and style of the various works in order to arrive at an understanding of their authors' selection of material, which may also throw light on what they were likely to borrow and what not. Moreover, the question of oral tradition has mostly been neglected, with the exception of Siegfried Beyschlag who clearly goes too far in explaining the similarities almost exclusively as the result of the writers' use of similar oral sources.⁵⁰

47. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Om de norske kongers sagaer*, Skrifter utgitt av Det norske vitenskapsakademi i Oslo, II. Historisk-filosofisk klasse, no. 4, 1936 (Oslo: Dybwad, 1937).

48. Svend Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, pp. 173 ff., 266–85, and *passim*.

49. Thus Theodore Andersson's pessimistic conclusion (Andersson, "Kings' Sagas," p. 211). However, despite the fact that no consensus has been reached, we have a better basis for choosing between various opinions, notably through Ellehøj's careful examination of the sources. By contrast, despite my agreement with Guðrun Lange on some points (*Die Anfänge der isländisch-norwegischen Geschichtsschreibung*, Studia Islandica, 47 [Reykjavík: Menningsrjóð, 1989]), I find her analysis as a whole inferior to Ellehøj's.

50. Beyschlag, *Konungasögur*.

The following discussion is not intended to address the general question of the relationship between the texts, which would hardly be possible on the basis of such a limited material, but confines itself to the aspects relevant to the understanding of the tradition about Olaf Tryggvason the missionary, in particular the story of his early life and conversion, the different versions of which are summarized in table 1.

The first two columns show the strong similarity between *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip*, which has been explained either by the latter being dependent on the former or by both having borrowed from Ari. The similarities between the two other works, Theodoricus and Oddr, are less striking but sufficient to suggest a connection. Most scholars believe that Theodoricus's work is the older.⁵¹ This is based partly on the assumption that Theodoricus had only oral sources for his account of Norwegian history and partly on the belief that tradition is more likely to expand than to diminish.

Most scholars have believed that Theodoricus had no written sources, although this has recently been questioned.⁵² Theodoricus refers explicitly only to skaldic poetry and not written narrative and some of his statements even seem to deny knowledge of written sources, notably when he comments in the prologue that he has written what he has heard and not what he has seen ("non visa sed audita conscripsimus").⁵³ "Visa" clearly refers to having been an eyewitness to the events,⁵⁴ and although it would have been possible to distinguish between *lecta* and *audita* in referring to second-hand knowledge,⁵⁵ the absence of such a distinction cannot be

51. Andersson, "Introduction," pp. 4, 6 ff., with references. An exception is Lange, *Die Anfänge*, pp. 125–33, who rejects earlier arguments in favor of Theodoricus's priority, i.e., his denial of having used written sources, the earlier date of his work, and his limited information about Olaf Tryggvason compared to Oddr. However, she gives no positive arguments in favor of Oddr's priority.

52. This has been the opinion of the majority of scholars, see, e.g., Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, p. 177 ff., the references in Guðrun Lange, *Die Anfänge*, p. 98, n. 276–77, and most recently Lars Boje Mortensen, [rev. of] Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia de antiquitate regum norwagiensium*, transl. D. and Ian McDougall, intr. by P. Foote, *Maal og minne* (2000), 103. The alternative opinion is represented by Bjarni Guðnason, "Theodoricus og íslenskir sagnaritarar," *Sjóttú ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20 júlí 1977* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977), I, 107–20, and Theodore Andersson, "Ari's *konunga ævi* and the Earliest Accounts of Hákon jarl's death," *Opuscula*, 6, *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana*, 33 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1979), and "Kings' Sagas," p. 209 ff.; Lange, *Die Anfänge*, p. 98 ff. For a summary of the whole discussion until 1985 with references, see Andersson, "Kings' Sagas."

53. Theod., p. 4.

54. Marie Schulz, *Die Lehre von der historischen Methode bei den Geschichtsschreibern des Mittelalters (VI.–XIII. Jahrhundert)* (Berlin and Leipzig: Rothschild, 1909), pp. 15–66, with numerous examples and quotations from the sources; Bernard Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Aubier, 1980), pp. 77 f.; cf. Bagge, "Theodoricus," p. 124, n. 32, Lange, *Die Anfänge*, p. 98 ff.; Foote, "Introduction," p. xvi ff. and n. 11.

55. Schulz, *Die Lehre*, p. 15 f.; Guenée, *Histoire*, p. 132; Mortensen, *Maal og minne*, p. 103.

Table 1. Four versions of the story of Olaf Tryggvason's early life and conversion.

<i>Historia Norvegiæ</i> , ch. 17	<i>Ágrip</i> , ch. 16–19	Theodoricus, ch. 4, 7	Oddr, pp. 2–47
O.'s father Tryggvi is killed, either by the Eiríksynir or as the result of a local rebellion. Afterwards, O.'s mother Ástriðr flees to the Orkneys where Olaf is born. Learning that Hákon jarl tries to kill her son, she entrusts him to a foster-father, Þórólfr lúsarskegg, who brings him through Trøndelag to Sweden. Later, on their way to Russia, they are attacked by Vikings who kill Þórólfr and sell O. as a slave in Estonia. O. is ransomed and brought to Russia, where, at the age of twelve, he avenges his foster father. He is brought to the notice of the king and adopted by him. As a grown-up, he becomes a Viking, raiding the Baltic and North Sea region, until he arrives in England, where his conversion takes place.	O.'s father Tryggvi is killed, either by the Eiríksynir or as the result of a local rebellion. Afterwards, O.'s mother Ástriðr flees to the Orkneys with O. who is then three years old. Learning that Hákon jarl and Queen Gunnhildr try to kill her son, she entrusts him to a foster-father, Þórólfr lúsarskegg who brings him through Norway to Sweden. Later, on their way to Russia, they are attacked by Vikings who kill Þórólfr and sell O. as a slave in Estonia. O. is ransomed and brought to Russia, where, at the age of twelve, he avenges his foster father. He is brought to the notice of the king and adopted by him. As a grown-up, he becomes a Viking, raiding the Baltic and North Sea regions until he arrives in England, where his conversion takes place.	O.'s father Tryggvi is killed, by Eiríksson gráfeldr. Afterwards, Queen Gunnhildr persecutes the newborn O., forcing Hákon jarl to look for him.	O.'s father Tryggvi is killed, by Guðrøðr Eiríksson. Afterwards Queen Gunnhildr persecutes the newborn O. and his mother, Ástriðr, forcing Hákon jarl to look for him. Ástriðr spends the winter with Eiríkr á Oprustöðum, has to flee from there, is chased by Hákon and his men from various places in the country and ends up in Sweden, where she and O. are well received by Hákon the Old. Later, Hákon jarl visits Hákon the Old in order to get hold of O., but he fails. After two years, Ástriðr and O. are sent to Ástriðr's brother Sigurðr, who holds a high position with King Valdemar of Russia. They are captured by pirates, separated and sold three times, and finally bought and liberated by O.'s uncle Sigurðr. Later, O. kills the man who killed his foster father six years earlier, is brought to King Valdemar and Queen Alloggia, and is eventually attached to their service.
		O. escapes and eventually ends up in Russia, where he grows up at King Valdemar's court.	

Table 1. Continued.

<i>Historia Norvegiæ</i> , ch. 17	<i>Ágrip</i> , ch. 16–19	Theodoricus, ch. 4, 7	Oddr, pp. 2–47
<p>O. visits a pious hermit whom he tests by dressing one of his subordinates up like himself.</p> <p>The hermit is not deceived and tells Olaf of his future, including the prophecy that he will be ambushed on his next raiding expedition two days later.</p> <p>All his men will be killed and Olaf himself heavily wounded, but he will recover and then convert and take baptism. Everything happens as the hermit has told.</p>	<p>O. visits a pious hermit whom he tests by dressing one of his subordinates up like himself.</p> <p>The hermit is not deceived and tells Olaf of his future, including the prophecy that he will be ambushed upon returning to his ships.</p> <p>All his men will be killed and Olaf himself heavily wounded, but he will recover and then convert and take baptism. Everything happens as the hermit has told.</p>	<p>O. is in a desperate situation during a raid in Denmark, prays to God and promises to become a Christian.</p> <p>He then goes to the Scillies where he is baptized by a pious abbot.</p>	<p>At the age of twelve, O. receives men and ships from the king, goes to war against his enemies, and wins great glory and much booty. He later marries Geira and after her death conducts raiding expeditions in the Baltic and North Sea regions</p>
<p>O. refuses to take part in pagan sacrifices during his stay in Russia.</p> <p>O., in a desperate situation during a raid in Denmark, uses the sign of the cross for protection and is saved.</p> <p>Returning to Russia, he receives God's vocation in a dream. He is told to go to Greece to gain knowledge.</p> <p>He obeys, goes there, learns about Christianity, receives <i>prima signatio</i>, and returns to Russia where he converts the king and queen.</p> <p>O.'s own conversion takes place in England, as a consequence of his meeting with a pious abbot in the Scillies.</p>	<p>O. refuses to take part in pagan sacrifices during his stay in Russia.</p> <p>O., in a desperate situation during a raid in Denmark, uses the sign of the cross for protection and is saved.</p> <p>Returning to Russia, he receives God's vocation in a dream. He is told to go to Greece to gain knowledge.</p> <p>He obeys, goes there, learns about Christianity, receives <i>prima signatio</i>, and returns to Russia where he converts the king and queen.</p> <p>O.'s own conversion takes place in England, as a consequence of his meeting with a pious abbot in the Scillies.</p>	<p>O. refuses to take part in pagan sacrifices during his stay in Russia.</p> <p>O., in a desperate situation during a raid in Denmark, uses the sign of the cross for protection and is saved.</p> <p>Returning to Russia, he receives God's vocation in a dream. He is told to go to Greece to gain knowledge.</p> <p>He obeys, goes there, learns about Christianity, receives <i>prima signatio</i>, and returns to Russia where he converts the king and queen.</p> <p>O.'s own conversion takes place in England, as a consequence of his meeting with a pious abbot in the Scillies.</p>	<p>O. refuses to take part in pagan sacrifices during his stay in Russia.</p> <p>O., in a desperate situation during a raid in Denmark, uses the sign of the cross for protection and is saved.</p> <p>Returning to Russia, he receives God's vocation in a dream. He is told to go to Greece to gain knowledge.</p> <p>He obeys, goes there, learns about Christianity, receives <i>prima signatio</i>, and returns to Russia where he converts the king and queen.</p> <p>O.'s own conversion takes place in England, as a consequence of his meeting with a pious abbot in the Scillies.</p>

