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## “INN HEILAGI ÓLÁFR KONUNGR OK INN HÁLEITI HALLVARÐR, FRÆNDI HANS”

*Óláfr helgi and genealogies of saints in  
Norway, Iceland, and Orkney*

### Introduction

Medieval sagas and historical writing from the Norse world are deeply concerned with family relationships. Genealogies often introduce a saga, situating its characters in the wider environment of local and regional families and dynasties.<sup>1</sup> But genealogies also tend to structure the text, particularly of longer sagas, in that one generation is shown to follow another in a linear fashion, framing the narrative structure of the text.<sup>2</sup> This also seems to be the case for European medieval historical writing, where genealogy is seen as a “perceptual grid” and a narrative frame for organising historical material.<sup>3</sup>

Ben Guy has recently argued that this understanding of genealogy has tended to become rather too loosely applied as a “modern metaphor for the linear passing of generations” in any context, even if these generations have nothing to do with family relationships.<sup>4</sup> It may be necessary, therefore, to emphasise that the saintly genealogies considered in the present article are characterised as such because they concern themselves

- 1 Theodore M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 6–11, 26–29; Kathryn Hume, “Beginnings and Endings in the Icelandic Family Sagas,” *Modern Language Review* 68 (1973): 593–606.
- 2 Margaret Clunies Ross, “The Development of Old Norse Textual Worlds: Genealogical Structure as a Principle of Literary Organisation in Early Iceland,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 92 (1993): 372–85.
- 3 Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 47.
- 4 Ben Guy, “Origin Legends and Genealogy,” *Origin Legends in Early Medieval Western Europe*, eds. Lindy Brady and Patrick Walden (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 365.

with family relationships. This does not mean that the texts in which they are contained cannot also be organised within a genealogical narrative framework, but my concern is not primarily such narrative organisation but rather the significance and purpose of the information provided about family relationships specifically, whether they are spread out across a text or condensed into lists of consecutive generations.

It should also be noted that the significance of genealogies is not restricted to such expositional and organisational purposes. Úlfar Bragason has argued that genealogies should rather be seen as “linked to the works’ origin and nature.”<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, Gro Steinsland has argued that genealogy can reveal ideology “the more artificially construed it is.”<sup>6</sup> While this argument raises an important point, Steinsland nonetheless overlooks the fact that all genealogies are, in one way or another, artificially construed, not just as the written representation of families in narratives or lists but also in the sense that such representations can never contain an entirely exhaustive account of ancestors and relatives; that was rarely the purpose of medieval genealogy. Instead, scope and selection of generations in lineages are limited and framed by the authors’ genealogical knowledge, textual intentions, and historical contexts. This may enable us to use genealogies as identifying fingerprints for the texts in which they are contained: their unique structures and composition can help us better understand the origin and meaning of the text. Inclusions or elisions of ancestors, relatives, and descendants may reveal the text’s intended audience and the scope of its author’s historical knowledge and imagination, as well as with whom a family or dynasty sought to identify.

Saintly genealogies abound in medieval sources from the Norse world but have received comparatively little attention from modern scholars. “Pagan genealogies,” on the other hand, have been thoroughly studied. It seems to be the scholarly consensus that pagan genealogical motifs, whether they were pagan survivals or later constructions, were an influ-

5 Úlfar Bragason, “The Politics of Genealogies in Sturlunga Saga,” *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350: Contact, Conflict and Coexistence*, eds. Jonathan Adams and Katherine Holman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 310.

6 Gro Steinsland, “Origin Myths and Rulership. From the Viking Age Ruler to the Ruler of Medieval Historiography: Continuity, Transformations, and Innovation,” *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*, eds. Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal, and Ian Beuermann (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 10.

ential component of Scandinavian historical texts and secular prestige and legitimacy in the Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup> A recent scholarly trend has emphasised the *interpretatio Christiana* in medieval representations of pagan genealogical material, demonstrating how it was sometimes imbued with profound moral significance; in particular, it is negative if not demonological motifs that have attracted scholarly attention.<sup>8</sup> This invites a closer look at those lineages that are charged with the inverse moral value: the genealogies being defined by the presence of one or more Christian saints.

It is important to distinguish between two trends in the development of saintly genealogies. One trend established a genealogical relationship, directly or indirectly, between saints, on the one hand, and magnates, pretenders, or family groups, on the other.<sup>9</sup> In Sweden, Denmark, and Orkney, kinship with dynastic saints Knútr (r. 1080–86), Eiríkr (r. 1150–60) and Magnús Erlendsson (d. 1116/17) was used to support the political

- 7 A selection of studies on the function of pagan myths and genealogies includes Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, 2 vols. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994–98); Anthony Faulkes, “Descent from the Gods,” *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11 (1978–79): 92–125; Heinz Klingenberg, “Odin und die Seinen. Altisländischer Gelehrter Urgeschichte anderer Teil,” *alvismál* 2 (1993): 31–80; Claus Krag, *Ynglingatal og Ynglingesaga: en studie i historiske kilder* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1991); John McKinnell, “Why Did Christians Continue to Find Pagan Myths Useful,” *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, eds. Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjødt, and Rasmus Tranum Kristenesen (Turnhout: Brepols 2007) 33–52; Else Mundal, “Kva funksjon har forteljninga om den mytiske fortida hjå Saxo og Snorre?” *Saxo & Snorre*, eds. Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, Karsten Friis-Jensen and Else Mundal (København: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2010); Gro Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi: en analyse av hierogamimyten i Skírnismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal og Hyndluljóð* (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991); Kevin Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).
- 8 Takahiro Narikawa, “Marriage between Harald Fairhair and Snæfriðr, and Their Offspring: Mythological Foundation of the Norwegian Medieval Dynasty?” *Balto-Scandia: Reports of Balto-Scandinavian Studies in Japan, Extra Edition* (2011): 111–36; Peter Sigurdson Lunga, *The Context Purpose and Dissemination of Legendary Genealogies in Northern England and Iceland c. 1120 – c. 1251*, PhD thesis (University of Cambridge, 2018), 211–16; Annette Lassen, *Odin’s Ways: A Guide to the Pagan God in the Medieval Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 101, 158–61.
- 9 Gábor Klaniczay, “From Sacral Kingship to Self-Representation: Hungarian and European Royal Saints,” *The Uses of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, trans. Susan Singermann, ed. Karen Margolis (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 86; Caitlin Ellis, “The Development of the Cult of Magnús: The Interplay between Saints, Bishops and Earls in Orkney,” *The Cult of Saints in Nidaros Archbishopric: Manuscripts, Miracles, Objects*, eds. Ragnhild M. Bø and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 115.

ambitions of specific branches of the local royal or comital dynasty to the exclusion of others.<sup>10</sup> In Norway, on the other hand, King Óláfr Haraldsson (r. 1015–28) was rather used to extinguish the traditional Danish claims to the kingdom of Norway or to parts thereof, legitimising the claims of both his son, King Magnús góði (r. 1035–47), who was installed as king in opposition to the deeply unpopular Danish ruler of Norway, Sveinn Knúttsson (r. 1030–35), and his English mother, Alfifa.<sup>11</sup> Óláfr helgi was also seemingly a component in the legitimisation of the power of his half-brother Haraldr harðráði (r. 1046–66), who patronised his brother's cult and even made use of the relationship during his service in the Byzantine empire.<sup>12</sup> Traditions are also extant that append a variety of saints to the genealogies of Icelandic families. The indigenous Icelandic bishop saints Jón Ögmundsson (d. 1121) and Þorlákr Þórhallsson (d. 1193) appear most frequently as relatives of powerful Icelandic families in *Landnámabók* and the *Íslendingasögur*, but non-Icelandic saints are also occasionally included in genealogies.<sup>13</sup> Elite families in Iceland also on occasion gave their children “ecclesiastical” names of both foreign and local saints.<sup>14</sup>

Another trend, which cannot be entirely disconnected from the first, is the establishment of relationships between individual saints, seemingly without the intention to legitimise any of the related royal or magnate families. Often saints with limited local or regional significance are connected

10 Ian Beuermann, “No Soil for Saints: Why Was There No Native Royal Martyr in Man and the Isles?” *Celtic-Norse Relationships in the Irish Sea in the Middle Ages 800–1200*, eds. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Timothy Bolton (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 86.

11 Erich Hoffmann, *Die heiligen Könige bei den Angelsachsen und den skandinavischen Volkern. Königsheiliger und Königshaus* (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1975) 210–11; Halvdan Koht, “Noreg eit len av St Olav,” (*Norsk*) *Historisk Tidsskrift* 30 (1934–36), 104–105.

