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## FOLKTALE AND PARABLE:

### *The Unity of Gautreks Saga*

AS SEVERAL SCHOLARS have pointed out, Gautreks saga has no single protagonist, no chronological plot, and a haphazard assortment of characters and settings.<sup>1</sup> It is currently considered a single text, but the heterogenous nature of its parts is so great that it has led in the past to the perception of these parts as constituting relatively independent *þættir*.<sup>2</sup> Despite such „deviations“ from the techniques of classical composition, I would like to propose that a single theme does inform the saga.<sup>3</sup> In it, the traditional characteristics of the suc-

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Boyer (1979) and Kathryn Hume (1973). Joseph Harris (1975, 1986:210 ff.) has drawn attention to a number of texts which do not display „biographical unity“, such as *Qgmundar þáttur dytts ok Gunnars helmings*, and Gautreks saga can be added to the list. Although Gautreks saga is preserved in two versions, one shorter and earlier, and the other longer and later, it is with the longer one, believed written towards the end of the thirteenth century, that I am concerned. See Ranisch (1900:i–xviii). The shorter version, whose lack of detail makes the action seem illogical and unmotivated, also does not include the story of *Starkaðr*. Henceforth, references to Gautreks saga indicate the longer version unless specified otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> So Schier (1970:76, 78, 89). Hermann Pálsson and Edwards (1985:10–3) give no hint in the introduction to their translation that Gautreks saga might be „separable“, and the assumption of the unity of Gautreks saga is essential to the argument of Régis Boyer (1979). The seventeenth-century copyists varied in their opinions, with Jón Erlendsson (in AM 65 fol, AM 203 fol, and AM 358 4to) and Björn Jónsson (in AM 164 h fol) entitling the parts of the shorter version as though they were relatively independent *þættir*. At the other extreme, the unknown copyists of AM 194 a fol and AM 590 b–c 4to included the text of the longer Gautreks saga in their copies of „*Saga af Hrolfe Gautrekssyne*“. Kålund seemed to think Gautreks saga and *Gjafa-Refs saga* were independent, for he uses both these titles when listing the untitled contents of compilation manuscripts (the former for AM 356 4to, and the latter for AM 152 fol), rather than calling one a defective version of the other.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that it is difficult to assign priority to any one of them has been considered a flaw in the composition of the saga (Boyer 1979). Hume (1973) argues that readers of the (family) sagas should not expect organic unity, although if the sagas are composed „genealogically“, as she suggests, then they should at least have a similar underlying continuity. Seymour Chatman (1978:47) briefly discusses Jean Pouillon's notion of „contingency“ as the organizational principle of events in „extreme modern cases“ (replacing the traditional Aristotelian „causality“ principle), but it seems very relevant to this particular criticism of the sagas.



cessful Scandinavian king — generosity and good luck — are reinterpreted in the Christian terms of charity and grace, thus investing the institution of the monarchy with a spiritual authority independent of that of Rome. Gautreks saga anachronistically projects this reinterpretation onto the pre-Christian past, but it is more usually found in narratives such as *Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka* and *Óláfs saga hins helga*, which deal with good Christian kings such as Sveinn Úlfsson of Denmark and St Óláfr of Norway.

If we disassemble Gautreks saga, we find that it is composed of three interlaced narrative strands. The first is the folktale-like account of Gautrekr's begetting, the second is the ancient legend of Starkaðr, and the third is the *Íslendinga-þáttur*-like story of Refr. These three narratives, which seem so disparate, are in fact linked by the repetition of the following motifs: misers, fools, and sacrifices to Óðinn. In the first story, the miser is King Gauti's unwilling host *Skafnörtungr* (the name means „Skinflint“), the fools are the members of *Skafnörtungr*'s family, and the sacrifices to Óðinn take the form of their throwing themselves over *Ætternisstapi* (their „Family Cliff“) to ensure their going straight to Valhalla. In the second story, the miser is the Norwegian Earl Neri, who serves to connect all three parts of the saga, since he makes his first appearance in the legend of Starkaðr, then becomes Gautrekr's earl, and finally Refr's foster-father.<sup>4</sup> The fool is Starkaðr himself, who as a youth is a good-for-nothing *kolbíttr* or layabout, and the sacrifice to Óðinn is the hanging of Starkaðr's foster-brother, King Víkarr. In the third story, the miser Neri appears once again, and Refr is a hero who begins as a *kolbíttr* and a fool both.<sup>5</sup> The lack of a sacrifice to Óðinn is a deliberate omission, as I will show, but a further connection between Starkaðr's story and Refr's is provided by Refr's father Rennir, who fought for and was a friend of King Víkarr. And when Refr gives his father's prized ox to Neri, his story is