taken as a denial of his having used written sources. Immediately before this statement, Theodoricus refers to the *relatio* of those on whom he bases his information.⁵⁶ He uses the same term at the end of his work, pointing out that he has written what he has learned from the *relatio* of others.⁵⁷ He then continues: “Et sciat pro certo me istarum rerum relatores alios potius voluisse quam me.”⁵⁸ When Theodoricus refers to himself as a *relator*, his use of the same term for his sources cannot be taken to mean that these were exclusively oral. Moreover, he explicitly refers to his use of written sources in some cases. He has used an otherwise unknown *Catalogus regum*, apparently containing mainly information on the kings’ genealogies and the length of their reigns,⁵⁹ and he abstains from going into detail about St. Olaf’s miracles, translation, and canonization because others have dealt with this subject.⁶⁰

Further, Theodoricus refers to the lack of written sources on some specific points. He suggests the year 858 as the date of Haraldr hárfagri’s accession to the throne, but he cannot be sure because of the lack of “scriptorum auctoritas.” The most likely interpretation of this passage is that no written evidence was available to him regarding this particular question (i.e., the dates of Haraldr’s reign).⁶¹ Ari’s *Íslendingabók*, which is extant and must have been the source for Theodoricus’s account of the conversion of Iceland, does contain information about the length of Haraldr’s reign and its chronological relationship to the settlement of Iceland, but does not explicitly give the dates. Thus, Theodoricus’s statement does not exclude the possibility that he knew Ari’s work on the kings of Norway. This may form an argument for emphasizing *auctoritas* in the sense of certainty: Theodoricus is confronted with various more or less plausible calculations, whether oral or written, none of which gives firm evidence.⁶²

56. “Veritatis vero sinceritas in hac nostra narratione ad illos omnimodo referenda est, quorum relatione hæc annotavimus” (Theod., p. 4).

57. “Quia aliena relatione didici quod scripsi” (Theod., ch. 34, p. 68).

58. Theod., ch. 34, p. 68.

59. Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, pp. 194–96.

60. “quia hæc omnia a nonnullis memoriæ tradita sunt, nos notis immorari superfluum duximus” (Theod., ch. 20). This is clearly a reference to a written source (Mortensen, *Maal og minne*, p. 103), most probably to *Passio Olavi*, which shows some similarity to Theodoricus. The parallels are listed in Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, p. 179 f. The usual opinion is that *Passio* is the earlier work; see Eiliv Skard, “Kirchliche Olafustradition bei Theodricus Monachus,” *Symbolæ Osloenses*, 14 (1935), 120–25; Arne Odd Johnsen, *Om Theodoricus og hans Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* (Oslo: Dybwad, 1939), pp. 18–21. Ellehøj argues in favor of the opposite sequence (see n. 68).

61. Thus Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, p. 183, who argues that Theodoricus’s source, *Catalogus regum*, did give the length of Haraldr’s reign but not the dates. The same interpretation in Andersson, “Ari’s konunga ævi,” p. 12 ff.

62. See also Bjarni Guðnason, “Theodoricus,” p. 108 ff., who understands *auctoritates* as particularly authoritative writings, and Andersson, “Ari’s konunga ævi,” pp. 11–13, who

Theodoricus deals with a similar problem in the case of St. Olaf's baptism. He tells that Olaf Tryggvason met St. Olaf, who was then three years old, with his mother, and according to some ("secundum quosdam") baptized both of them, whereas others maintain that St. Olaf was baptized in England. Theodoricus then states that he has read in the *Historia Normannorum* [by William of Jumièges] that Olaf was baptized in Rouen. Indicating his preference for one of the two latter opinions (i.e., that Olaf was baptized as an adult and not as a child),⁶³ he concludes that the question remains open, thereby suggesting Constantine's baptism as a parallel. In this connection, he mentions the lack of written evidence: "Nec mirum de Olafo hoc contigisse in illa terra, ubi nullus antiquitatum umquam scriptor fuit, cum idem scribat beatus Hieronimus de Constantino magno. . . ."⁶⁴ Theodoricus writes nearly 200 years after Olaf's baptism and most of his possible sources—with the exception of William of Jumièges—are not very much older. By contrast, despite the fact that Jerome was born in 340, only three years after Constantine's death, there were widely divergent opinions about the emperor's baptism already during his lifetime. If not even near contemporary authors knew the facts, how much less would

suggests that Theodoricus refers to a lack of written information going back to the time of Haraldr himself.

63. "tunc constat eum fuisse provectoris ætatis, *quando martyrio coronatus est*, [quam illi dicant,] quibus maxime in hujus modi credendum est" (Theod., ch. 13, p. 22 ff.). In his commentary to the passage, Storm regards the passage in italics as an interpolation, which seems the only way to make sense of the text: Whereas those in whom Theodoricus normally has the greatest confidence believe that Olaf was baptized as a child, both William and those stating that he was baptized in England maintain that he was older at the time. Olaf's age at his death would seem to be completely irrelevant in this context. Lange severely criticizes Storm for his emendation as well as his general interpretation, but fails to make clear her own, including how she manages to get the passage about Olaf's death to fit perfectly into the context ("die so gut in den Kontext passende Wendung" [Lange, *Die Anfänge*, p. 100]). She adds that a reference to Olaf's martyrdom occurs shortly before (*ibid.*, p. 101): "ibique tunc puerulum Olafum trium annorum, qui postea devotus Christi martyr factus est." This would rather seem to be an argument against the authenticity of the passage in question, serving to explain its inclusion by a scribe who looked at the wrong place in the manuscript he was copying. The English translation, accepting Lange's interpretation, renders the passage: "it is clear that he was rather advanced in age when he was crowned with martyrdom," i.e., as "absolute" comparative. This would seem to mean that Olaf was an elderly man at his death, whereas most sources tell that he was thirty-five. Theodoricus never comments on the matter, and it remains a mystery what this piece of information has to do in connection with Olaf's baptism. The alternative understanding of the comparative, that Olaf was older when he died than when he was baptized, contains information that is undoubtedly true but so self-evident that it is unlikely to have been mentioned. The only possible way to save the passage in question would be to assume that Theodoricus is alluding to a discussion about the distance in time between Olaf's baptism and his death, in which case it would of course make a great difference whether he was baptized at the age of three or as an adult. As Theodoricus's text contains no such allusion, however, Storm's emendation would seem a simpler solution.

64. Theod., ch. 13.

authors writing 150–200 years after the event? Against this background, it might be tempting to understand “antiquitatum scriptor” not as a writer about antiquity but as a writer belonging to antiquity, i.e., being contemporary or near contemporary with the events,⁶⁵ despite the fact that linguistically the former is the more likely reading. Even so, however, the only information that can be derived from this passage is the absence of written narrative dealing with the earliest period, before ca. 1000.

A further difficulty is whether “illa terra” refers to Norway or Iceland.⁶⁶ The use of *illa*, when one might expect Theodoricus to refer to his own country with *hac*, might be an argument in favor of Iceland, as might also the reference to “those who are most to be trusted in such matters”⁶⁷ in the previous sentence. However, neither Iceland nor Icelanders are mentioned explicitly in the whole chapter. Nor can Norwegians be excluded from those who ought to know, as the tradition about Olaf’s baptism as a child may well have originated in Norway. Theodoricus’s point seems to be that local people are most likely to know, but that in this case he is more inclined to trust William of Jumièges, which may also be understood as an example of the usual medieval preference for written rather than oral sources. As Olaf was king of Norway and never set foot in Iceland, it would seem strange to understand the reference to what happened regarding him “in illa terra” as referring to Iceland. Consequently, “in illa terra” most probably refers to Norway, and the use of *illa* rather than *hac* may possibly be understood as anticipatory, in a similar way as the definite article: “in the country where” We must therefore interpret this statement as meaning that no Norwegian written account about the earliest period was available to Theodoricus. Further, if Theodoricus had only oral information from the Icelanders, would he not have rejected

65. Thus Lange, *Die Anfänge*, p. 102.

66. Opinions differ on this point. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Om de norske kongers*, p. 6; Johnsen, *Om Theodoricus*, p. 15; and Andersson, “Ari’s konunga ævi,” p. 11, prefer Norway, whereas Siegfried Beyschlag, *Konungasögur. Untersuchungen zur Königs saga bis Snorri. Die älteren Übersichtswerke samt Ynglingasaga*, Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana, 8 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1950), p. 126; Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, p. 178; Jan de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967), p. 249; and Jonas Kristjánsson, *Um Föstbræðrasögu* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1972), p. 146, prefer Iceland. By contrast, Lange rejects both alternatives in favor of understanding “in illa terra” as “in this world” (Lange, *Die Anfänge*, p. 102) and regards the passage in question as an example of rhetorical *hyperbole*. It is unclear to me what exactly she makes of this passage, but her translation of “in illa terra” clearly runs into conflict with what seems the obvious interpretation: No wonder that there are many opinions about such a question in a country where there is no writer about ancient matters, when the great Jerome is unable to decide the circumstances around Constantine’s baptism. Moreover, as Theodoricus lived on this earth as well as in Norway, the use of *illa* instead of *hac* receives no better explanation through Lange’s interpretation.