12 Ellis, “The Development of the Cult of Magnús,” 116; Gustav Storm, “Haarald Haardraade og væringene i de græske keiseres tjeneste,” (*Norsk*) *Historisk Tidsskrift* (1884): 359–61 (354–86); Kekaumenos, *Strategicon*, ed. Maria Dora Spadaro, *Raccomandazioni e consigli di un galantuomo: Strategikon, Cecaumeno* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 1998), 7; Steffen Hope, “Byzantine History in the Legend of Saint Olaf of Norway, c. 1150–c. 1230,” *Byzantine and Medieval History as Represented in Hagiography*, ed. Anna Lampadaridi, Vincent Déroche, and Christian Høgel (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2022), 34–35.

13 For genealogies of St Þorlákr, see *Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, *Íslenzk fornrit I* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1986), 214–16, 322–23, 333, 340–42 and 364. St Jón is mentioned in *Landnámabók*, 51–52, 316–18, 340–42 and 367.

14 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, “Nafngiftir Oddaverja,” *Bidrag til nordisk filologi tillagnade Emil Olson den 9 juni 1936* (Lund: Gleerup, 1936), 192.

to the far more significant royal martyr, king Óláfr helgi. The purpose is likely to have been similar to genealogies of the first trend: to increase the prestige and legitimacy of a claim, whether it was to sainthood or secular power, by letting the kinship with Óláfr helgi illuminate the family and person in question.

This article will consider the function of Óláfr helgi in the genealogies of Nordic saints more closely. His presence, genealogical position, or indeed absence in these texts may be revealing of strategies for promoting new saints locally and tell us something about how Óláfr was perceived by the ecclesiastical communities in Norway, Orkney, and Iceland. The liturgical and hagiographical nature of some of these texts demonstrates how the interest in royal genealogies even permeated the ecclesiastical sphere. In the following I will consider genealogies that connect Óláfr genealogically to St Hallvarðr Vébjarnarson (d. c. 1043) and the Orcadian jarl, St Magnús Erlendsson.

## King Óláfr’s Kinsman: Hallvarðr Vébjarnarson

Hallvarðr Vébjarnarson (d. 1043) was a locally venerated saint from eastern Norway whose background as a layman and merchant stands out as relatively humble compared to other saints in the eastern and northern periphery of Christian Europe.<sup>15</sup> The relics of St Hallvarðr must have been translated from Lier to the shrine at St Hallvarðr’s church in Oslo at some point before 1137, although construction of the church itself began around 1100/20.<sup>16</sup> Yet, it has been claimed that the Norwegian royal dynasty promoted his cult at an even earlier stage. A hypothesis frequently presented as fact is that King Haraldr harðráði translated Hallvarðr’s relics from Lier to the Church of St Mary in Oslo around 1053.<sup>17</sup> But there is little evidence that supports such claims, which seem to build, at least

15 Haki Antonsson, “The Canonization Accounts of St Stephen of Hungary, St Thorlak of Skálholt, and St Cnut of Odense: A Comparative Reading,” *The Cult of Saints and Legitimization of Elite Power in East Central and Northern Europe up to 1300*, eds. Grzegorz Pac, Steffen Hope, and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (Turnhout: Brepols 2024), 292.

16 Áslaug Ommundsen, “The Cult of Saints in Norway before 1200,” *Saints and their Lives on the Periphery: Venerations of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe*, eds. Haki Antonsson and Ildar H. Garipzanov (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 82.

17 Ole Rikard Høisæther, *Sankt Hallvard: Helgen og Symbol* (Oslo: Orfeus Publishing, 2020), 135.

partly, on an assumption accepted by most modern scholars that Hallvarðr was a kinsman of Óláfr helgi and the Norwegian royal dynasty.<sup>18</sup> In the following, I will analyse the textual tradition of St Hallvarðr with special attention to genealogical information and the evidence for royal involvement in the promotion of his cult.

The cult of St Hallvarðr is first mentioned in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesie Pontificum* (c. 1075/76), word of which may have reached Adam from one of his informants, King Sveinn Ástríðarson of Denmark (r. 1047–1076).<sup>19</sup> Hagiographic material for St Hallvarðr is relatively fragmented and includes versions of a Latin *Legenda* (the so-called *Acta Sancti Halvardi* from around 1150x1200),<sup>20</sup> and approximately twenty-five lines of an Old Norse, fourteenth-century *Hallvarðs saga*. Both the Latin and Old Norse tradition provide Hallvarðr with a genealogy that connect him to Óláfr helgi in fairly similar ways. A third tradition, attested in *Óláfs saga hins helga* (the so-called the *Legendary Saga* from c. 1225–1250) also connects Hallvarðr to the two saints genealogically.<sup>21</sup>

- 18 Ommundsen, "The Cult of Saints in Norway before 1200," 89; Olav Tveito, "St. Hallvard – helgenen fra Husby: Noen synspunkter på legendens proveniens og kultens særpreg," (*Norsk*) *Historisk Tidsskrift* 85 (2006): 19; Haki Antonsson, "The Canonization Accounts," 292.
- 19 Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, ed. Bernhard Schmeidler, MGH SS rer. Germ. 2 (Hannover and Leipzig: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1917), 199.
- 20 Áslaug Ommundsen, "A Text in Flux: St. Hallvard's Legend and Its Redactions," *Along the Oral-Written Continuum*, ed. Slavica Rekovic (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 273; Arnvéd Nedkvitne and Per G. Norseng, *Middelalderbyen ved Bjørvika: Oslo 1000–1536* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2000), 50.
- 21 *Legendarisk Olavssaga etter Uppsala universitetsbiblioteks Delagardieska samlingen nr. 8 II*, ed. Anne Holtsmark (Oslo: Selskapet til utgivelse av gamle norske håndskrifter, 1956), 8–9; Sverre Bagge, "Warrior, King, and Saint: The Medieval Histories about St. Óláfr Haraldsson," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 109, no. 3 (2010): 285.

<p><i>Acta Sancti Halvardi</i> (possibly 1150/1200)<sup>22</sup></p>	<p><i>The Legendary Saga of King Óláfr</i> (c. 1225–1250), possibly based on the <i>Oldest Saga</i> (c. 1200)<sup>23</sup></p>	<p><i>Hallvarðs saga</i> (fourteenth century)<sup>24</sup></p>
<p>Sanctus Haluardus ex nobilioribus natalibus claruit, cuius pater Vebiorn, mater vero Thorni dicebatur. Cuius uidelicet Thorni mater, ut fertur, fuit filia Guthbrandi comitis. Qui Guthbrandus genuit etiam Ostam, sancti Olauī matrem.</p>	<p>Son Harallz hins harfagra var Biorn kaupmaðr, faðer Guðroðar faður Harallz hins grænka, faður Olaff hins hælga. Moðer Olafs hins hælga var Asta dotter Guðbranz kulu. Systir hæn-nar var Ulvilldr moðer hins hælga Hallvarðz.</p>	<p>Madr er nefndr Vebiorn, hann bio i Hlidum a Vestfold i Vik austr a bæ þeim, er heitir Husabær. Hann atti konu þa er Þorný het. Seiga sumir menn hana verit hafa dottur, enn sumir dotturdottur Guðbrandz kulu hersis a Upplondum. Hann var fadir Astu modur ens helga Olafs konungs ok Haralldz konungs Sigurdarsonar. Þau Vebiorn attu tvo sono, het annar Hallvardr, enn annar Ormr.</p>
<p>Saint Hallvarðr was famous for his noble birth. It is said that his father was called Vébjörn and his mother Þorný. The mother of this Þorný was as is related, daughter of Guðbrandr hersir. This Guðbrandr begot Ásta, mother of St Óláfr.</p>	<p>Son of Haraldr hárfagri was Björn kaupmaðr, father of Guðrøðr, father of Haraldr grenski, father of St Óláfr. Mother of St Óláfr was Ásta, daughter of Guðbrandr kúla. Her sister was Úlfhildr, mother of St Hallvarðr.</p>	<p>A man was called Vébjörn, who lived in Vestfold in Vik on that farm east in Lier which is called Husaby. He had a wife who was called Þorný. Some men say that she was the daughter, and some say the grandchild of Guðbrandr kúla, hersir in Uppland. He was the father of Ásta, mother of King Óláfr helgi, and of King Haraldr Sigurdarson. They, Vébjörn [and Þorný] had two sons. One was called Hallvarðr and the other Ormr.</p>

22 Translations are mine unless otherwise noted. *Latinske tekster i Norge mellom 1152 og 1230 – En tekstkritisk samling med Norske Paralleloversettelse*, ed. and trans. Egil Kraggerud, 2 vols. (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2023), 1: 110.

23 *Olafs saga hins helga – Efter pergamenthaandskrift i Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, Delagardieske samling nr. 8 II*, ed. Oscar Albert Johnsen (Kristiania [Oslo]: Den Norske Historiske Kildeskriiftkommission, 1922), 1.

24 *Heilagra Manna Sögur Fortællinger og legender om hellige mænd og kvinder efter gamle Haandskrifter*, ed. C. R. Unger, 2 vols. (Christiania [Oslo]: B. M. Bentzen, 1877), 1: 396.