<sup>4</sup> For convenience, quotations from Gautreks saga are taken from volume 4 of Guðni Jónsson's 1950 edition. Starkaðr is described as a *kolbíttr* on p. 15, and Neri as a miser on p. 23: „Neri jarl var hermaðr mikill, en svá sínkr, at til hans hefir jafnat verit öllum þeim, er sínkastir hafa verit ok sízt hafa öðrum veitt“ („Earl Neri was a great warrior, but such a miser that all those who have been the most miserly and have aided others the most reluctantly have been compared to him“).

<sup>5</sup> Gautreks saga (1950:27) describes Refr as a *kolbíttr* and fool: „Þá er hann var ungr, lagðist hann í eldaskála ok beit hrís ok börk af trjám ... Hann gerði sik athlægi annarra sinna hraustra frænda“ („When he was young, he lay about in the kitchen and bit twigs and bark off the wood ... He made himself the laughing-stock of his other famous relatives“). On the same page, Rennir is implied to be thrifty: „Faðir hans [i.e., Rennir] var fjárorkumaðr mikill, ok líkaði honum illa óþrifnaðr sonar síns“ („His father was a great man of wealth, and the unthrifty ways of his son displeased him“).

linked with Gautrekr's, who as a boy disposed of his uncle's prized ox by killing it.<sup>6</sup>

Gautreks saga is particularly rich in its use of folktale motifs and indeed whole tale-types. The story of Gautrekr begins with an analogue of AT 1544, „The Man Who Got a Night's Lodging“, and continues with a series of motifs illustrating the behavior of miserly fools. The story of Refr seems to be based on Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka, which has been the subject of several folkloristic studies and itself has multiple analogues in folktale (Ranisch 1900: lxi–ii). Yet these folktale-aspects, which in themselves seem naïve or unliterary, have been adapted and modified to various degrees by the saga-author. John Lindow (1978:173) notes (see also Harris 1979, Strömbäck 1968):

We must recall, however, that in no case does an Old Norse text 'translate' an international tale. Even in the case of clearest influence, what the Norse text does is to rework the international material, casting it in a Norse context according to the rules of Norse literature and work it into some fuller text which makes complete sense in its own terms.

What is unusual about Gautreks saga is not that it conforms to Lindow's generalization, but that the saga-author uses folktale structures and motifs as a vehicle for a certain aspect of his theme, and abandons them when his particular point is made.

The satiric aspect of Gautreks saga which Régis Boyer (1979) detects is in fact limited to the first narrative strand, which opens with a parody of that commonplace of romance, the hero finding adventure when he becomes lost in the forest during a hunt. In this case, King Gauti loses not only his way, but also his spear and all of his clothes except for his underwear.<sup>7</sup> Eventually he

<sup>6</sup> Neri turns his chair away from the sight of the missing shield on his wall, just as Skafnörtungr pulls his hood over his eyes to avoid watching Gauti eat his food. See Milroy (1966:214) for an interpretation of Skafnörtungr's action as originally to ward off the evil eye, a motif which „is found in a more or less clear form in Celtic stories of [this] type“.

<sup>7</sup> See Milroy (1966:213–4) and the literature he cites for the age and extent in folklore and medieval romance of this *topos*. If we attempt to take this episode seriously, we would read the forest as the place outside civilization, opposed to the court, and possibly as the other-world or psychic landscape of the hero. The loss of King Gauti's clothes, weapon, horse, hawk, and hounds — the identifying signs of his status — suggest that his identity is now lost or without meaning, and that if he emerges from the forest, it will be as a new or reborn man, changed in some way by his adventure. But such a reading is not validated, for Gauti emerges unchanged and unchallenged, having encountered no monsters from his subconscious, but only a family of foolish peasants.



makes his way to the house of a family of foolish pagan peasants, and the subsequent events form an inversion of „The Man Who Got a Night's Lodging“. Aarne and Thompson (1961) say:

The rascal feigns deafness and eats the best food. He accepts hospitality before it is offered. He takes the host's horse out of the stable and puts his own in. He is to pay for his lodging with a goatskin; he takes one of the host's own goats. At table they put poor food before him but he continues to get the best. At night he manages to sleep with the wife or daughter. When the woman puts out food for her husband in the night he gets it himself. He makes the women believe that the man knows all about them, and they confess their misdeeds. The host becomes angry and is going to kill the rascal's horse; he kills his own instead.