67. “quam illi dicant, quibus maxime in huius modi credendum est.”

it much more easily when he knew William of Jumièges as well as, most probably, the *Passio Olavi*, both of which works also state that Olaf was baptized in Rouen?⁶⁸

Some passages in Theodoricus's work suggest that he lacked written information about the earliest history or parts of it, although the exact amount of this lack of sources is difficult to decide, but he nowhere states directly that he only used oral sources. His statements about this question cannot therefore be used as an argument for his work being earlier than that of Oddr. Nor does the argument from the tendency of tradition to expand seem very strong in the case of Theodoricus, as the relevant passages in Theodoricus contain a considerable amount of condensed factual information, including most of the names in Oddr and later and more detailed sources.

These fairly cryptic references would seem to be intended as basic facts that Theodoricus expected his audience to know or alternatively as brief background information for his readers in order to make them understand the evil character of Gunnhildr, Haraldr, and Hákon jarl and the hardships the saintly king had to suffer.⁶⁹ If Theodoricus derived this information directly from the Bible or the legends, he would probably have made more out of it. Thus, the allusion to Christ's childhood would have been clearer if Theodoricus had included Olaf's mother in the story. Nor is it likely that he invented these stories himself, as they seem to make no sense from his perspective. Why would he burden his account by informing his readers that Olaf hardly found anywhere to hide or that he was brought up in Russia by King Vladimir, unless he knew the stories included in Oddr's account or some similar ones? In particular, the following passage, introducing the story of Olaf, has every sign of being a

68. Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, p. 181. To Ellehøj, this forms an argument that *Passio Olavi* depended on Theodoricus rather than vice versa. Given the authority of the archbishop, to whom his work was dedicated, Theodoricus would have accepted his opinion about Olaf's baptism without question. However, Theodoricus may have been a more independent writer than Ellehøj assumes. Thus, Theodoricus expresses his doubt about Constantine's baptism despite the fact that this question would seem to have been settled by a statement from Pope Alexander III from 1169 (*Lat. dok.*, no. 12). Further, Theodoricus's negative views about ecclesiastical wealth hardly corresponded to those of the archbishop (Bagge, "Theodoricus," pp. 129–32). Finally, Theodoricus's relationship to *Passio Olavi* may have been closer than Ellehøj assumes. *Passio Olavi* was probably a collective work, composed in stages and existing in several versions, and Theodoricus may even have been among the team of authors. He may also have been the one who drew attention to the passage in William of Jumièges about Olaf's baptism and revised *Passio Olavi* accordingly; the connection between the two sources is certainly close, as an excerpt from William is attached to a copy of *Passio Olavi* in the monastery of Anchin in Northern France; see Lars Boje Mortensen, "The Anchin Manuscript of *Passio Olavi* (Douai 295), William of Jumièges, and Theodoricus Monachus," *Symbolae Osloenses*, 75 (2000), 165–89.

69. Bagge, "Theodoricus," pp. 125–28.

summary: “Qui post interfectionem patris sui vix umquam latere poterat propter insidias Gunnildar.”⁷⁰ One imagines the poor boy or possibly young man—Theodoricus says nothing about his age—running from place to place, much in the manner of Oddr’s account. As an isolated statement, invented by Theodoricus himself, however, it is almost meaningless. Further, there is a gap in the story between the brief reference to the persecution of the child Olaf and the sentence describing his way from Russia to England that clearly suggests an allusion to a more complete story. Nor can the explanation of the cryptic and scattered facts be that Theodoricus is simply a bad writer who is unable to tell a good story. Theodoricus is an excellent rhetorician when he wants to be. But he is clearly not particularly interested in narrative. His concern is with the deeper meaning of the events. Consequently, he summarizes the facts known to him and develops his analogies and commentaries on the basis of some of them. Thus, Theodoricus’s account of Olaf Tryggvason’s early life is clearly an abbreviation of a longer version.

Turning from Olaf’s early life to the account of the mission itself, however, we have to conclude that this version can hardly be that of Oddr. The coming of the gospel of salvation to the barbarian north and the inclusion of this region into the common history of Christendom is one of the most crucial events of Theodoricus’s work, which is celebrated with the appropriate rhetorical flourish.⁷¹ But it is extremely brief and contains very few facts, only the reference to Olaf destroying the *hóf* and burning the sorcerers in Trøndelag—two events in Oddr corresponding to one in Theodoricus. In addition, there is a later reference to Olaf’s marriage alliances in order to promote Christianity.⁷² It is a likely hypothesis that Theodoricus in this case would have included more facts if he had known them. This hypothesis gains in likelihood if we compare this account with the following chapter, dealing with the conversion of Iceland, which is longer and contains considerably more names and other details, which clearly derives from Ari’s *Íslendingabók*.⁷³ The suggestion I have made about Oddr’s work being composed after 1184, might also be an argument for the priority of Theodoricus’s work, although it is not impossible that it was composed between 1184 and 1188.

Generally, the chaotic character of Oddr’s work, at least from a modern point of view, indicating that he has used a number of different sources, might also serve as an argument for placing him later in the tradition than Theodoricus. The long and repetitious story of Olaf’s conversion clearly

70. Theod., ch. 4, p. 11.

71. Theod., ch. 11.

72. Theod., ch. 13.

73. Theod., ch. 12.

has the appearance of being borrowed from more than one source, as has also the story of one of the sorcerers, Hróaldr of Goðey, which is told twice.⁷⁴ There are also a number of inconsistencies (e.g., in the account of the battle of Svǫldr) that suggest a mixture of various traditions.⁷⁵ A possible further argument in favor of Theodoricus's priority is the structure of Oddr's work. As Andersson observes, its first part has a firm structure, which suggests a written source, while the middle part is fairly chaotic.⁷⁶ However, a story dealing with a man's life from his birth to the conquest of the country in which he becomes king⁷⁷ lends itself more easily to a firm structure than an account of the various events happening during his reign. In Olaf's case, the second half of the structured part is mainly focused on one theme, namely, the conversion. Consequently, it is hardly necessary to explain the differences in composition between the first part and the middle part by a different kind of sources.

In sum, the observations above are more easily explained by the hypothesis that Theodoricus's work is earlier than Oddr's than vice versa. By contrast, there is no evidence for the stages in Olaf's conversion of Norway earlier than Oddr himself and consequently nothing to prevent us from assuming that this part of his work is actually Oddr's invention. The episodes contain no more factual information than that Olaf preached the gospel and converted the people, with or without the use or threat of force. More specific events mostly have a miraculous or legendary character, such as St. Martin making Olaf's adversaries speechless at the assembly at Mostr; the destruction of idols; Olaf succeeding by threatening to sacrifice his opponents to the pagan gods; and the fantastic stories about sorcerers in northern Norway. As we have seen, only the story of Olaf's burning of the sorcerers at Mærin is to be found in an earlier source, namely, Theodoricus. Further, Oddr directly refers to Sæmundr as a source, either for an assembly at Dragseið or for Olaf's expelling sorcerers or both.⁷⁸

74. Oddr, pp. 117–19, 165 ff.; cf. Andersson, "Introduction," p. 16 ff.

75. Andersson, "Introduction," pp. 17–20.

76. Andersson, "Introduction," p. 13 ff., distinguishes between ch. 1–41 in his translation, i.e., until the conversion of Iceland (=Oddr, pp. 1–130), containing a relatively organized narrative, the loosely structured ch. 42–61 (=Oddr, pp. 130–79), and finally ch. 62–78 (=Oddr, pp. 179–261), dealing with Olaf's death in the battle of Svǫldr. I have here extended the first part to p. 147 ff., the destruction of the statue of Freyr, as this seems to mark the end of Olaf's conversion of Norway.

77. Oddr, pp. 1–83.

78. Oddr, p. 114. The text differs somewhat in the two manuscripts. AM 310 qv. (late thirteenth century) clearly refers to Sæmundr as the source for Olaf's expulsion of the sorcerers which allegedly took place both at Dragseið and at Niðarnes, i.e., in the later town of Niðaróss. In Sth 8 mbr. qv. (ca. 1300), the quotation may either refer to the assembly at Dragseið and the decisions passed there, including the ban against sorcerers, or to the expulsion of them

As for the geography, the places mentioned in Olaf's itinerary are all well known places for meetings or assemblies. Mostr, where Olaf's mission in Norway starts, is mentioned in the Law of Gulating as the place where St. Olaf issued the law about Christianity.⁷⁹ The next reference is to Gulaping, the central assembly for the whole of Western Norway, in Oddr's age as well as earlier. Further north, Dragseið, the isthmus of the Selja peninsula, is likely to be an important meeting place, where ships gather waiting for an opportunity to pass the difficult promontory, stretching far out in the high sea, or where ships were dragged over land, which is the origin of the name. In Trøndelag, Frosta is the meeting place of the regional assembly, Frostaping; Hlaðir and Niðarnes are the residence for the earls of Hlaðir as well as later for the kings in Trøndelag, and Mærin is a famous place for pagan sacrifices. According to *Ágrip*, it was the place where Hákon góði was forced to take part in a *blót*,⁸⁰ and there is also archaeological evidence that it was actually a pagan cult site.