Both *Acta* and *Hallvarðs saga* mention Hallvarðr's father Vébjörn and mother Þorny, who in turn is either daughter or granddaughter of the east-Norwegian magnate Guðbrandr kúla, who died in the late 900s. Unlike the *Legenda*, however, the saga fragment recognises the fact that there are seemingly diverging genealogical traditions that mention Þorny, Hallvarðr's mother, as either the daughter or the granddaughter of Guðbrandr. In *The Legendary Saga of King Óláfr*, Hallvarðr's mother is called Úlfhildr rather than Þorny.

It is of course possible that Óláfr and Hallvarðr were related, but such genealogical variation is good reason to be critical of the claim.<sup>25</sup> That their earliest common ancestor, Guðbrandr kúla is supposed to have died around 200 years before the genealogies were first recorded in writing provides further grounds for scepticism. It should be noted, however, that divergences such as those in the genealogies of Hallvarðr, which largely agree on substance (a matrilineal relationship between the two saints) but disagree on the details (the names and number of generations between Hallvarðr and Guðbrandr kúla), suggest the existence of an oral culture in which precisely such details are likely to alter during various stages of transmission.<sup>26</sup> That the tradition was circulating orally, however, does not necessarily confirm its veracity, but it does suggest that the claim must have come into existence at a time sufficiently distant from the moment of committing the genealogy to writing for it to undergo alteration and lapses of memory. An absolute *terminus ante quem* for the divergence in the oral versions of the claim can perhaps be determined to around 1200, when two mutually incompatible versions of the genealogy are likely to have existed in the *Oldest Saga of Óláfr* (c. 1200), which was the source of the *Legendary Saga*, and in Hallvarðr's Latin *Acta*. Therefore, the claim itself most likely dates before 1200. But how old was it?

Among the modern historians who have accepted the claim that Hallvarðr was related to Óláfr some have conjectured that the relationship was already known in the mid-eleventh century and encouraged royal involvement in the promotion of the cult and in the translation of Hallvarðr's relics to Oslo. Kraggerud has assumed that it was Óláfr helgi's son Magnús

25 Fredrik Paasche, "St. Hallvard," *St. Hallvard* 2 (1916): 82.

26 Gisli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, trans. Nicholas Jones (Cambridge, MA: Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, 2004), 30.



góði who initiated the translation of his kinsman Hallvarðr’s relics from Lier soon after the king’s campaign against the Wends in 1043.<sup>27</sup> P. A. Munch, on the other hand, has suggested that the conjectured translation from Lier to St Mary’s Church in Oslo took place under Haraldr harðráði, who was traditionally considered the founder of Oslo.<sup>28</sup> But Haraldr’s “founding” may in fact have amounted only to the construction of churches and a royal estate, as the settlement has been shown to be approximately fifty years older than Munch assumed.<sup>29</sup> Tveito has theorised that Grímkell (d. 1047), Óláfr helgi’s court bishop [*hirðbiskup*], who was instrumental in canonising Óláfr, also promoted Hallvarðr’s cult in eastern Norway to consolidate the Christian conversion by presenting Hallvarðr as a royal kinsman and a sort of eastern “mini-Óláfr”.<sup>30</sup>

While the cult is likely to have gained popular traction at an early stage, it is difficult to reconcile the hypothesis of an early claim to kinship with Óláfr with the earliest description of the cult from Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta*. In his brief account, he makes no reference to the alleged family relationship between the two saints. And even if absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, I believe it is reasonable to expect Adam to have mentioned the alleged relationship, since Adam held Óláfr helgi in very high regard.<sup>31</sup> It is telling that by the 1070s, Hallvarðr’s cult was famous enough for a German cleric such as Adam to make note of it, but that it still had no connection to Óláfr helgi. It may perhaps be argued that Adam’s most likely informant on this topic, King Sveinn Ástríðarson of Denmark – who had been involved in an enduring conflict with Óláfr helgi’s successors, the kings Magnús góði and Haraldr harðráði – would have left out a potentially anti-Danish legitimising element in his account of the cult: the kinship between Hallvarðr and the Norwegian royal dynasty. But if the cult was set up by King Haraldr harðráði as a counterweight to the traditional Danish claims to the Vík (the area around the Oslo Fjord) as suggested by P. A. Munch, why then would King Sveinn have made mention

27 *Latinske tekster*, 2:114; Haki Antonsson, *St. Magnús of Orkney: A Scandinavian Martyr-Cult in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 123–24.

28 P. A. Munch, *Det Norske Folks historie*, anden del (Christiania [Oslo]: Chr. Tønsbergs forlag, 1855), 200.

29 Nedkvitne and Norseng, *Middelalderbyen ved Bjørvika*, 43.

30 Tveito, “St. Hallvard,” 18–20.

31 Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, 120–21.

of this new saint in his conversations with Adam<sup>32</sup> If King Sveinn was indeed Adam's source, it is more likely that the cult of St Hallvarðr was devoid of any anti-Danish prejudice at this moment, and that the claimed relationship between Hallvarðr and Óláfr helgi (and thus the Norwegian royal dynasty) was either absent at this early stage in the cult's development or not yet an important component of the saint's legitimacy.

I do agree with earlier scholars, however, that the claimed relationship between Hallvarðr and King Óláfr should be seen in the context of royal patronage or promotion. But the suggestion that such patronage was achieved as early as the eleventh century is guesswork at best. There is greater evidence of such royal patronage in the early twelfth century, with the construction of St Hallvarðr's church, which also became the seat of the bishops of Oslo. Archaeological evidence points to construction beginning around 1100/20, and in 1130 it had progressed far enough to allow the burial of King Sigurðr Jóralfari (r. 1103–30) in the south wall.<sup>33</sup>

Traditionally, King Sigurðr is considered to have initiated the construction of St Hallvarðr's Church.<sup>34</sup> Vibe-Müller has argued that the king's interment in St Hallvarðr's Church indicates his involvement in its construction, since kings in the century prior to 1130 was almost exclusively interred in Christ's Church in Niðaróss.<sup>35</sup> And while Sigurðr for most of his reign shared the title of king with his brothers Óláfr (r. 1103–15) and Eysteinn (r. 1103–23), only Sigurðr was based in eastern Norway and Vík.<sup>36</sup> This local position may have encouraged the king into an alliance with the local Church since their interests is likely to have converged in the promotion of the cult of St Hallvarðr. By embracing and patronising an east-Norwegian saint, the king strengthened his local position in the competition for legitimacy with his brothers. By collaborating with the

32 Ludvig Daae, *Norges Helgener* (Christiania [Oslo]: Alb. Cammermeyer, 1879), 166–67.

33 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3 vols. Íslenzk fornrit XXVI–XXVIII (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941–51), 3:276; Nedkvitne and Norseng, *Middelalderbyen*, 50.

34 Høisæther, *Sankt Hallvard*, 137.

35 The exceptions are Haraldr harðráði, who was first buried in Mary's Church and then Elgeseter Priory (both in Niðaróss) and Magnús berfættar (r. 1093–1103), who died on campaign in Ireland and was buried in Downpatrick. Inger Helene Vibe-Müller, "Gamle Aker Kirke," *Gamle Aker Kirke – Festskrift ved kirkens 900-års jubileum*, ed. Sverre Skjelsbæk (Øvre Ervik: Alvheim & Eide akademisk forlag, 1980), 45.

36 Claus Krag, "Sigurd 1. Magnusson Jorsalfare," *Norsk Biografisk Leksikon*, accessed 18 March 2024, [https://nbl.snl.no/Sigurd\\_1.\\_Magnusson\\_Jorsalfare](https://nbl.snl.no/Sigurd_1._Magnusson_Jorsalfare).

king, the Church would be politically supported and financially secured during a critical stage of consolidating its organisation in eastern Norway, with its permanent episcopal seat in Oslo being gained only around 1100.<sup>37</sup>

A condition for this collaboration, however, seems to have been the elevation of Hallvarðr's status from local merchant to a royal relative by the construction of a genealogy to Guðbrandr kúla and Óláfr helgi. On its own terms, the cult of St Hallvarðr could not outshine the splendour and national significance of Óláfr helgi in Niðaróss. But as a relative of Óláfr, Hallvarðr could borrow some of that splendour. His new status was thus used to attract and justify the patronage of king Sigurðr, and the added dynastic component made St Hallvarðr's cult in Oslo and Vík at least regionally complementary to that of Óláfr helgi in Niðaróss and Þrøndalög.

Such is the context within which the claim of kinship between Hallvarðr and Óláfr is most convincingly placed: in the confluence of royal and ecclesiastical interests and their collaboration in church building and institutionalisation of the early 1100s. It may very well be the case that the Church had claimed kinship between Hallvarðr and Óláfr at a somewhat earlier stage than 1100/20. But there is no evidence that it produced any tangible results before the early 1100s when Guðbrandr kúla had long since passed out of living memory. That limits the confidence we can put in the claim.