The inversion is an ethical one that leaves the structure of the tale intact. In contrast to the folktale's rascally, selfserving hero and the more or less honest host whom he shamelessly takes advantage of, King Gauti is „vitr maðr ok vel stilltr, mildr ok máldjarfr“<sup>8</sup> (Gautreks saga:1), while the host is the miserly peasant Skafnörtungr. Gauti does accept hospitality before it is offered, helps himself to food unasked, and sleeps with his host's daughter, but he does nothing to trick or threaten him. Instead it is the peasant's own cowardly, stingy nature that creates the havoc surrounding Gauti's visit. The saga-author has added the reek of folk humor to the story in order to emphasize the destructiveness of the lack of charity, as in the episode of the foolish servant who kills the dog for „betraying“ the location of the house to a stranger (Gautreks saga:3), and Skafnörtungr's response to Gauti's reasonable request for a pair of shoes: he pulls out the laces before he gives the shoes to the king. The saga-author draws the moral of this incident in a verse which Gauti utters (Gautreks saga:6):

Skúa tvá,  
er mér Skafnörtungr gaf,  
þvengjum er hann þá nam;  
ills manns  
kveð ek aldri verða  
grandalausar gjafir.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> „A wise man and good-tempered, generous and free-spoken“.

<sup>9</sup> „Two shoes Skinflint gave me, which he deprived of laces; I say there will never be guileless gifts from an evil man.“

At the folktale's climax, the angry host attempts to get back at the hero, but his vengeance goes astray and he finds that he has killed his own horse instead of his unwelcome guest's. In the inverse move in *Gautreks saga*, the destructive impulse is turned on itself — the miser's reaction to Gauti's visit is not to kill the guest, but to commit suicide, taking his wife and servant with him. As we shall see, the ultimate meaning of the narrative is not that of the corresponding tale-type, which, as James Milroy (1966:212–215) has argued, reflects a conception story — the host is hostile to the visitor because it has been predicted that his daughter will give birth to a hero who will kill his grandfather.<sup>10</sup>

The saga continues in the folktale-mode, but without the framework of a complete tale-type. Instead, the saga-author explores the further destructive effects of avarice through the misadventures of *Skafnörtungr's* sons, who are fools as well as misers. The series of motifs includes that of the fools who push their parents over a cliff as a favor to them, the fool who believes that he has impregnated his sister by touching her cheek, the fool who believes that snails have destroyed his gold, the fool who kills himself because a sparrow has eaten one grain from his cornfield, and the fool who kills himself because his ox has been killed.<sup>11</sup> Although the familiar folktale triad appears in the number of brothers and sisters, there is no corresponding tripartite structure, nor do the folktale motifs occur in the typical series of three. For example, we would expect the sequential deaths of the brothers after a foolish action by each, but in fact one of them is persuaded not to kill himself after his foolish action, and it takes a second foolish action to propel him over *Ætternisstapi*. This lack of discernable pattern gives the impression of incidents piled on top of one another (rather like the bodies which must be accumulating under the cliff), suggesting that the author was imitating folktales here, rather than adapting pre-existing ones.

The lack of common sense or intelligence that the fools display is typified by their bizarre religious beliefs, particularly in their worship of Óðinn. Again, the depiction seems to be satirical, since Óðinn is traditionally the god of battle and poetry and the ancestor of royal houses, and hence utterly inap-

<sup>10</sup> See Weber (1986) for an exposition of this development in reception-theoretic terms. Here I am describing the response of the reader to the text, rather than the reception of the shorter *Gautreks saga* by its later redactor.