The main exception to this picture is the conversion of Iceland and Olaf's marrying his three sisters to powerful chieftains in return for their conversion. The conversion of Iceland itself is based on Ari's account, whereas the preceding account of the Icelanders converting in Niðaróss in return for the king's friendship may be based either on Ari's lost work⁸¹ or some other Icelandic source. The marriage alliances are also mentioned by Theodoricus. Such genealogical information is likely to be preserved in oral tradition. Moreover, one of the persons in question, Erlingr Skjálgs-son, is a well-known figure, mentioned in skaldic poetry as well as in several sagas. The story about how Olaf concluded these alliances, however, may well be Oddr's own invention. Further, the stories of Olaf's persecutions of sorcerers, which include names of places and persons, probably have some root in oral tradition.

from Niðarnes, or both. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Om de norske*, pp. 33–40, and Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, p. 17 ff., consider the passage an interpolation, mainly because of its repetitious character. However, Oddr is often repetitious, and there seems therefore to be no need to reject the reference to Sæmundr altogether, although some doubt remains as to what is actually a quotation from him.

79. *Den eldre Gulatingslova*, ed. Bjørn Eithun, Magnus Rindal, and Tor Ulset (Oslo: Riksarkivet, 1994), ch. 9, 15, 17.

80. *Ágr.*, ch. 5.

81. Cf. Snorri's reference to Ari's oral sources about Hákon jarl's death and Olaf's foundation of Niðaróss (Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, I, ed. Finnur Jónsson [Copenhagen: Møller, 1893–1901], p. 1), which may suggest that his work included some information on events there during Olaf's reign.

THE TWO VERSIONS OF OLAF'S EARLY LIFE

Whereas most of the account of the stages in Olaf's conversion of Norway may be Oddr's own invention, those of Olaf's earlier life need a more complex explanation. Here there are two distinct versions, corresponding to the two pairs of works in the table above. According to *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip*, the main persecutor of Olaf as a child is Hákon, and Olaf is either brought to the Orkneys or born there. According to Theodoricus and Oddr, Gunnhildr is the main persecutor, and there is no mention of the Orkneys. As for the conversion, the former version lets Olaf visit a hermit who predicts an ambush, whereas Olaf in the latter is saved from an ambush by praying to God and later visits an abbot and is baptized by him.

The same difference is to be found regarding one piece of information about Olaf's missionary work—his persecution of sorcerers—which is mentioned in the two latter works but not in the two former. It also occurs in the two most dramatic and spectacular events of Olaf's life, his accession to the throne through the deposition and death of Hákon jarl, and his death in battle. According to Theodoricus, Hákon learns about Olaf's career in England, concludes that he represents a danger to himself and tries to entice him to Norway and kill him by means of two of Olaf's maternal uncles and a traitor named Þórir klakka. Olaf leaves for Norway and is told about the treachery at the last moment. Arriving in the place of the future city of Niðaróss, he is received with great joy by the people there who immediately rebel against Hákon. Hákon is hidden by his concubine under a pigsty but killed by his slave Karkr who is later executed by Olaf.⁸² Oddr's story is more detailed and contains some additions,⁸³ but the basic facts are the same, including the names of the traitor and the two uncles.⁸⁴ By contrast, both *Historia Norwegie*⁸⁵ and *Ágrip* let Olaf go to Norway on his own initiative, without any treacherous plan on Hákon's part.⁸⁶ According to *Historia Norwegie*, the rebellion against Hákon seems to break out immediately on Olaf's arrival, although it is not clear whether it was also caused by Olaf's presence.⁸⁷ *Ágrip* mentions that Hákon had

82. Theod., ch. 7, 10.

83. I.e., that Hákon's envoys, when arriving in England, learn that Olaf has gone to Russia and gone there to meet him, and further, that they meet a Saami on their return to Norway who tells them about Olaf's future (Oddr, pp. 65–70).

84. Oddr, pp. 63–83.

85. HN, ch. 17, p. 92 ff.

86. *Ágr.*, ch. 12–14.

87. "Norwagenses . . . Olauum sibi regem constituunt, comitemque Haconem . . . a regno expulerunt" (HN, ch. 17, p. 94). The last passage should be translated "deposed from kingship" rather than "driven out of the realm," as in Fisher's English translation of the work.

become unpopular because of his tyranny, notably by forcing the wives and daughters of the leading men in the region to have sex with him and lets Olaf return after Hákon's death.

The story of Hákon's death is basically the same in all versions, with the exception that according to *Ágrip*, Hákon orders Karkr to kill him⁸⁸ to avoid being burned to death when he hears that the men searching for him plan to burn down the farm where he hides. Further, only the two later versions, Oddr and *Ágrip*, mention Hákon's behavior towards women. Given the religious and clerical attitude of the author of *Historia Norwegie* and even more of Theodoricus, as well as their negative attitude to Hákon, they would be likely to include such a piece of information if they had known about it. On the other hand, the fairly firm character of the tradition at this stage makes it unlikely that this aspect was not included. Further, the episode directly leading to the rebellion has a certain ring of authenticity, with names of persons and places. I would therefore venture the hypothesis that the two Latin writers omitted it, simply because they had already presented sufficient evidence of Hákon's evil character. The main difference, however, is not between earlier and later but between the two branches of the tradition already identified; Theodoricus and Oddr explain Olaf's arrival in Norway as the result of Hákon's attempt to deceive him, while *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip* explain it as the direct result of his vocation from God. Corresponding to this, the former tradition finds a direct causal connection between Olaf's arrival and the rebellion, whereas such a connection is uncertain in *Historia Norwegie* and nonexistent in *Ágrip*.

Not only does this difference correspond to the one found regarding the earlier passages, but there is the curious coincidence that the absence of Hákon's treacherous plan concerning the adult Olaf corresponds to its presence concerning the child Olaf. Both *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip* attribute an independent role to Hákon in the persecution of the young Olaf, and both let Olaf move from the west (i.e., the Orkneys) to Norway. It is not quite easy to understand why fear of the ruler of Trøndelag makes Olaf's mother send her son from the Orkneys through Trøndelag to Sweden, which might suggest that this story is derived from that of the adult Olaf who actually passes through the Orkneys on his way to Norway. On the other hand, this latter story also has its logical flaws, notably the

As nothing in the passage suggests that Hákon was driven out of the country, *regnum* here must mean "kingship/royal office" rather than realm, as often in medieval as well as Classical Latin.

88. The story of Karkr killing Hákon and above all its sequence, Olaf's execution of Karkr, is probably influenced from the story in the Bible of David executing the man who killed Saul, despite the fact that he did so on Saul's own order (2. Sam. 1, 1–15). Although all the versions show this influence, *Ágrip*'s is the one closest to the Bible.

one of Hákon sending Olaf's uncles to England to deceive him, threatening them with death. They ultimately reveal Hákon's plan to Olaf but could of course easily have done so much earlier. A logical story would be a combination of the two versions, either that Hákon entices Olaf's mother to bring the child Olaf to him—in analogy with the biblical story of Herod asking to be brought to the child Jesus in order to adore him (Matt. 2, 8)—or that Olaf leaves for Norway on his own initiative which is easily explained by other facts in both versions, as this is the result of his vocation. If any such story has actually existed, the former version would be the one best suited to explain the two existing versions, as the latter would simply mean that all reference to Hákon's treachery would have been omitted. Another, admittedly weak, indication in the same direction is the fact that Theodoricus only mentions Olaf's mother Astríðr in connection with Hákon's treacherous plan, not in connection with his persecution of Olaf as a child. Further, both Theodoricus and Oddr mention a boy in the Orkneys who, like Olaf in *Ágrip's* version, is three years old; this is the earl's son whom Olaf threatens to kill if his father does not convert.⁸⁹ The existence of a common, consistent version later divided into the two extant ones is fairly hypothetical, but the two different but related versions do indicate a tradition that has taken some time to develop.

There even seems to be some possibility of tracing this development. Two elements, both in *Historia Norwegie's* and *Ágrip's* version, are crucial in this respect. Both these works give alternative explanations of the death of Olaf's father, Tryggvi, either as the result of a local rebellion or treachery by the Eirikssynir, instigated by their mother Gunnhildr. At the other end of the story, the same two works suggest the existence of a version where Hákon is killed by the local population without Olaf being involved. Taken together, these observations suggest that the connection between Olaf and the two competing dynasties found in the rest of the extant works is a secondary element in the tradition. The original Olaf is simply the son of a local magnate in southeastern Norway who later happens to become the ruler of the country. Some tradition of Olaf as a Viking chieftain in England and possibly also in the Baltic may have existed from early on—in any case, there is evidence of his activities in England in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*⁹⁰—but apparently little or nothing was known of his childhood and career before his arrival in Norway.

It is, however, easy to see the need for such information. When the

89. *Theod.*, ch. 9; Oddr, pp. 91–93.