After Sigurðr's interment in St Hallvarðr's Cathedral in 1130, the relationship between the saint and the royal dynasty endured. It finds expression in the reiteration of Hallvarðr's kinship with Óláfr in the aforementioned written sources between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries and in subsequent royal interments in St Hallvarðr's Cathedral of Magnús blindi (r. 1130–35 and 37–39), Ingi krókhryggr (r. 1136–61), and Hákon ungi (r. 1240–57).

## Presence and Absence: Óláfr helgi in the Genealogies of Magnús Erlendsson

Magnús Erlendsson (d. 1116/17) had been jarl of Orkney until he was murdered by his co-jarl and cousin Hákon Pálsson (d. 1123). His cult was later promoted by his sister's son, jarl Røgnvaldr kali (d. 1154/9), who had the St Magnus Cathedral built in Kirkwall and was himself

37 Nedkvitne and Norseng, *Middelalderbyen*, 47–48.

canonised in 1192. Magnús was a popular saint, with church dedications in Orkney, Shetland, and Iceland, but none in Norway.<sup>38</sup> Several medieval sources document the life and miracles of Magnús, and genealogy plays an important part in most of them. But each genealogy of the saint is represented differently in the various sources, with new selections of relatives that represent differing views on Magnús and the Norse community of saints. The sources include the rather extensive *Orkneyinga saga*, dating to the early decades of the thirteenth century, and the two Icelandic saints' sagas, *Magnúss saga skemmri* (*The shorter saga of Magnús*) from the second half of the thirteenth century, and *Magnúss saga lengri* (*The longer saga of Magnús*), from the first half of the fourteenth century. A Latin *Legenda* is also preserved, but it contains no significant genealogical information about Magnús.

*Orkneyinga saga* contains the most comprehensive account, its scope extending to the entire history of the Orcadian jarls, including their mythological origins. Its genealogies contain hundreds of individuals, although only a few of them are placed within that part of *Orkneyinga saga* that is concerned with St Magnús. In the following, I will concentrate on precisely those lineages that introduce the sections about St Magnús and his family. These sections begin with an exposition that outlines the descendants of Þorfinnr jarl (d. c. 1065) in several collateral branches from his two sons Páll (d. 1098) and Erlendr (d. 1098).<sup>39</sup> Many of Þorfinnr's descendants play minor roles later in *Orkneyinga saga*, as the saga author also comments: "ok koma þessir menn allir við söguna síðarr" (and all these men will come into our story later).<sup>40</sup> The rivalling earls, Hákon Pálsson and Magnús Erlendsson, are also included in these genealogies and will be the topic for the following discussion.

The saga author accentuates the matrilineal ancestors of the two cousins, representing them as components in the competition between the jarls. Hákon Pálsson is shown to be a descendant of the Norwegian royal dynasty, on his mother's side, indicating perhaps the legitimising function of such descent:

38 Haki Antonsson, *St. Magnús of Orkney*, 20, 72–73; Ellis, "The development of the cult of Magnús," 128–29.

39 *Orkneyinga saga*, ed. Finnboði Guðmundsson, Íslenzk fornrit XXXIV (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1965), 84–87.

40 *Orkneyinga saga*, 85.

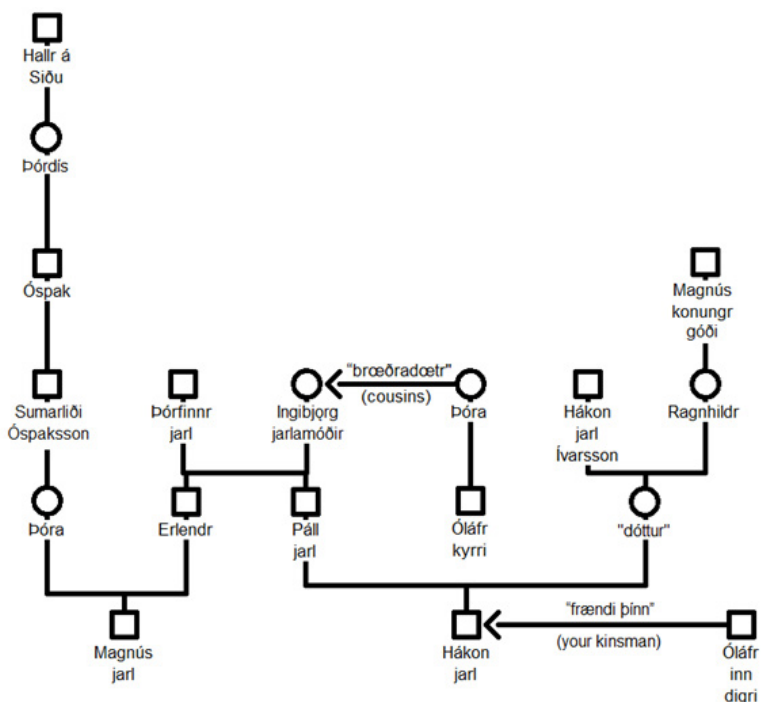


Figure 1: Magnús's genealogy from Orkneyinga saga (c. 1206–1235); selected generations.

En er synir þeira tóku at megnask, þá gerðusk þeir ofstopamenn miklir, Hákon ok Erlingr. Magnús var þeira kyrrlátastr. Allir váru þeir miklir ok sterkir ok vel menntir um alla hluti. Hákon Pálsson vildi vera fyrirmaðr þeira bræðra; þóttisk hann vera meiri burðum en synir Erlends, því at hann var dóttursonr Hákonar jarls Ívarssonar ok Ragnhildar, dóttur Magnúss konungs góða.<sup>41</sup>

But when their sons [i.e. the sons of Páll Þorfinnsson and Erlendr Þorfinnsson] grew older, Hákon and Erlingr became very reckless. Magnús was the gentlest of them. All were big, strong, and very skilled in all things. Hákon Pálsson wanted to be the leading man among the brothers, and thought he was more high-born than

41 Orkneyinga saga, 87.

the sons of Erlend, since he was the daughter's son of Hákon jarl Ívarsson and Ragnhildr, daughter of Magnús góði.

The branch of the Norwegian royal dynasty with which jarl Hákon Pálsson is related is curiously that which descends from Óláfr helgi. But the genealogy revealingly stops with Magnús góði, one generation short of the saint. How should we understand such a glaring omission?

One possible intention may have been to distance Óláfr genealogically from the enemy and murderer of St Magnús. But it is unlikely that contemporary readers would be convinced by such an omission, since they would not have to look further than earlier in *Orkneyinga saga* to find it stated that Magnús góði was the son of Óláfr helgi.<sup>42</sup> We must assume that this information was known to the readers. A more likely explanation, therefore, is that the connection, the way it is represented, contributes to the development of Hákon Pálsson's character. The saga author does not relate the information on Hákon's matrilineal descent impartially but imputes to Hákon both the knowledge of his royal ancestors and a certain pride in descending from King Magnús góði. Jarl Hákon seemingly cares little for his descent from King Magnús' saintly father and otherwise displays little spiritual affinity with the martyred king. This point is strengthened in another episode from the saga, where Hákon seeks the counsel of a Swedish fortune-teller:

En er hann fann þenna mann, þá frétti hann eptir, hversu honum myndi gangask til ríkis eða annarrar hamingju. Vísendamaðr spurði, hvat manna hann væri. Hann sagði nafn sitt ok ætt sína, at hann var dóttursonr Hákonar Ívarssonar. Þá sagði vísendamaðr: "Hví muntu vilja taka af mér vísendi eða sagnir? Veiztu eigi þat, at inir fyrri frændr þínir hafa lítinn hug haft á þess háttar mǫnnum sem ek em? Ok má þér þǫrf vinna, at þú leitir eptir at vita forlǫg þín af Óláfi inum digra, frænda þínum, er þér hafid allan trúnað á. En grunr myndi mér á vera, at hann myndi eigi lítillæti til hafa at segja þér þat, er þik forvitnar, eða vera eigi svá máttugr ella sem þér kallid hann." Þá svarar Hákon: "Ekki vil ek honum ámæla; ætla ek þat meirr, at ek mun eigi verðleika til hafa at taka af honum vísendi, en

42 *Orkneyinga saga*, 54–55.

hitt, at eigi myni hann vera svá völdugr, at ek mætta taka fyrir þat af honum vísendi. En því hefi ek á þinn fund farit, at mér hefir þat í hug komit, at hér mun hvárrgi þurfa at ofunda annan fyrir mann-kosta sakar eða trúbragða.” Sá maðr svarar: “Vel líkar mér þat, at ek finn þat á, at þú þykkisk þar eiga allt traust, er ek em, ok framarr en trúa sú, er þér hafið með farit ok aðrir frændr þínir.”<sup>43</sup>

When he met the man, he asked him if he would come to power or have another fortune. The fortune-teller asked what man he was. Hákon said his name and lineage, and that he was the daughter’s son of Hákon Ívarsson. Then the fortune-teller said: “Why are you seeking knowledge from me? Do you not know that your ancestors had little regard for men of my kind? And it may be better for you to learn your destiny from your kinsman Óláfr the Stout, in whom you have placed all faith. But I suspect that he is not humble enough to tell you what you are interested to know, or perhaps he is not as powerful as you think.” Then Hákon answered: “I do not want to speak ill of him. Rather than thinking that he is not mighty enough to give me knowledge, I believe that I am not worthy of receiving knowledge from him. But I have come to meet with you because I did not think either of us would resent the other for reasons of skills or beliefs.” The man answers: “I like it well that you seem to have more faith in me than in that belief which you and your other relatives have held.”