<sup>11</sup> Boberg (1966) classifies these under J1744 (Ignorance of marriage relations), J1919.7 (Absurd disregard of facts), J1810 (Physical phenomenon misunderstood), J2119.3 (Absurd shortsightedness), and J2518.1–2 (Foolish extremes). Stith Thompson (1957) provides non-Scandinavian analogues under J1744, J1919, and J2119.



propriate as the family deity of preternaturally stupid peasants.<sup>12</sup> It is a nice touch to have the master of the house take his servant to Vallhalla with him because „Óðinn mun eigi ganga í mót þrælum, nema hann sé í [Skafnörtungs] föruneysi“<sup>13</sup> (Gautreks saga:5). According to the traditional account of Vallhalla, the stingy peasant master would hardly qualify as a companion for heroes like Sigurðr and Helgi!<sup>14</sup> The debased nature of the peasants' Óðinn-worship also shows itself in their sacrificial practices. An evidently traditional part of Óðinn-worship is here taken to absurd extremes, becoming literally the self-sacrifice of the faithful.

For the second narrative strand of Gautreks saga, the author shifts from the obscure to the well-known; he retells the legend of the giant-like Starkaðr. The protege of Óðinn, Starkaðr incurs the wrath of Þórr, who counters every gift of Óðinn's with a parallel curse. These take effect beginning with Starkaðr's treacherous sacrifice of his lord to Óðinn and continue throughout his triple lifespan. However, the narrative focusses on the early part of Starkaðr's life; the infamous betrayal is one of the last events described. The narrative begins, as does the story of Gautrekr, with an account of the begetting of the hero. The next two chapters are concerned with the feud between King Víkarr and the three grandsons of Friðþjófr. The narrative ends with the determination of Starkaðr's fate by the gods, the sacrifice of Víkarr, and quotations from the poem *Víkarbálkr* in which Starkaðr relates the trials he has had to endure.

The story of Starkaðr contrasts vividly with the story of the begetting of Gautrekr. The scene is Norway, rather than Sweden, the characters are gods, kings, and heroes, rather than peasants and fools, the action is military, rather than agrarian, the „source-style“ is that of legend, rather than folktale, the tone serious, rather than satiric. Yet these narrative strands are not unrelated. Both begin with the unusual begetting of the protagonist, contain a triad of subsidiary characters (the sons of Skafnörtungr, the grandsons of Friðþjófr), a series of similar events connected with the triad (foolish misunderstandings and battles), and end with a sacrificial gesture (the slaying of the ox with a

<sup>12</sup> See Milroy (1966:206–212) for further reasons not to interpret this episode as an authentic description of pagan practice, though I disagree with his analysis of its function as authenticating. Ellis Davidson (1943:74) describes it as „a parody or misunderstood echo of the tradition of dying by fire [associated with an Óðinn cult]“.

<sup>13</sup> „Óðinn would not accept the slave unless he were in Skinflint's company.“

<sup>14</sup> Harris (1986:202) refers to *Völsa þátrr* as „wonderful satire“ and states, „In general the treatment of heathenism [in the *þættir*] is humorous“.

spear and the sacrifice of the king). Both associate the worship of Óðinn — particularly the practice of sacrificing to him — with negatives: the foolishness and death of the peasants and the bad luck and suffering of Starkaðr.

Unlike Saxo Grammaticus, the narrator of *Gautreks saga* does not comment on Starkaðr's character, so we have no overt indication of the reason why this legend is included in the saga. However, the elements that appear to have been added to the story provide a clue. These are Starkaðr's genealogy, the account of his birth, the emphasis on the earlier part of his life, when he fought with King Víkarr against the grandsons of Friðþjófr, and on the consequences of his betrayal of the king.<sup>15</sup> Evidently the saga-author wanted to provide a basis for comparing him with Gautrekr on one hand and with Refr on the other. Moreover, the reader is led to pay particular attention to Starkaðr's position with respect to King Víkarr (*Gautreks saga*:28):

Starkaðr var mest metinn af öllum [köppum Víkars] ok kærast konungi, þar hann var öndvegismaðr hans ok ráðgjafi ok landvarnarmaðr. Hann þá margar gjafir af konungi.<sup>16</sup>

These special emphases, additions, and selections constitute such an integral part of the saga's meaning that most probably this version of the Starkaðr legend was consciously and deliberately written for inclusion in *Gautreks saga*. That meaning cannot be fully understood without having first examined the story of Refr, so we will proceed on to it.

The story of Gift-Refr is a humorous parallel to *Auðunar þáttir vestfirzka*, one of the finest *Íslendinga þættir* (see Boyer 1979).<sup>17</sup> It seems likely that *Auðunar þáttir* is not just an analogue, but is actually the source for this story.<sup>18</sup> In *Gautreks saga*, Refr gives Earl Neri his father's prized ox. Neri rewards him with a whetstone and some advice, which results in the par-

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Hermann Schneider (1933:147–50), who claims that the account of Starkaðr's youth was not derived from *Víkarsbálkr* (as some of the other material in *Gautreks saga* was), but was added by the saga-author. (He goes on to postulate a \*Starkaðar saga which contained this information and served as the source for *Ynglinga saga*, *Skjöldunga saga*, *Hervarar saga*, and *Gautreks saga*, but his hypothesis is not currently accepted.)