90. See, e.g., Lesley Abrams, "The Anglo-Saxons and the Conversion of England," *Anglo-Saxon Studies*, 24 (1995), p. 220 ff.

conversion of Norway becomes almost identical with Olaf's personal life, this life has to be known from its very beginning, and a story about him being persecuted by evil people from his birth and even before would seem perfectly appropriate, according to the analogy with Moses and Christ, as well as from the clear evidence of his election by God to do His work. From a political and dynastic point of view, Olaf cannot be a chieftain coming from nowhere but must be placed in a context. In all extant narrative sources, he descends from Haraldr hárfagri, which is probably a later invention, the result of a new emphasis on dynastic continuity from the twelfth century on.⁹¹ As heir to the throne he has two sets of rivals: the Eiríkssynir, his father's cousins, and the Lade dynasty, represented by Hákon. It would therefore seem logical to represent one or both of these as his persecutors. The most likely solution might immediately seem to be to make the Eiríkssynir the persecutors of the infant and Hákon of the adult Olaf. As the four sources mention Hákon in connection with the persecution of the infant, and there is also some evidence that the *Historia Norwegie-Ágrip* version is the earlier one, Hákon was probably the original persecutor. This would also indicate that the story of Hákon trying to entice Olaf to Norway to kill him originally referred to the infant Olaf and was based on the analogy with Herod, who pretended to want to worship the newborn Christ while he actually intended to kill him.

At some stage in the tradition, Gunnhildr and the Eiríkssynir were introduced in the story, possibly either in connection with an increasing demonization of Gunnhildr or for chronological reasons.⁹² These persecutors are present already in one of the explanations of Tryggvi's death in the *Historia Norwegie-Ágrip* version, and the transition is still visible in Theodoricus and Oddr, who let Hákon act as Gunnhildr's agent. At the last stage in the tradition, however, in Snorri's version, Hákon jarl has been replaced by another Hákon.⁹³ If Hákon's role in the persecution of the infant Olaf was reduced, it might explain that the attempt to entice Olaf to Norway was transferred to the adult Olaf. Admittedly, it would not be impossible to Theodoricus and Oddr to retain the original version, but they or their predecessors' need for a more direct connection between

91. Claus Krag, "Norge som odel i Haraldr Hárfagres ætt," *Historisk tidsskrift* (Norwegian), 68 (1989), 288–301; Sverre Bagge, "Ætt, stat og politikk fra vikingtiden til 1200-tallet," *Norsk slektshistorisk tidsskrift*, 38 (2001), 68 ff.

92. On the various calculations of Olaf's age at his accession to the throne and the length of Hákon jarl's reign in the sources, see Halvdan Koht, *Innhogg og utsyn* (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1921), p. 37, and Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, pp. 71–73. Olaf's age at his accession varies between twenty-two and thirty-two years and the length of Hákon's reign between twenty and thirty-three. The latter, however, is often reckoned from his father's death, which implies a period of co-rule between him and the Eiríkssynir.

93. Snorri, *Heimskringla. The Saga of Olaf Trygvason* (=OT), ch. 3.

Hákon's fall and Olaf's arrival in Norway may have led to this replacement, as they had already produced enough evidence of the persecution of the infant Olaf.

This attempt to trace the development of the story is of course highly hypothetical. There may be other explanations, including that of two original versions gradually influencing one another. Regardless of how we imagine the relationship between the versions and the development of the story, however, taken together the various accounts form important evidence of the ideological considerations in the tradition about Olaf the king and missionary. His crucial importance as God's instrument in the conversion of Norway necessitated a long and detailed account of his childhood and early life, giving clear evidence of God's intervention, and his position as the legitimate king of Norway necessitated his descent from Haraldr hárfagri and his persecution by rivals inside and outside the dynasty.

Turning to the second event, Olaf's last battle, we find the same division as earlier between our two main versions. According to *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip*, war breaks out because King Svein of Denmark refuses to cede the island of Sealand, which is the dowry of Þyri, Olaf's wife and Svein's sister. Olaf attacks Denmark and is surprised and defeated near Sealand by his enemies, King Svein, King Olof of Sweden, and the Norwegian Eiríkr jarl, son of Hákon whom Olaf deposed. According to Theodoricus and Oddr, Olaf is the victim of a conspiracy between the same three adversaries, as in the alternative version, who lay an ambush for him near the island of Svþlör off the coast of Wendland, probably near the island of Rügen. In both versions, Olaf is greatly outnumbered by his enemies, but fights heroically until the end.⁹⁴ All the authors also express their doubts as to whether Olaf was killed in the battle or escaped and lived as a monk or hermit for the rest of his life. Within each version, there are considerable differences between earlier and later accounts, above all between Theodoricus and Oddr, the latter of whom has a long and vivid account of the battle as well as the events leading up to it. The battle as well as its sources have also been the subject of much scholarly discussion, which shall not be dealt with here.⁹⁵ The most important in our context is that the main division found earlier occurs here as well. Further, there can hardly be any doubt that the version in *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip* is the older one, as it corresponds fairly well to that of Adam of Bremen,

94. HN, ch. 7, pp. 96–100; *Ágr.*, ch. 20; Theod., ch. 14; Oddr, pp. 179–236.

95. See, e.g., Lauritz Weibull, *Kritiska undersökningar i Nordens historia omkring år 1000* (Lund: Gleerup, 1911), pp. 111–43; Svend Ellehøj, "Olaf Tryggesons fald og venderne" *Historisk tidsskrift* (Danish), 11 rk., IV (1953), 1–55.

who must be considered a more reliable source in this case than about Olaf's reign in general. There is a close correspondence between Adam's and *Historia Norwegie's* versions both in the main facts that are included and in their sequence. The main difference is that Adam represents a Danish point of view, explaining Olaf's attack as a reaction against a pact between the Danish and Swedish kings in order to promote Christianity and depicting Olaf as the aggressor.⁹⁶

We have thus found two related but different versions of Olaf Tryggvason's life and reign regarding a series of events from his childhood to his last battle. Concerning the latter event, the priority of *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip* is near certain. The same applies to the story of Olaf's conversion, if the model is Totila's meeting with St. Benedict, as well as to Olaf's childhood, if the hypothesis suggested above holds true. We may guess that the two versions, or parts of them, go back to the two lost works known to have existed, by Sæmundr and Ari, of whom Sæmundr is admittedly the earlier. This hypothesis agrees well with that of Ellehøj who explains the common ground between *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip* by both works being dependent on Ari.⁹⁷ Further, the fact that Oddr directly refers to Sæmundr as the source for the story of Olaf and the sorcerers may indicate that he was the source for parts of the version distinguishing Theodoricus and Oddr from *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip*. The lack of any such reference in the two latter works seems to correspond to Ari's more pragmatic view of the Christianization. Finally, the poem *Noregs konunga tal*, which refers to Sæmundr as its source, mentions Svölðr as the site of Olaf's last battle, thus agreeing with Theodoricus and Oddr.

The division between the two pairs of texts, however, is less clear-cut than it may appear so far. *Ágrip* has much in common with Theodoricus as well as with *Historia Norwegie*,⁹⁸ and even if Oddr did not know *Historia Norwegie*, he certainly knew Ari.⁹⁹ Nor is there much solid evidence in favor of Ellehøj's explanation of the similarities between *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip* as common loans from Ari;¹⁰⁰ Ellehøj even admits that he is not able to exclude the alternative explanation of the material common to

96. Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, p. 154 ff. On *Historia Norwegie's* relationship to Adam and to Danish and German sources, see also Asgaut Steinnes, "Ikring Historia Norwegie," *Historisk tidsskrift* (Norwegian), 34 (1946-48), 1-61; and Mortensen, "Introduction," p. 17 ff.

97. Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, pp. 238-55.

98. Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, pp. 203-40.

99. He refers to Ari concerning Olaf's age and the chronology of his reign (Oddr, p. 28 ff.). Cf. also above, on the possible influence from Ari on Theodoricus.

100. Knut Helle, rev. of Olafía Einarsdóttir, *Studier i kronologisk metode i tidlig islandsk historieskrivning*, and Svend Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, *Historisk tidsskrift* (Norwegian), 46 (1967), 73-77; Andersson, "Kings' Sagas," pp. 207-9.

Historia Norwegie and *Ágrip*, that the latter borrowed from the former.¹⁰¹ This explanation has also been suggested by Tor Ulset who maintains that parts of *Ágrip* have been translated from Latin.¹⁰²

A further complication is introduced through Theodore Andersson's observation about three rather striking pieces of factual information common only to Theodoricus and Snorri and not to Oddr who we know was Snorri's source:¹⁰³ (1) Olaf stays in England under the assumed name of Áli; (2) he converts the Orkneys on his way to Norway; and (3) he lands at Mostr. There are alternative explanations, such as common oral information or, more likely, that Snorri may have taken this information directly from Theodoricus. As there is no other evidence that Snorri used Theodoricus, Ari as a common source would seem to be the most likely explanation. The arrival at Mostr is compatible with both traditions about Olaf's accession to the throne, whereas the two other pieces of information are not. Olaf's conversion of the Orkneys on his way to Norway seems to imply Theodoricus's and Oddr's version of the story, as the alternative one lets Olaf leave the Orkneys as a child. However, all the sources agree that Olaf converted the Orkneys, and Oddr lets him return there immediately after his acceptance as king of Norway. Snorri could therefore easily have rearranged Olaf's itinerary so as to make him convert the Orkneys on his way to Norway without having any source for it, in the same way as he rearranges Olaf's missionary expeditions through Norway to make his route more practical from a geographical point of view. By contrast, the assumed name shows a clear connection with Hákon's plan to entice Olaf to Norway, since it is regarded as a precaution by Theodoricus as well as Snorri.¹⁰⁴

If these pieces of information are really derived from a common lost source, Sæmundr would therefore seem to be a more likely hypothesis than Ari, the more so as his location of Olaf's last battle seems to correspond to Theodoricus's and Oddr's. Sæmundr is usually believed to have been a source for Oddr and *Ágrip*. Although there is no direct evidence of Sæmundr as Snorri's source, as an Icelander he is likely to have known him. Anyway, Sæmundr seems a more likely source for Snorri than Theodoricus.