This episode emphatically distances Hákon from Óláfr helgi. The jarl seems uncomfortable to be reminded of his descent from the saint, especially since it is the pagan fortune-teller who brings up the topic of his family. It is also the fortune-teller who teasingly reminds the deviating jarl of the boundaries of the Christian behaviour adhered to by his other relatives. Haki Antonsson has interpreted this episode in context of the many revelatory visions granted to Norwegian kings by Óláfr helgi in the kings’ sagas.<sup>44</sup> But that Hákon considers himself unworthy of receiving similar foreknowledge is perhaps something other than merely authorial commen-

43 *Orkneyinga saga*, 90–91.

44 Haki Antonsson, “The Kings of Norway and the Earls of Orkney: The Case of *Orkneyinga saga*, §36.” *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 15 (2005): 91–92.



tary on the earl's non-royal status. For the fortune-teller, it is a matter of faith, and mockingly points out that Hákon's actions indicate that he has more faith in practices that are forbidden to Christians than in his saintly forbear. The episode thus demonstrates some of the complexities in the genealogical function of saints in saga literature. The author of *Orkneyinga saga* recognises the kinship between Hákon and Óláfr helgi, but instead of using it to elevate the status of the Hákon or the comital family, Óláfr is posited as a moral contrast to the dissolute Hákon. He may be high-born, but his own behaviour disgraces him in the eyes of the medieval reader.

By contrast, Magnús is not shown to be related to Óláfr in the *Orkneyinga saga* genealogies. The saga author instead constructs a genealogy in five generations from Magnús' mother, Þóra, to highlight his descent from the Icelandic chieftain Síðu-Hallr (d. 1012/14).<sup>45</sup> It may seem like an odd contrast to Hákon Pálsson's descent from the Norwegian royal dynasty. But to the Icelandic Oddaverja-dynasty, for whom the earliest redaction of the *Orkneyinga saga* (c. 1200) is likely to have been composed and who was in frequent contract with the earls of Orkney at the end of the 1100s,<sup>46</sup> such a connection would certainly attract interest as Síðu-Hallr was one of their ancestors. If this genealogy was indeed included in this now lost redaction, it may have been an attempt to increase the prestige of the Oddaverjar and to promote the cult of Magnús to his purported Icelandic relatives.

Later texts elaborated on and changed the genealogical information from *Orkneyinga saga*, showing a development in thinking about Magnús and his genealogical relationship to Óláfr helgi and other saints. The narrative of the mid-to-late thirteenth-century saint's saga *Magnúss saga skemmiri* follows *Orkneyinga saga* so closely that it has been largely ignored by modern scholars.<sup>47</sup> Its genealogy, however, has not only condensed genealogical information from the more comprehensive scope of *Orkneyinga saga*, but it also adds entirely new generations to the genealogy of Magnús. The particular selection of generations from *Orkneyinga saga*, together with the addition of new generations may suggest attitudes and values of an author

45 *Orkneyinga saga*, 85–86.

46 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sagnaritun Oddaverja. Nokkrar athuganir* (Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja hf., 1937), 16–39; Haki Antonsson, "The Kings of Norway and the Earls of Orkney," 81.

47 Haki Antonsson, *St. Magnús of Orkney*, 10.

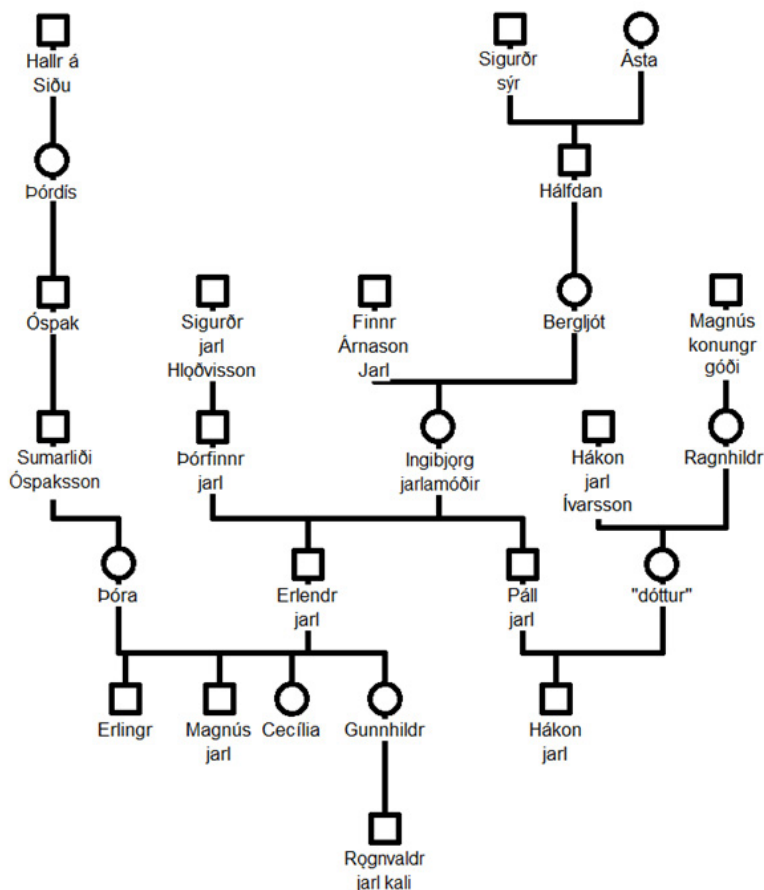


Figure 2: Magnús's genealogy from Magnúss saga skemmri (second half of the 1200s).

we so far know very little about, even if the narrative contributions to the hagiographical tradition of Magnús are fairly modest.

The genealogy of Magnús is placed at the very beginning of the saga, following the descendants of Þórfinnr jarl to Magnús, his cousin Hákon, and his nephew Rognvaldr kali, who played such an important role in promoting the cult of his uncle.<sup>48</sup> Bilateral lines to King Magnús góði, on

48 *Magnúss saga skemmri*, ed. Finnboði Guðmundsson, Íslenzk fornrit XXXIV (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1965), 311.

Hákon Pálsson's side, and Síðu-Hallr on Magnús Erlendsson's side are also included, but a new addition is the bilateral line back to Sigurðr sýr and Ásta through Ingibjörg jarlamóðir (d. 1068–69), mother of Erlendr and Páll. *Orkneyinga saga* includes no such line in the sections about St Magnús, or elsewhere, making it an innovation of the author of *Magnúss saga skemmri*. The inclusion of shared royal ancestors can perhaps be seen as a response to Hákon Pálsson's claim from *Orkneyinga saga* of being higher-born than the brothers Magnús and Erlingr, which is also preserved in *Magnúss saga skemmri*.<sup>49</sup> But since they were all descended from kings, there would be no reason to consider Magnús as lower-born than his rival.

Another change is the omission of Óláfr helgi and the episode where Hákon awkwardly meets the Swedish fortune-teller. Even though readers with even modest historical knowledge will know that Óláfr was the father of Magnús góði and son of Ásta, the exclusion of Óláfr seems intended to concentrate the narrative more intently on Magnús' achievements and miracles. They speak for themselves, without borrowing legitimacy from a connection to Óláfr helgi.

Beuermann has argued that we may see the contours of competition between the two saints, Magnús and Óláfr, in *Magnúss saga skemmri*. Óláfr helgi had been employed to support the political ambitions of the Norwegian church and kingdom to consolidate Norwegian power over the North Atlantic islands.<sup>50</sup> Part of this process was the formal incorporation of Iceland and Orkney into the Norwegian kingdom after the treaties of 1262 and 1266 respectively.<sup>51</sup> Because of this, Icelandic authors, perhaps even more than before, were prompted to examine and define their own individual characteristics within, but separate and individual from, the Norwegian kingdom. This may have encouraged the search for a wider North Atlantic solidarity where apprehension over Norwegian cultural and political encroachment is expressed through adoption of St Magnús as, in Beuermann's words, an "anti-Norwegian saint".<sup>52</sup> Óláfr helgi, may

49 *Magnúss saga skemmri*, 312.

50 Ian Beuermann, "Jarla Sögur Orkneyja. Status and Power of the Earls of Orkney According to Their Sagas," *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*, eds. Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal, and Ian Beuermann (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 146–47.