<sup>16</sup> „Starkaðr was the most valued of all [Víkarr's champions], and dearest to the king; he sat in the seat of honor across from him, and was his advisor and the defender of the land. He accepted many gifts from the king.“

<sup>17</sup> For the discussion of the *Íslendinga þættir*, see Harris (1972, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> For the date of *Auðunar þáttir* to 1200–1230, see de Vries (1956:338). *Auðunar þáttir* is found in *Vestfirðinga sögur* (1943), *Íslendinga þættir* (1935), etc. It has been translated by Hermann Pálsson, Gwyn Jones, Pardee Lowe, and Alan Boucher.



laying of the worthless return-gift into gifts of greater and greater value during Refr's visits to various men of power. With Neri's help, Refr eventually wins the daughter of King Gautrekr and the title of earl. The similarities to Auðunar þáttir are as follows: a farmer's simple son takes a valuable animal as a gift to a wise and powerful man. Through the manipulation of the generosity of kings, the gift-giver is generously rewarded and, now known as a man of luck („gæfumaðr“), he lives happily for the rest of his days. Auðun's two gift-giving journeys (to Sveinn of Denmark and Haraldr of Norway) are expanded into five in the story of Refr, as he goes first to the Norwegian earl Neri, then the Swedish king Gautrekr, the English king Ælla, the Danish king Hrólfr kraki, and finally to the sea-king Óláfr, but like Auðunar þáttir, the story of Refr demonstrates the generosity of the Danish and Norwegian courts, to the slight disadvantage of the Norwegian king.<sup>19</sup>

The parallels are at first glance not exact; the story of Refr emphasizes in particular the generosity of the Swedish king Gautrekr, and Auðunar þáttir is strongly colored by Christianity in a way that a narrative set in pagan times cannot be, at least not on the surface. Auðun's giving all he owns to buy the polar bear echoes the Biblical parable of the merchant who sold all he had in order to buy a pearl of great price (Mt. 13:45–6), while his generosity in giving the bear away and making a pilgrimage to Rome recalls the command of Christ to the rich young man: „If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me“ (Mt. 19:21).<sup>20</sup> Although Auðun's ostensible goal is the Danish court, it is in fact his pilgrimage to Rome that occupies the exact center of the chiastically structured narrative. His material gifts become gifts of the spirit; he is moved not by what Joseph Harris (1976:7, 15) has called the „humanistic“ value of a „general ethical principle ... unromantically conceived, that of gift-giving“, but by charity. As Peter Hallberg (1973, 1975) and Hermann Pálsson (1975) have established, the Old Norse words for „good luck“ or „good fortune“ (*gæfa*, *gipta*, *hamingja*) by the thirteenth century were harmonized with the Latin complex of words and notions relating to grace, so

<sup>19</sup> In Auðunar þáttir, King Haraldr gives „good gifts“ to Auðun only after King Sveinn has proved himself remarkably munificent and Auðun has shown his own integrity by giving Haraldr the gold ring. In Refs þáttir, the Norwegian earl Neri is a legendary miser, and rewards Refr only with lodging and advice.

<sup>20</sup> In some respects Auðun's situation is the reverse of the rich young man's, in that the rich young man gives all he has to the poor, while Auðun (never rich and now reduced to begging) gives all he has to the king, but the parallel acts of giving seem to have equivalent spiritual weight.



that at the end of the *þáttir*, when Auðun is described as „inn mesti gæfu-maðr“, I believe we can understand this in the spiritual sense. Despite Refr's situation in pre-Christian Scandinavia, he, too, is described as having „gæfa“ (Gautreks saga:45). What is more, this quality of his is mentioned precisely in opposition not to some kind of secular bad luck, but to the specifically evil magic and *tröllskapr* of the sea king's counselor Refnefr, an *illmenni* who rejects Refr's gifts, throwing them into the sea. Significantly, the shadow of Óðinn is completely absent from the story of Refr. His is a tale of good luck and wisdom, rather than of bad luck and foolishness; it implicitly contrasts the fruitful exchange of gifts with the barren sacrifices of the other stories.