However, if Sæmundr's and Ari's works mainly consisted of brief sum-

101. Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, pp. 238–40.

102. Tor Ulset, *Det genetiske forholdet mellom Ágrip, Historia Norwegiæ og Historia de antiquitate regum norwagiensium* (Oslo: Universitetet i Oslo, 1983). This hypothesis has earlier been brought forward by Sigurður Nordal and Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson; see discussion and references in Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, p. 258 ff.

103. Andersson, "Ari's konunga ævi," p. 8 ff., and *passim*.

104. Theod., ch. 7, p. 14; a similar connection in Snorri, OT ch. 32, p. 312; ch. 47, p. 345.

maries, as is usually supposed, they may not be able to give the full explanation of the two versions of the stories found in the extant texts. This applies particularly to the stories about Olaf's childhood. Theodoricus's summary may well be derived from a similar one in Sæmundr, but the original story cannot have had this form; it must be based on an earlier narrative, written or most probably oral. It is a normal phenomenon that writing, after its introduction, is first used for practical purposes and in the form of brief notes, and that literary use, particularly literary prose, is a later development.¹⁰⁵ We can therefore imagine a coexistence of oral and written forms in the early period. Narrative in the real sense was still oral, whereas writing was used for recording certain important facts and dates and the chronological relationship between them—the latter is certainly very prominent in Ari's extant work.¹⁰⁶ If this holds true, we can follow the early development of literary prose in the works we are examining here, in Theodoricus in the form of comments and analysis, in *Historia Norwegie* in the form of "real" narrative.

A possible objection to this hypothesis is that a considerable part of the tradition about Olaf, notably his persecution as a child and his conversion, seems to have its origin in clerical circles and to be influenced by the Bible or legends of the saints rather than by popular storytelling, and thus suggests a written rather than an oral tradition. However, at this early stage, i.e., the early twelfth or even late eleventh century, we may imagine a mixture of oral and written texts used for oral storytelling or histories composed on the basis of a mixture of oral and written information, as seems pretty clear in the case of Theodoricus. Ideological considerations must have been a powerful stimulus for such storytelling, as is expressed in the need for linking Olaf to the dynasty and tracing God's finger in his early life in a way corresponding to his importance as a missionary. This might suggest a connection between the development of the story of Olaf and the vivid scholarly milieu around the new-founded archiepiscopal see in Nidaros in the years after 1152/53, where we have evidence of the development of hagiography, liturgical reforms, *rex iustus* ideology, and dynastic thought, the latter expressed in the Law of Succession of 1163/64.¹⁰⁷ However, both the hagiographic and the dynastic elements

105. Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 82–93.

106. On the gradual development of literacy in Iceland and its coexistence with orality, see Ole Bruhn, *Tekstualisering. Bidrag til en litterær antropologi* (Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1999), pp. 155–205.

107. See most recently Sverre Bagge, "Den heroiske tid—kirkereform og kirkekamp 1153–1214," in *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537*, ed. Steinar Imsen (Trondheim: Tapir, 2003), pp. 58–71.

may well have been developed earlier, and given the evidence of various branches of tradition in the extant sources, there is likely to have been more than one site of origin. The lost works of Sæmundr and Ari point strongly in the direction of Iceland, and the existence of two similar works unknown to each other, Theodoricus's work and *Historia Norwegie*, suggests more than one milieu in Norway.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STORY OF OLAF TRYGGVASON THE MISSIONARY

It thus seems possible to draw some conclusions regarding the age of the different elements of the story of Olaf Tryggvason. The tradition most probably has a basis in fact concerning two of the most spectacular events in his career, Hákon jarl's death, which paved the way for him to the throne, and his last battle. There is fairly good evidence, in Adam of Bremen as well as in skaldic poetry, for a battle between the rulers of the Nordic kingdoms in which Olaf was killed, but the circumstances have been considerably elaborated in the later tradition. The account of Hákon's death is unusually unanimous in all four of our sources and contains many names of persons and places which give it an authentic ring or at least suggests that some main elements of it have a factual basis. Further, Snorri also mentions Hákon's death in connection with his account of Ari's sources, a passage that is probably derived from Ari's lost work.¹⁰⁸ The rest of the story about Olaf is more uncertain and to a considerable extent based on inventions and constructions during the period between Olaf's death and the oldest extant sources. We may, however, form some opinion on the relative date of the different layers. There is certainly a fairly long tradition about him as a missionary, which means that the division of labor between the two Olafs must go far back in time, rather than being an invention from the late twelfth century. Although the origin of the stories about Olaf's childhood and early life is uncertain, the existence of two main versions of the most crucial events points to a tradition that must have taken some time to develop and to a connection with hagiography as well as dynastic ideology. The most doubtful parts of the story are the stages in Olaf's conversion of Norway where there is

108. Snorri refers to Ari's account of the Norwegian kings, for which one of his informants was Oddr Kollsson who had his information from Þorgeirr afráðskollr who lived at Niðarnes (i.e., on the site of the later city of Niðaróss) when Hákon was killed (*Heimskringla*, I, p. 6). Most of the people Snorri mentions in this passage are also mentioned in Ari, ch. 1, 7, 9. See Ellehøj, *Den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*, p. 6, and Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: The Univ. of California Press, 1991), p. 27.

little evidence before Oddr Snorrason who may be suspected of having invented most of it.

This sequence of the layers in the tradition about Olaf indicates an understanding of the conversion in the earliest, probably clerical sources parallel to that in *Passio Olavi*, but with Olaf Tryggvason as an even more important missionary hero than his later namesake. The conversion is the result of God's intervention, and as in many other cases, His instrument is a single person, a holy missionary, whom God elects to pass on His message, and whose life symbolizes the conversion of the country. This understanding is present in the two Latin works, but developed in different ways, in the direction of typology and universal history in Theodoricus and in the direction of a real biography of Olaf Tryggvason in *Historia Norwegie*. The biographical approach is developed further in the two biographies from the late twelfth century. Oddr's work is largely modeled on the missionary biography, whereas the *Legendary Saga* is modeled on the *rex iustus*; both, however, include strong elements of heroic tale. Without being directly biographical, *Ágrip* represents essentially the same understanding, although it also contains a substantial amount of secular material.

Nonetheless, the tradition is very emphatic that Olaf Tryggvason as well as his successor in the missionary work, St. Olaf, are also kings. Olaf Tryggvason is a great warrior hero, and there is no attempt to conceal his past as a Viking. Oddr in particular develops the heroic aspects in his account of Olaf's years as king and his relationship to other kings and magnates, notably in the account of his last battle at Svölðr. The institutional framework of the Christianization also corresponds to the missionary's royal status. The missionary king presents the gospel at the normal popular assemblies (*þing*), he uses his connections, such as marriage alliances, to bring about Christianization, and he uses force against those who cannot be persuaded in other ways.

SNORRI STURLUSON'S SYNTHESIS

What is usually regarded as the final stage¹⁰⁹ in the saga tradition is represented by the three great sagas from the 1220s or early 1230s, *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, and Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*. The first of these is irrelevant in our context, as it begins after St. Olaf's death. The second deals fairly briefly with the conversion, telling the essential story

109. However, the tradition of kings' saga writing did continue during the following period through revisions and extensions of earlier works and various kinds of compilations, one of which is the Great Saga of Olaf Tryggvason (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ca. 1300), which may deserve a closer examination.

common to the earlier works discussed above, but abbreviating the account of Olaf Tryggvason's childhood and omitting any reference to St. Olaf's early life. As *Fagrskinna* is fairly long and often contains detailed accounts of secular events, this saga marks a shift of emphasis away from the missionary biography and in the direction of secular history, a trend that is continued in *Heimskringla*.

Heimskringla contains the most detailed account of the Christianization process from beginning to end in the whole of the saga literature, while at the same time representing a more secular attitude than the earlier works we have dealt with, excepting *Fagrskinna*. Although it is easy for the most part to trace Snorri's various stories back to the earlier tradition, there is often a change of emphasis and an attempt to see the Christianization against the broader background of general, "political" history.

In contrast to the earlier saga tradition, Snorri deals in considerable detail with the first, apparently unsuccessful attempt by Hákon góði to introduce Christianity.¹¹⁰ He follows *Ágrip's* account in its main outline, but adds some important details. He includes an extra excuse for Hákon's failure to introduce Christianity to those found in *Ágrip*: Having been forced to take part in the pagan sacrifice, Hákon prepares an army to fight the people of Trøndelag, but has to use it to defend the country against the Eirikssynir's attack.¹¹¹ Above all, Snorri makes the story more vivid as well as more intelligible, adding speeches and dialogues to bring out the arguments on both sides. After Hákon góði, Snorri follows his predecessors in regarding Olaf Tryggvason's reign as the next and main stage in the process. He uses Oddr Snorrason as his main source, but arranges his material in accordance with his own interests and ideals. He simplifies the story of Olaf's conversion, leaving out the dream in Russia, the journey to Greece, and the missionary activity in Russia, and depicting the conversion solely as the result of the meeting on the Scillies. Here he departs from Oddr's version, following that of *Historia Norwegie* and *Ágrip*, most probably the latter, in making the holy man a hermit and not an abbot and letting him prophesy the ambush. Like *Ágrip*, he lets the ambush take place immediately upon Olaf's return to the ships. By contrast, Snorri follows Oddr's version in his account of Olaf's childhood.¹¹² Although this is described in considerable detail—the only example in *Heimskringla* of a king's childhood being narrated—the element of missionary biography is reduced in favor of a stronger emphasis on the mission itself. This is further underlined by the fact that the story of Olaf's early life is interlaced

110. *Heimskringla*, I, *The Saga of Hákon góði*, ch. 13–19.