51 Steinar Imsen, *Kongemakt og skattland: Den norske Kongens rike utenfor Norge i middelalderen* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2018), 36–37, 45–49.

52 Beuermann, "Jarla Sögur Orkneyja," 147.

have been excluded from the genealogy if he was seen as a symbol of Norwegian expansionism.

I do not believe that Beuermann’s somewhat polemical formulations are entirely substantiated by the sources. As mentioned, the saga author takes care to graft another branch onto the tree, making St Magnús into a descendant of the Norwegian royal dynasty too. This strongly indicates that such descent was considered prestigious, even in the second half of the thirteenth century, and that there is no absolute disjunction between the prestige of the Norwegian centre and the North Atlantic periphery.

But this does not exclude the possibility of competition between the saints. Óláfr helgi is glaringly absent from the genealogy in *Magnúss saga skemmri*, perhaps suggesting that the saga author was less concerned about Norwegian politics and more concerned that Óláfr would outshine Magnús. This concern may lie behind a curious episode from the miracle collection in *Magnúss saga skemmri*, where Magnús seems to stand in for Óláfr. In this account, the ailing Icelandic farmer Eldjárn Varðason prays to be cured of an illness, making vows to both Óláfr and Magnús.<sup>53</sup> Finally, Magnús appears to Eldjárn, promising him recovery from the illness. The saint further explains that he has been sent as St Óláfr was busy answering another prayer in the west.<sup>54</sup> Beuermann argues that this posits Magnús as a “counterweight” to the rapidly spreading cult of St Óláfr,<sup>55</sup> a claim that is substantiated by the manifest exclusion of Óláfr in the genealogy. Similar intentions may lay behind the retention in *Magnúss saga skemmri* of the lineage on Magnús’ mother’s side to Síðu-Hallr which we also find in *Orkneyinga saga*. Hallr was the ancestor of several powerful families and individuals in the thirteenth century, such as the Icelandic jarl Gizurr Þorvaldsson (d. 1268). But while the cult of St Magnús may have achieved local appeal in Iceland as early as the mid-thirteenth century, it would take another couple of decades until the cult was formally adopted by the Icelandic Alþing in 1326.<sup>56</sup>

In *Magnúss saga lengri*, from the early fourteenth century, we find an altogether different attitude to the relationship between Óláfr and other Nordic saints. The saga has adapted material from *Orkneyinga saga*, as well

53 *Magnúss saga skemmri*, 330.

54 *Magnúss saga skemmri*, 331.

55 Beuermann, “Jarla Sögur Orkneyja,” 146.

56 Haki Antonsson, *St. Magnús of Orkney*, 20.

as from a now lost Latin *Vita* of St Magnús composed by a certain master Robert in the late 1100s. It may be somewhat challenging, therefore, to properly contextualise the relevant passages, as the earlier and later material cannot be entirely distinguished. Due to a lack of other sources, however, the text will primarily be evaluated as a historical synthesis of previous sources representing values and attitudes of its fourteenth-century context.

The genealogical material in the saga differs from both *Orkneyinga saga* and *Magnúss saga skemmri*, and it is likely that the author of *Magnúss saga lengri* himself interpolated new generations into the introduction of the saga. Rather than rivalry, we are presented with a harmonised vision of a pan-Nordic community of related saints from Norway, Iceland, and Orkney:

Lof, dýrð ok heiðr ok æra sé almáttigum guði, lausnara várum ok skapara, fyrir sína margföldu mildi ok miskunnsemi, er hann veitir oss, er byggjum á utanverðum jaðri heimsins, ok eptir meistaranna orðtæki, er svá setja í sínar bækr, at þeim sýnist sem vér sém komnir út ór heiminum. Ok allt eins, þó at svá sé, virðist guð at sýna oss sína mildi, einkanliga í því, er hann hefir oss látit koma til kynningar síns blessaða nafns, þar með gefit oss styrka stólpa, ina helgustu forgöngumenn heilagrar kristni, af hverra heilagleik öll Norðrhálfan skinn ok ljómar nær ok fjarri. Þessir eru: inn heilagi Óláfr konungr ok inn háleiti Hallvarðr, frændi hans, er prýða Nóreg með sínum helgum dómum; inn mæti Magnús Eyjajarl, er birtir Orkneyjar með sínum heilagleik, hverjum til sæmdar eptirfarandi saga er saman sett. Hér með eru blessaðir biskupar, Johannes ok Thorlacus, hverir Ísland hafa geislat með háleitu skini sinna bjartra verðleika. Því má sjá, at vér erum eigi fjarlægir guðs miskunn, þó at vér sém fjarlægir öðrum þjóðum at heims vistum; ok þar fyrir eigum vér honum þakkir at gera, sæmd ok æru alla tíma várs lífs.<sup>57</sup>

Praise, glory and splendour and honour be to Almighty God, our redeemer and maker, for his manifold mercy and grace, which he bestows on us who dwell on the uttermost edge of the world; so that after the sayings of the masters who so set it in their books,

57 *Magnúss saga lengri*, ed. Finnboði Guðmundsson, Íslenzk fornrit XXXIV (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1965), 335. The translation is altered and somewhat expanded from Haki Antonsson, *St. Magnús of Orkney*, 31–32.

it seems to them as though we were come out of this world. And even if it is like this, God has shown us his mercy, especially in that he has let come to us knowledge of his blessed name, and thereby given us strong pillars, the most holy advocates of holy Christianity, from whose holiness all the northern half of the world shines and gleams, near and far. These are King Óláfr the saint and the exalted Hallvarðr his kinsman, who adorn Norway with their holy relics; the illustrious Magnús, the Isle-earl, who brightens the Orkneys with his holiness, to whose honour the aftercoming Saga is put together. Herewith are the blessed Bishops Jón and Þorlákr, who have enlightened Iceland with the exalted shining of their bright worthiness. By this it may be seen that we are not far off from God’s mercy, though we be far off from other peoples in our abode in the world; and therefore, we are bound to pay Him thanks, honour, and reverence all the time of our life.

With this vision, the Nordic saints appear as collectively complementing, rather than as individually competing. Each saint brightens their specific region of the Norse world: Óláfr and Hallvarðr in Norway, Magnús in the Orkneys, and Jón (d. 1121) and Þorlákr (d. 1139) in Iceland, but together they “shine and gleam” over the entire northern half of the world. Thus, the saintly parochialism, contours of which can be identified in *Magnúss saga skemmri*, is extinguished with the introduction of *Magnúss saga lengri*. Together with the geographical position, the saintly college constructs a greater Nordic identity defining the inhabitants of Norway, Iceland, and the Western Isles as members of the same group. But in this argument, we may also see a refutation of a common medieval trope, ultimately derived from the Old Testament, of the north as a “particularly vicious and evil location”.<sup>58</sup> The saints confirm God’s presence, even at the utmost edge of the world, against what the author vaguely alludes to as “meistaranna orðtæki, er svá setja í sínar bækr” (the sayings of the masters who so set it in their books). Such books seem to contain precisely such negative attitudes to the north.

58 Lasse Sonne, “The Northification of the Pagan Past in Old Norse Literature,” *The Northification of the Pagan Past in Old Norse Literature. The Scandinavian Connection*, eds. Mia Münster-Swendsen, Thomas K. Heebøll-Holm, Sigbjørn Olsen Sønnesyn (Durham: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2017), 89–90.

The lineages in *Magnúss saga lengri* support the vision of a related saintly community through the juxtaposition of five saints in one genealogy.<sup>59</sup> The two Orcadian saints Magnús and his nephew Rognvaldr kali, who is called “sannheilagr maðr” (truly holy man), are placed in the intersection between dynasties from Orkney, Iceland, and Norway. But the selection of generations diverge from that of *Orkneyinga saga*, and even *Magnúss saga skemmri*. The text prioritises the kinship between saints, rather than secular legitimacy conferred by descent from royalty. The branch connecting St Magnús to Sigurðr sýr and Ásta is therefore omitted, as there is seemingly no need to connect Magnús directly to the Norwegian royal dynasty. The author instead shows how the kin of Óláfr kyrri and the Orkney jarls are descended from the same Norwegian ancestors of the Arnæðlinga family, although this seems intended to explain the close relationship between the families during the events of 1066.<sup>60</sup> On the maternal side of Hákon Pálsson, Óláfr helgi is finally inserted as the father of Hákon’s ancestor, Magnús góði, but the inclusion of the episode of Hákon and the Swedish fortune-teller from *Orkneyinga saga* nonetheless distances the saint-killing Hákon from his holy ancestor.<sup>61</sup> But by including Óláfr in the genealogy, the saga author shows how the dynasties of Magnús and Óláfr are related, even if this is somewhat more indirectly. St Hallvarðr also belongs to this family of saints, even if he is not explicitly mentioned in the genealogical section of the saga. His place can be inferred from the sobriquet of King Óláfr helgi’s “frændi” (kinsman) that appears in the introduction. Finally, *Magnúss saga lengri* retains the Icelandic branch on the maternal side of St Magnús but expands it with a collateral line from Hallr to incorporate yet another saint, “inn heilagi Jón Hólabiskup” (i.e. Jón Ögmundsson, Bishop of the Icelandic diocese of Hólar from 1106–1121).<sup>62</sup>

Magnús Már Lárusson has argued that the genealogy to Jón ties St Magnús and *Magnúss saga lengri* to the diocese of Hólar, perhaps in an attempt to increase the prestige of St Jón who was held in higher regard in Hólar than Saint Þorlákr of Skálholt.<sup>63</sup> But Haki Antonsson duly points out that there is little to support such “factional attitude [...] towards the

59 *Magnúss saga lengri*, 337–38.