The meaning of Gautreks saga is constructed by the reader very much in retrospect. Not until the end of the saga can its elements be added up and understood as a whole. Foolish, miserly, Óðinn-worshipping peasants bring about their own destruction after an encounter with a generous king; an immensely strong, intelligent, generous, unflinching, and loyal warrior brings about the death of his equally unflinching and generous king and foster-brother because of Óðinn's demands; finally, a farmer's son makes a generous gift to a clever man and eventually wins land and a princess from a generous king — none of these worship Óðinn, and all come to a happy end. Not until the reader has noticed the parallels between the story of Refr and Auðunar þáttir can the pro-generosity and anti-Odinic themes of the saga be connected, for Auðunar þáttir, a narrative that explicitly associates Christianity with the generosity of kings and the good luck of a farmer's son, provides the link missing in Gautreks saga: the name of the generosity that brings grace is charity.

That this is indeed a Christian reinterpretation of the traditional qualities that made a king popular is obscured by Gautreks saga's pre-Christian setting, but it is much clearer in the Flateyjarbók saga of St Óláfr. There we find a curious pair of *þættir*, Styrbjarnar þáttir Svíakappa and Hróa þáttir, which closely resembles Gautreks saga in its combination of themes.<sup>21</sup> The first *þáttir* tells of an ill-fated Swedish champion defeated by the enmity between Þórr and Óðinn, and the second tells of a Danish merchant who, supported by the good luck of King Sveinn Haraldsson, out-tricks the Swedes who try to cheat him of his cargo and returns to Denmark with many treasures for the king. Similarly, the Flateyjarbók version of Fóstbræðra saga contrasts Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld's treatment at the hands of the miserly King Knútr

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed readings of these texts, see Rowe (1998).

with his reception by St Óláfr, who judges that the poet will not turn out to be an „ógæfumaðr“ after all (Óláfs saga hins helga, ch. 150). Even the Flateyjarbók characterization of Haraldr Fairhair at the beginning of Óláfs saga Haraldssonar as a generous king of great good luck, in contrast to the overbearing tyrant that he is at the beginning of Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, is meant to be seen as prefiguring the charity and grace of his descendant St Óláfr.<sup>22</sup>

This reinterpretation's political value for the monarchy is two-fold. On one hand, this depiction of the Norwegian king serves as „evidence“ that the power of the monarchy is independent of that of the church, for the signs of God's favor appear to be inherent in the king and not conferred by consecration. On the other hand, the ability of the king to confer good luck on his men suggests that salvation is found through political loyalty, not through spiritual devotion. If Gautreks saga was indeed written during the late-thirteenth century *staðamál*, the conflict between the Icelandic bishops and the lay chieftains over the ownership of the private churches, I for one would not be surprised if its hint of „salvation outside the church“ not only served the monarchist ideology, but also had a special appeal to those chieftains who had been impoverished by the loss of their churches or who had been excommunicated for resisting their seizure by the bishops.

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<sup>22</sup> Compare chs. 1–12 and 450–469 of Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, cf. Sigurður Nordal (1944), my own analysis of Flateyjarbók has Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar ending with ch. 449 and Óláfs saga Haraldssonar beginning with ch. 450, which returns to the beginning of the Norwegian royal dynasty with Hálfðanar þáttur svarta and looks forward to the reign of St. Óláfr, not Óláfr Tryggvason.



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### EFNISÁGRIP

Í grein þessari er fyrst rakið að fræðimenn hafi álitnið Gautreks sögu vera samansetta af þremur sjálfstæðum þáttum: Sá fyrsti segir frá getnaði Gautreks, annar greinir frá Starkaði og loks sá þriðji sem fjallar um Ref. Höfundur er þeirrar skoðunar að þessir þættir séu samtvinnaðir og tengist efnislega hver öðrum, þar sem þeir fjalli allir um skyld hugtök og hugmyndafræði. Meginkjarni frásagnanna þriggja snýst að hyggju höfundar um að sýna bestu hliðar veraldlegs valds, menn geti öðlast sálarheill án þess að vera seldir undir ok kirkjunnar manna. Slík skoðun gat samrýmst vel áhugamálum íslenskra höfðingja á síðari helmingi 13. aldar þegar þeir allmargir áttu í stríði við biskupana um ættaróðil sín, staðina.

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