111. HG, ch. 18–19, p. 195; cf. Bagge, "A Hero," p. 190.

112. OT, ch. 1–8.

with a fairly detailed story of Hákon jarl's reign, though in such a way that Olaf's life is formally characterized as the main story.¹¹³

Like Oddr, Snorri concentrates most of the account of the Christianization in the middle of the saga of Olaf,¹¹⁴ interrupted by the failed effort to marry and convert the Swedish Queen Sigríðr. Olaf begins in the east, where he has friends and relatives, and where the Danish King Haraldr blátönn has already prepared the ground. Haraldr's mission is also mentioned by Oddr¹¹⁵ who, however, makes no use of it in his narrative of Olaf's mission. Olaf then moves west and north along the coast. From a geographical point of view, Snorri brings order into Oddr's chaos, but Snorri misses Oddr's cosmological drama. There is a tendency in this direction in the fight against the sorcerers of northern Norway, but in the final phase, Iceland, the story returns to normal political pressure and negotiations. Characteristically, the story of Olaf's meeting with the Devil in the shape of Óðinn becomes far more dramatic and meaningful in Oddr than in Snorri. Whereas Oddr places the story towards the end of his account of the Christianization, after the conversion of Iceland and just before the fight against the diabolic forces of northern Norway, Snorri inserts it before the second expedition to Trøndelag, when Olaf passes Ogvaldznes. Snorri also omits Oddr's introduction about the Devil seeing his power diminish and deciding to attack Olaf directly. Thus, Oddr makes this episode into a major battle in the spiritual war in which Olaf takes part, while to Snorri, it is just a curious episode.

Like Oddr's, Snorri's story of Olaf's conversion of Norway contains a mixture of the natural and the supernatural, but with a different emphasis. A considerable part of the supernatural material is left out, although enough remains to reject any idea of Snorri as a kind of modern rationalist.¹¹⁶ The explanation of Snorri's abbreviations should probably be sought in considerations about relevance rather than in disbelief. In a similar way, Snorri emphasizes the natural aspect of the process by offering a "sociological" explanation of the Christianization, in terms of kinship, friendship, and marriage alliances. This aspect is further emphasized by Snorri's rearrangement of Olaf's itinerary to make it more logical from a geographical point of view. Snorri develops further the earlier tradition of Olaf Tryggvason as the main missionary king, depicting his Christianization of the coast as lasting. Despite the earls' passivity, there is no lapse from Christianity as in the *Legendary Saga*. St. Olaf's achievement is to convert the interior parts of the country and to suppress the remains of

113. Bagge, *Society and Politics*, pp. 46, 53 ff.

114. OT, ch. 53–82.

115. Oddr, p. 53.

116. Bagge, *Society and Politics*, pp. 208–15.

pagan cult in Trøndelag. Although Olaf is portrayed as a good Christian king in Snorri's account, there are no indications of his sainthood until his period in exile in Russia towards the end of his life.¹¹⁷

Coming at the end of a long tradition, Snorri repeats most of the facts and part of the interpretation of his predecessors. Most characteristic of him are explanations in natural and "sociological" terms, which are to be found in his predecessors but which Snorri makes far more explicit and systematic. It is difficult to make people change religion; customs are well ingrained. It is partly a question of familiarity. As the southern, i.e., southeastern, part of the country is more familiar with Christianity, conversion is less difficult here. Olaf Tryggvason has many friends and relatives there who tend to follow him. And when leaders convert, the people follow, according to Snorri's aristocratic—but probably also realistic—understanding of human behavior. Some of these examples are also to be found in Oddr but are not used systematically in the same way. When such means are insufficient, the missionary kings use or threaten to use force, to which supernatural intervention is sometimes added. The effect of such means is largely the same as in more secular contexts: "nothing succeeds like success," the winner normally gets what he wants. Thus, crushing pagan idols demonstrates the impotence of the pagan religion in the same way as defeating or killing one's opponent. In both cases, the adherents of the loser join the winner.¹¹⁸

THE NATURAL AND THE SUPERNATURAL IN SNORRI'S ACCOUNT

In reorganizing his predecessors' accounts, Snorri succeeds in ironing out inconsistencies, improving the geography, and creating a more logical and consistent story which makes the Christianization process intelligible in natural and human terms, without excluding the supernatural element, which is carefully distinguished from the natural one. In doing this, however, he also creates new problems. What is the relationship between Snorri's secular story of struggles for power between kings and pretenders or between kings and their subordinates and the change of religion? And what is really his attitude to the merit of the two conflicting religions?

Some elements in Snorri's account of Hákon's attempt at Christianization might suggest that Snorri sympathizes with the pagans. The pagan Sigurðr Hákonarson jarl is portrayed as a clever mediator, a figure that seems to have Snorri's sympathy, and the pagan *blót* is described with re-

117. Bagge, *Society and Politics*, pp. 181–86.

118. Bagge, *Society and Politics*, pp. 105–7.

spect, without caricature or criticism.¹¹⁹ This description, which has been much discussed, is apparently a mixture of stereotypes of pagan cult from the Bible and other sources and contemporary Christian rituals. During the *blót* at Mærin, the statues of the gods as well as the participants in the ritual are sprinkled with blood from the animals used for the sacrifice by means of brushes resembling those used for holy water in Christian churches.¹²⁰ In a similar way, water is poured over newborn children while they are given names. Snorri may possibly have picked these elements from the Christian rituals simply because they were the easiest to come by, but he may also directly have wanted to show similarities between the pagan and the Christian cult.

While Hákon's appeal for conversion to the people of Trøndelag is rendered briefly in indirect speech, the local representative, Ásbjörn af Meðalhúsum's answer is rendered in greater detail and in direct speech. Ásbjörn points to the people's earlier choice of Hákon as their king, because of his great popularity and promises to them. Now, however, he wants to destroy their ancient traditions, thus acting as a tyrant, which they will not tolerate, but rather kill him or expel him from the country. Admittedly, Snorri's speeches do not necessarily express his own opinions, but form part of his literary technique, aiming at vivid representation of conflicting opinions and motives.¹²¹

In this case, however, Ásbjörn defends constitutional principles that seem to correspond to Snorri's own, notably the Swedish *lögmaðr* Þorgnyr's protest against the king's stubborn refusal to come to terms with St. Olaf. The Swedish King Olof Skotkonung is depicted as an arrogant fool, so in this case, there can be no doubt about Snorri's opinion.¹²² Generally, Snorri believes in the desirability as well as the necessity for the king to have popular support. It is *a priori* unlikely that Snorri, living in a society that had been Christian for more than two hundred years, directly sympathized with Ásbjörn, and his description of the later stages in the Christianization also forms evidence against such an assumption, but there

119. Gro Steinsland, *Den hellige kongen. Om religion og herskermakt fra vikingtid til middelalder* (Oslo: Pax, 2000), p. 111.

120. For a discussion of the reliability of Snorri's account of the *blót*, see Klaus Düwel, *Das Opferfest von Lade*, Wiener Arbeiten zur germanischen Altertumskunde und Philologie (Vienna: Halosar, 1985), who rejects it, and Steinsland, *Den hellige kongen*, p. 111 ff., and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, "Den norrøne literatur og virkeligheden," in his *At fortælle historien* (Trieste: Parnaso, 2001), pp. 115, 117, 119 ff., who take a more positive attitude. I am inclined to agree with Düwel.

121. Sverre Bagge, "Oratory and Politics in the Sagas," in *L'Histoire et les nouveaux publics dans l'Europe médiévale (XIIIe-XVe siècles)*, ed. Jean-Philippe Genet, Actes du colloque international organisé par la Fondation Européenne de la Science à la Casa de Velasquez, Madrid, 23-24 Avril 1993 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1997), pp. 215-28.

122. Cf. Bagge, *Society and Politics*, p. 220 ff.

is certainly a tension between the religious and the secular aspect of this episode. The same tension is even more pronounced in his account of St. Olaf's conflict with the Norwegian magnates.¹²³

Snorri does not directly address the question of why Hákon's mission failed, but he does give a hint about his general interpretation. After the death of the last pagan ruler, Hákon jarl, he expresses his surprise at the ignoble end of this great chieftain, and continues: "And that was the main reason why this happened, that the time had come when the *blót* and its practitioners were to be condemned, and in its place came holy faith and right customs."¹²⁴ Snorri's problem here is the following: Why did this clever and highly successful chieftain suffer such a shameful death?¹²⁵ Normally, those who are smart and clever are also lucky. Hákon was in this case extremely unlucky. Admittedly, he was partly to blame for his fall, as he made himself unpopular in his old age by having sex with the women and daughters of the leading men in the region, which is not a good idea for a chieftain. The rebellion that followed was thus to be expected, but Hákon was extremely unlucky in that it coincided with the arrival of Olaf Trygvason. Even then, he might have escaped, had it not been for his slave Karkr's treachery. Karkr had apparently been Hákon's private servant throughout his life—the two were born in the same night—had been treated well, and had always been loyal. He was probably the person in Hákon's surroundings most likely to be trusted. His treachery seems in Snorri's account to be the result of a combination of panic and temptation, as he listens to Olaf Trygvason promising a great reward to the one who kills Hákon. Taken together, these factors amount to such extreme bad luck that a supernatural explanation seems likely. Such an explanation easily presents itself when the pagan Hákon is succeeded by the great missionary king Olaf Trygvason who brings about the conversion of the country.