60 *Magnúss saga lengri*, 339.

61 *Magnúss saga lengri*, 341–42.

62 *Magnúss saga lengri*, 337.

63 Magnús Már Lárusson, “Sct. Magnus Orcadensis Comes,” *Saga* 3 (1960–1963): 487.



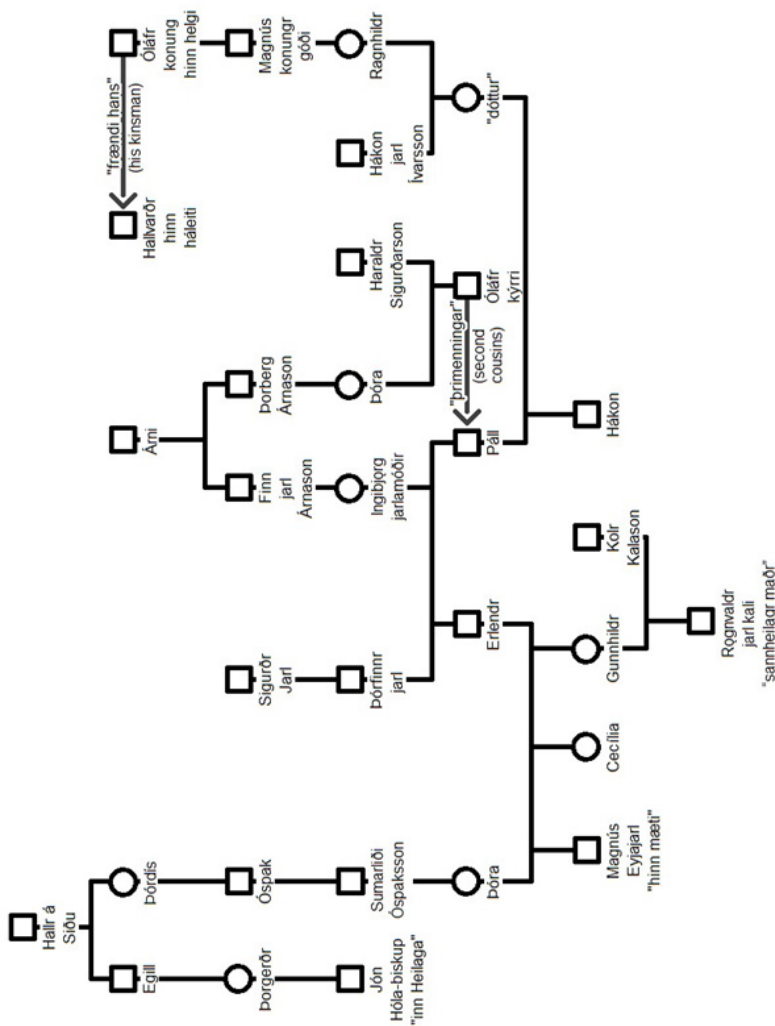


Figure 3: Magnús's genealogy from Magnúss saga lengri (early 1300s).

cult of the native saints”<sup>64</sup> and that *Magnúss saga lengri* is more likely to have been composed in Skálholt, in the years leading up to the offi-

64 Haki Antonsson, “The End of *Árna saga biskups* and the Cult of St Magnús of Orkney: Hagiography and Ecclesiastical Politics in Early Fourteenth-Century Iceland,” *Gripla* 34 (2023): 159.

cial adoption of St Magnús feast day by the Icelandic *Alþingi* in 1326.<sup>65</sup> The text was most probably composed sometime that year, even though Magnús had been locally venerated since at least the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>66</sup> Another important date that shows the growing interest in Magnús is 1298, when Icelandic annals mention the translation of a relic of St Magnús to Skálholt Cathedral.<sup>67</sup> From these circumstances, it seems clear that the cult of St Magnús had already built up a certain momentum by the time *Magnúss saga lengri* was composed. And while the secular prestige of his genealogical credentials had been thoroughly explicated in sources such as *Orkneyinga saga* and *Magnúss saga skemmri*, through his descent from Síðu-Hallr there remained perhaps a question of how Magnús would fit into the Icelandic religious context.

The purpose of connecting Magnús to Jón and Óláfr, therefore, was apparently to situate the increasingly popular Magnús within a community of saints through a method with which the Icelanders were highly familiar: genealogy. Simultaneously, Jón Ögmundsson was tied into the Norse spiritual dynasty of saints through his connection with Magnús Erlendsson and, more indirectly, with Óláfr helgi and Hallvarðr Vébjarnarson. By representing the Orcadian jarl as partly Icelandic in extraction, and indeed a kinsman of the renowned Bishop Jón, whom several powerful Icelandic families considered a kinsman,<sup>68</sup> the proposal for formal recognition of his cult would perhaps be more appealing to the *Alþingi* of 1326.

## Concluding Remarks

Genealogy understood as “family relationships” was ultimately a secular method of establishing legitimacy in the medieval world, since the Church with its strict, though not universally enforced regulations on celibacy was able to prevent the development of dynasties in the ecclesiastical aristocracy. But the density of royal martyrs in Scandinavia effortlessly enabled the

65 Haki Antonsson, *St. Magnús of Orkney*, 18; Haki Antonsson, “The End of *Árna saga biskups*,” 160.

66 Margaret Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1994), 20.

67 *Íslandske annaler indtil 1578*, ed. Gustav Storm (Christiania [Oslo]: Grøndahl & Søns Bogtrykkeri, 1888), 145, 198, 386.

68 *Landnámabók*, 51–51, 318, 340–41, 367.

adaptation of genealogy as a tool in promoting and legitimising saints: it echoed the mechanism of legitimising power in the secular hierarchy. Thus, a genealogical connection to Óláfr helgi could be used to promote the cults of both St Hallvarðr in Norway and St Magnús in Iceland because the audience for these genealogies was familiar with how genealogical legitimacy worked.

At or around the establishment of a permanent seat for the Bishop of Oslo in the early 1100s, an oral tradition communicating the real or imagined kinship between Óláfr helgi and St Hallvarðr is likely to have been used to attract or perhaps justify the patronage of King Sigurðr Jórsalafari. By supporting the cult and its church-building efforts, Sigurðr strengthened his position in the eastern part of Norway. Óláfr helgi was the genealogical anchor that both justified and encouraged collaboration between king and church. Texts of the twelfth to thirteenth century continued recording this kinship both in the Latin liturgical *Acta* and the vernacular saint's sagas of Óláfr, Hallvarðr, and even in *Magnúss saga lengri*. By the fourteenth century, the belief in kinship between Hallvarðr and Óláfr was so entrenched that the author of *Magnúss saga lengri* simply appended the former saint to the genealogical material of the first few chapters, without having to explicate any of Hallvarðr's own lineage.

Inversely, the cult of Magnús Erlendsson seems at first to distance itself somewhat from Óláfr helgi in *Orkneyinga saga*, using the martyred king instead as a moral contrast to Magnús' murderer and Óláfr helgi's descendant, jarl Hákon Pálsson. The conjectured rivalling between dynastic saints during a period when the kingdom of Norway expanded its reach, in the latter half of the thirteenth century, probably accounts for the absence of Óláfr from the earliest genealogies of Magnús in *Orkneyinga saga* and *Magnúss saga skemmri*. But this absence does not eclipse the reliance on a genealogical connection to the Norwegian royal dynasty to confer prestige to the Orcadian comital family and Magnús in particular. Even if Magnús in *Magnúss saga skemmri* is shown to be a descendant of Ásta, who was well-known as Óláfr helgi's mother, the hagiographer takes care to allow Magnús' achievements and miracles to shine independently of the Norwegian saint.

A more important concern in these genealogies is the relationship between Orkney and Iceland, underpinned by the ubiquitous maternal lineage from Magnús to the Icelandic chieftain Síðu-Hallr. This appears to have been part of a strategy to introduce Magnús to Iceland by connecting

the saint to the ancestor of some of Iceland's most powerful families. It may also constitute a step in the process that led to the "collegiate" vision of saints that is so emphatically expressed in *Magnúss saga lengri*. This text introduces Óláfr helgi unambiguously to the genealogical tradition of Magnús, uniting the saints genealogically as well as politically, as members of a glorious community of holy men from Iceland, Norway, and Orkney.

Visions of saintly communities are not limited to *Magnúss saga lengri*. Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, from the 1260s, recounts a vision supposedly experienced by the Scottish king Alexander II (r. 1214–49) of the saints Óláfr, Magnús, and Columba, who warned him against incursions into the Norwegian Hebrides.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, *Guðmundar saga biskups*, from the first decades of the fourteenth century, contains an account of a miracle from the time of Bishop Guðmundr Arason of Hólar (r. 1203–37). A certain Icelandic woman, Rannveig, calls upon the saints Óláfr, Magnús, and Hallvarðr who all appear before her.<sup>70</sup> If we are to believe the hagiographer's comment on Rannveig's prayer, that "menn heto þa mioc a þa her a landi" (back then, many here in the country called upon those men), the gradual genealogical integration of saints into a culturally specific collective for the "northern half of the world" (i.e. Norway, Orkney, and Iceland) in texts such as *Magnúss saga lengri* only reaffirmed long-established popular traditions of praying to groups of saints.

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## SUMMARY

“Inn heilagi Óláfr konungr ok inn háleiti Hallvarðr, frændi hans”: *Óláfr helgi and Genealogies of Saints in Norway, Iceland, and Orkney*

**Keywords:** genealogy, hagiography, saints’ sagas, Óláfr helgi, St Hallvarðr Vébjarnarson, St Magnús of Orkney

This article examines the function of St Óláfr Haraldsson (d. 1030) in the genealogies of saints from the Norse world. Studies of Norwegian kingship have shown how Óláfr retained a pivotal role in legitimising claims to power from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. But Óláfr was also used to legitimise later saints. This study considers two such saints: St Hallvarðr Vébjarnarson (d. c. 1043) from eastern Norway and St. Magnús Erlendsson of Orkney (d. 1116/17). The article illustrates the ways in which genealogies of these later saints interacted with and used the legacy of Óláfr helgi, demonstrating the enduring significance of Óláfr in the genealogical narratives of subsequent saints.

Hallvarðr’s genealogies are carefully explored through fragmented textual sources including the Latin *Acta Sancti Halvardi* and the almost completely lost Old Norse *Hallvarðs saga*. The sources consistently report of a matrilineal relationship between Hallvarðr and Óláfr helgi but are inconsistent about the details. It is contended that the idea of this relationship circulated orally before the genealogies were committed to writing. It is, however, good reason to be critical of the proposed kinship. Both Hallvarðr and Óláfr are mentioned in Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesie Pontificum* (c. 1075/76) but are not shown to be related. It is likely, therefore, that the claimed relationship emerged only around the 1100s, when King Sigurðr Jórsalafari (r. 1103–30) was involved in the construction of St Hallvarðr’s Church for the bishops of Oslo. The relationship between Óláfr and Hallvarðr could have underpinned this collaboration, consolidating the power and prestige of King Sigurðr in competition with his co-kings Eysteinn and Óláfr.

The second part of the article turns to St Magnús Erlendsson. His genealogies from *Orkneyinga saga*, *Magnúss saga skemmri*, and *Magnúss saga lengri* offer new perspectives on the promotion of Magnús’ cult in the centuries after his death. *Orkneyinga saga* emphasises the Icelanders among Magnús’ matrilineal ancestors whereas his cousin and rival, Hákon, is shown to descend from King Magnús góði (r. 1035–47), notably stopping one generation short of King Óláfr helgi. *Magnúss saga skemmri*, from the second half of the thirteenth century, is considered to offer little of value outside the narrative of the *Orkneyinga saga*, but it both condenses and expands the genealogy of its source. The text increases the prestige of St Magnús by connecting him by a new branch to the Norwegian royal family although Óláfr helgi is completely omitted from the narrative. This omission highlights the individual merits of Magnús’ achievements and miracles, possibly reflecting competition between the Óláfr and Magnús in late thirteenth-century Iceland. Finally, the

genealogies in *Magnúss saga lengri* are seen to establish Magnús' status as a saint within a broader Nordic context. It reintroduces Óláfr helgi to Magnús' genealogy aligning him genealogically with even more saints from the Norse world. In this text, rivalry and local concerns are thus displaced by a harmonised vision of a pan-Nordic community of related saints from Norway, Iceland, and Orkney.

## ÁGRIP

„Inn heilagi Óláfr konungur ok inn háleiti Hallvarðr, frændi hans”: *Ólafur helgi ok ættfræði dýrlinga í Noregi, á Íslandi og Orkneyjum*

**Lykilorð:** ættfræði, helgisagnir, dýrlingasögur, Ólafur helgi, Hallvarður helgi Vébjörnsson, Magnús helgi Orkneyjajarl

Í þessari grein er fjallað um hlutverk Ólafs helga Haraldssonar (d. 1030) í ættfræði norræna dýrlinga. Við rannsóknir á norskri konungstign hefur komið fram hvernig Ólafur gegndi lykilhlutverki við að tryggja lögmæti krafna um völd allt frá elleftu öld til þrettánda aldar. En Ólafur var einnig nýttur til að réttlæta staðfestingu á heilagleika dýrlinga síðar meir. Þessi rannsókn snýst um tvo dýrlinga af því tagi: Hallvarð helga Vébjörnsson (d. um 1043) frá austurhluta Noregs og Magnús helga Orkneyjajarl (d. 1116/17). Gerð er grein fyrir hvernig ættfræði þessara síðari dýrlinga tengdist og nýtti sér arfleifð Ólafs helga en það undirstrikar hvað Ólafur var lengi mikilvægur í ættfræðilegri umfjöllun þeirra dýrlinga sem á eftir komu.

Farið er vandlega yfir ættfræðilegar upplýsingar um Hallvarð í textabrotum sem varðveist hafa, þar með talin *Acta Sancti Halvardi* á latínu og fornsagan *Hallvarðs saga* sem nú er nær algjörlega glötuð. Heimildir greina ávallt frá ættartengslum Hallvarðs og Ólafs í kvenlegg en eru ekki sammála um hvernig þeim er háttað. Fullyrða má að hugmyndin um þessi tengsl hafi verið í munnlegri geymd áður en farið var að skrá þau niður. Hins vegar er full ástæða til að draga í efa þennan ætlaða skyldleika. Hallvarðar og Ólafs er beggja getið í bók Adams frá Brimum, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesie Pontificum* (um 1075/76) en ekki kemur þar fram neitt um skyldleika þeirra. Því er líklegt að ekki hafi verið farið að ætla þá skylda fyrr en í upphafi tólftu aldar þegar Sigurður Jórsalafari (konungur frá 1103–1130) kom að byggingu kirkju Hallvarðs helga fyrir Óslóarbiskupana. Ættartengsl Ólafs og Hallvarðs gætu hafa rennt stoðum undir þetta samstarf og styrkt völd og orðstír Sigurðar konungs í samkeppninni við hina konungana tvo, Eysteinn og Ólaf.

Seinni hluti greinarinnar fjallar um Magnús helga Erlendsson. Ættarsaga hans í *Orkneyinga sögu*, *Magnúss sögu skemmri* og *Magnúss sögu lengri* draga fram ný sjónarmið varðandi dýrkunina á Magnúsi næstu aldir eftir andlát hans. Í *Orkneyinga sögu* er lögd áhersla á Íslendingana í móðurætt Magnúsar og greint frá því að frændi hans og keppinautur Hákon sé kominn af Magnúsi góða

(konungur frá 1035–1047), en þó þannig að hætt er að rekja ættina einni kynslóð áður en að Ólafi helga kemur. Svo er litið á að *Magnúss saga skemmri*, frá seinni hluta þrettánda aldar, sé um fátt merkileg nema hvað frásögnina af *Orkneyinga sögu* varðar en þar er ættfræðiheimildum bæði þjappað saman og þær útvíkkaðar. Textinn eykur orðstír Magnúsar helga með því að tengja hann nýrri grein norsku konungsfjölskyldunnar, jafnvel þótt Ólafi helga sé alfarið sleppt í frásögninni. Þannig eru dregin fram afrek og kraftaverk Magnúsar sjálfs sem gæti bent til þess að samkeppni hafi ríkt á milli Ólafs og Magnúsar á Íslandi síðla á þrettánda öld. Ættfræðiupplýsingarnar í *Magnúss sögu lengri* eru auk þess taldar vera til þess að undirstrika stöðu hans sem norræns dýrlings í víðara samhengi. Þar er Ólafi helga á ný bætt við ættartöflu hans og þannig er hann ættfræðilega tengdur enn fleiri dýrlingum í norrænu samhengi. Í stað metings og staðbundinna deiluefna birtist sameiginleg sýn á samfélag dýrlinga frá Noregi, Íslandi og Orkneyjum, sem tengjast hver öðrum ættarböndum.

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