This reasoning, however, has repercussions on the earlier history. If God had decided to use Olaf Trygvason to introduce Christianity, Hákon góði could not really be blamed for failing to do so. God may have allowed or even caused the Eiríkssynir to attack, because in His inscrutable wisdom, He had not yet decided to introduce Christianity to Norway. It may seem a paradox that it is the most secular of the historians of the Christianiza-

123. Bagge, *Society and Politics*, pp. 66–70. See also Lars Lönnroth, *Skaldemjödet i berget: Essayer om fornisländsk ordkunst och dess återanvändning i nutiden* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 1994), p. 88 ff., and Sverre Bagge, "Icelandic Uniqueness or a Common European Culture? The Case of the Kings' Sagas," *Scandinavian Studies*, 69 (1997), 439.

124. "En þat bar mest til er svá varð, at þá var sú tíð komin, at fyrir dæmask skyldi blót-skaprinn ok blótmennir, en í stað kom heilög trúa ok réttir siðir" (OT, ch 50)—my translation.

125. Cf. Bagge, *Society and Politics*, p. 220 ff.

tion of Norway who most explicitly refers to God's intervention. Actually, the combination makes sense. Being mainly concerned with narrating and explaining secular history, Snorri is in greater need of distinguishing between the natural and the supernatural than his predecessors.

Both the constitutional attitude and the relative respect for the pagan religion in Snorri's account should be understood in light of his attitude to tradition. His great history of the Norwegian kings from the origin of the dynasty in the distant past deals with continuity, in the political as well as cultural sense. The cultural traditions include the stories from the distant past as well as the skaldic poetry with its intimate connection to the old mythology, still apparently a part of the culture of educated circles in a similar way as the Classical mythology in contemporary Europe. Politically, the Norwegian kings as well as the Norwegian and Icelandic aristocracy took pride in their real or invented genealogical connection with the heroes in the distant past. Both considerations indicated that the pagan past should not be painted in too dark colors.¹²⁶ Thus, in his *Edda*, Snorri underlines that the old religion contains glimpses of the truth and that it represents the feeble attempts of mankind to grasp some part of the supernatural after the loss of the true religion.¹²⁷ Another device was to point to some anticipation of Christianity in pre-Christian times, as in a passage in an addition to *Fagrskinna* stating that Haraldr hárfagri refused to believe in the many gods of the pagan religion. Having established himself as the sole ruler of the whole country, he understood that the world also had to be ruled by one God.¹²⁸ Snorri may possibly allude to such an idea when he makes Haraldr swear "by God Who created me and governs everything" to conquer the whole of Norway.¹²⁹ He also points out that Haraldr and his descendants disliked sorcerers and persecuted them,¹³⁰ and he never directly mentions Haraldr in connection with the pagan cult.

126. Bagge, "A Hero," pp. 205–7, and "On the Far Edge of the Dry Land: Scandinavian and European Culture in the Middle Ages," *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350: Contact, Conflict, and Coexistence*, ed. J. Adams & K. Holman (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2004), pp. 359–61. For parallels to this in other relatively recently converted peoples, see Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (Malden, MA.: Blackwell, 1997), p. 307 ff.

127. Anne Holtmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, Skrifter utg. av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo II. Hist.-filos. klasse, Ny serie, no. 4 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964), p. 9 ff.; Ursula and Peter Dronke, "The Prologue of the Prose Edda: Explorations of a Latin Background," *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20 júlí 1977*, vol. I (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977), pp. 153–76; Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál. Snorri Sturluson's Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language*, The Viking Collection, IV (Odense: Odense Univ. Press, 1987), p. 13 ff.

128. *Fagrskinna. Norges kononga tal*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Møller, 1902), p. 386.

129. "Þess strengi ek heit, ok því skýt ek til guðs, þess er mik skóp ok öllu ræðr," *Heimskringla*, I, *The Saga of Haraldr hárfagri*, ch. 4.

130. *Heimskringla*, I, *The Saga of Haraldr hárfagri*, ch. 34.

Thus, Snorri knows that the old religion has to give way to the Christian truth, but he sees no reason to diminish the reputation of the venerable ancestors by depicting it more negatively than strictly necessary.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONVERSION IN THE NORWEGIAN-ICELANDIC TRADITION

We have followed the development of the tradition about the conversion of Norway for a period of around fifty years if we keep to the extant works, and considerably longer, more than a hundred, if we include the two lost works of Sæmundr and Ari and the oral tradition. Despite uncertainties about their relationship to each other and to their lost sources, the older works represent much the same understanding of the Christianization as the result of God's intervention through two great missionary kings, an understanding that results in the development of a narrative of Olaf Tryggvason's life modeled on the missionary biography. Most of the facts in this tradition are taken over in the two latest and most secular works, *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, in the former in an abbreviated form that makes the Christianization a relatively marginal part of the narrative, in the latter in great detail but modified in a more secular direction, which emphasizes the problem of religious versus secular history and of constitutional issues versus the true religion. Finally, although the missionary biography is still there, there is a more "sociological" understanding of the conversion, in terms of political alliances, tactics, personal friendship, and the appropriate use of violence.

The missionary biography is an important and widespread genre going back to works like Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Sancti Martini* from the late fourth century and including works about missionaries in the northern and eastern periphery, like Rimbart's *Vita Ansgari* and the Lives of St. Adalbert of Prague. Although not directly a missionary biography, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* describes the conversion from the missionaries' point of view, emphasizing their preaching and including some "existential" elements, like the famous allegory of human life being compared to a bird coming from the unknown and returning to the unknown, but flying for a short time through the warm hall.¹³¹ A closer study of such works may lead to a better understanding of what is similar and what is different in the Norwegian-Icelandic tradition. One difference, however, is clear at the outset: that the missionary is also a king. Here a comparison with the

131. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), II, 13.

lives of royal or princely saints in other countries will be relevant, notably St. Stephen in Hungary and St. Wenceslas in Bohemia. By contrast, the royal saints of Denmark and Sweden, St. Cnut and St. Erik, are less interesting in this context, as the conversion of their countries was not attributed to them. Further, Saxo's account of the conversion of Denmark differs radically from the Norwegian-Icelandic tradition, as it is explained partly by pressure from the German emperor and partly by the German missionaries' effort, notably Poppo's ordeal.¹³² Admittedly, King Haraldr blátönn plays an important part in the conversion, but he is not depicted as a missionary nor as resembling a saint but rather as an unpopular and somewhat tyrannical ruler. The conversion itself is described fairly briefly, but it is anticipated in the detailed account in Book VIII about Thorkild's journey to Udgård to seek the true religion, and it clearly plays a crucial part in the composition of the work.

Thus, there seem to be some reasons for regarding the combination of missionary and king as a distinctive, although not necessarily unique feature of the Norwegian-Icelandic tradition. To this can be added the almost complete absence of any foreign influence, both in the sense of political pressure by foreign rulers—with the exception of Haraldr blátönn's mostly unsuccessful attempt—and in the sense of the conversion being the result of foreign missionaries' effort. Admittedly, the kings bring with them priests and missionaries from abroad, but these people play a wholly subordinate part in the narrative, and most of them are not even named. The only one who acts independently to a certain extent is the German priest Þangbrandr who is sent to Iceland by Olaf Tryggvason, but even he illustrates the general point; his mission results from the king not being able to go himself. Possibly corresponding to this emphasis on the kings, doctrine plays a subordinate part. There are some references to sermons or discussions, but generally, religion seems to have to do with doing rather than thinking. Cult is thus more central than doctrine, above all in the attacks on the pagan *blót* and idols. Fasts and holidays are important expressions of Christianity, as in the objections directed at the new religion in Snorri's account of the negotiations between Hákon góði and the people of Trøndelag. Personal connections also play a major part, above all in Snorri, but also in the earlier sources. The marriage between Erlingr Skjálǫgsson and Olaf Tryggvason's sister secures the conversion of Hordaland, not only in Snorri, but also in Oddr. The kings' charismatic qualities are particularly prominent in Snorri but are also there in his predecessors. Violence also plays some part and receives explicit justification

132. Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, I–II, ed. J. Olrik and H. Ræder (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1931), X.4.1, X.11.3.

in some of the religious works. Finally, the forum for making religious decisions are the popular assemblies, where the kings negotiate with the local population. This applies to Oddr as well as to Snorri, although only the latter points to the connection between the religious and the constitutional issue. In sum, the narratives of the Christianization largely serve to illustrate the usual Old Norse term for the process, *siðaskipti*, i.e., change of manners or customs. Even Snorri's relatively tolerant attitude to the pagan religion is anticipated earlier, notably in *Ágrip's* positive portrait of Hákon góði. Although Snorri's in many ways radical transformation of the earlier tradition is largely his own achievement, he makes explicit some of the themes that are implicit in the earlier tradition: the pagan past as legitimizing the present dynasty, power structure, and cultural traditions, and the relationship between the new religion and secular politics and constitutional issues.