Óðinn Visiting Christian Kings: Storytelling and the Construction of Royal Authority in Medieval Norway

Arnfrid Opedal and Endre Elvestad*

A group of stories in saga literature dealing with the Norse god Óðinn, who in disguise visits two of the 'founding father' kings of medieval Norway, forms our focus for this study of storytelling and the construction of royal authority in medieval Norway. The kings who received visits from the god were Óláfr Tryggvason (reigned *c.* 995–1000) and Óláfr Haraldsson (Óláfr helgi, reigned 1016–30). The stories are well known and various aspects of them have been studied previously: the conflict between paganism and Christianity in the time of conversion (Harris 1989; Harris and Hill 1989); Óðinn in a Christian perspective (Lassen 2011); and the role of the past in the Christian Middle Ages (Kaplan 2004; Kaplan 2011). Our perspective in analysing these stories anew is that narratives of this kind could become a tool to legitimate a new political

* This article was written as part of an interdisciplinary research project about the royal manor at Avaldsnes, Rogaland, south-west Norway.

Dr Arnfrid Opedal, archaeologist, and Endre Elvestad, marine archaeologist, both of Stavanger Maritime Museum — Museum Stavanger.

Abstract: A group of similar stories in the saga literature deals with the Norse god Óðinn visiting two 'founding father' kings of early medieval Norway, Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson. This leads us to investigate the political importance of storytelling during times of political fragility. The stories were first written down in the late twelfth century but are likely to have much older antecedents preserved in oral tradition. We interpret these stories as a creation of an alternative way of transferring the legitimate authority of legendary rulers to new kings with weak inheritance rights. Óðinn, as a representative of the past, accepts the founding-father kings and gives legitimacy to fragile state formation attempts in a historical context of rivalry between pretenders to the throne. We explore the relationship between storytelling and the symbolic foundation of a community. The stories appear to be Norse manifestations of a common European tradition of using the past as a political instrument of power.

Keywords: Saga literature, storytelling, narratives, state formation, royal legitimacy, Norway, Óðinn, kingship.

order,[1] specifically to construct royal authority in a fragmented or fragile state, or a state still in the process of emerging. Our aim is not to discuss the political importance of the two kings but to study possible political motives behind the creation of the Óðinn stories.

While the oldest written versions of the Óðinn stories are from the late twelfth century (and also occur in subsequent redactions), they are likely to have much older antecedents which were transmitted in oral tradition, possibly from as far back as the eleventh century. In the early decades of that century the two kings Óláfr assumed key positions of initiative, at a time when the fragmented petty kingdoms of western Scandinavia were being welded into the Christian Norwegian state (Bagge 1996; Bagge 2010; Bagge 2014). The two Óláfrs had to defend their kingships against contestation by key regions and powerful individual magnates, not to mention opposition from beyond Norway. Legends about them seem to have begun to form shortly after their respective lifetimes, if not already during them.[2] Meanwhile, the oldest extant written versions of these stories can be loosely dated to the period of the Norwegian civil wars (1130 to *c.* 1240), which can be seen as the last phase of the Norwegian state formation process. During these wars, factions promoting different pretenders to the throne, some of dubious royal descent and personal fitness, fought for the throne and church leaders also played a major part. From *c.* 1160 the conflicts increased in intensity and caused more profound damage to the general population (Helle 1974, 37, 41; Orning 2014). In both these periods of major political change, the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the need for legitimacy of a new political order and the kings' personal fitness would have been acute. The construction of royal authority, sufficient to give a king or a pretender to the throne a legitimate right to rule and an acceptance of that right in the eyes of the ruled, must have been essential.[3]

[1] Cf. for instance Freeman 2002; Latowsky 2013. For a late twelfth-century Norwegian context involving saga literature, see O'Hara 2009.

[2] For an instance of a very early legend concerning Óláfr Tryggvason see the *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* of Hallfreðr Óttarsson vv. 18–23 (Heslop 2012, 425–34).

[3] While power is defined as the ability to influence somebody to do something that he/she would not have done, authority refers to a claim of legitimacy, the justification and right to exercise power. Royal authority needs acceptance, trust, and respect from the 'audience', the people: see Lincoln 1995, 8–10.

The Óðinn Stories

Of these stories about the two Óláfrs the oldest that we know of in terms of the written record is from *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, written by the Icelander Oddr munkr Snorrason (abbreviated OMS). The original saga text in Latin from *c.* 1190 is lost but transcripts exist of an Icelandic translation probably made around 1200 (Ólafur Halldórsson 1982). Another version of the story appears in the saga of Óláfr Tryggvason in *Heimskringla* (HK), written by Snorri Sturluson *c.* 1225–35. It is a little shorter but otherwise very similar to Oddr's.[4] Two *þættir* describe a meeting between Óðinn (or a person with an Óðinn name or Odinic appearance) and Óláfr Tryggvason. They are *Norna-Gests þáttr* (NGÞ) and *Helga þáttr Þórissonar* (HÞÞ).[5] Both NGÞ and HÞÞ are from *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, written *c.* 1300.[6] In NGÞ the meeting between the king and the Norse god is recounted in a rather complex narrative that includes a poem.[7] NGÞ can be

[4] Oddr Snorrason tells that the meeting took place at Christmas (Finnur Jónsson 1932, 131, chap. 43; Petersen and others 1836, 256, chap. 39), while Snorri places it at Easter (Schjött 1900, 196, chaps 63–64). Feasting and drinking in the hall has a bigger part in Oddr's version, and it is clearly stated that the drinking ritual was held according to tradition. In both versions information about the legendary King Augvaldr at Ǫgvaldsnes on the island of Karmøy, Rogaland, south-west Norway, plays an important part. Oddr's version includes an important addition: Óðinn tells Óláfr Tryggvason that Augvaldr and the king's favourite cow are buried in the two mounds just outside the house (Finnur Jónsson 1932, 132, chap. 43; Petersen and others 1836, 257, chap. 39). The story continues the day after: 'En áhinum fiórða degi bað konungr brióta haugin huárntueggia, oc funduz i hinum meira mannzbein en kýr ihinum minna. oc sýndiz nú opinberliga allum, at þessi hinn gamli maðr hafði suma luti satt sagt' (Finnur Jónnson 1932, 136, chap. 44; Petersen and others 1836, 259, chap. 40) (On the fourth day the king said that both burial mounds should be opened. They found human bones in the larger one and the bones from a cow in the smaller. Then it became clear to all that this old man had told the truth in some respects: our translation). For other versions of the Ǫgvaldsnes story see Finnur Jónsson 1893–1901, I, 377–79; Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68, I, 375–76; and Ólafur Halldórsson 1961, 86).

[5] A *þáttr* can be defined as a semi-independent short story that stands on its own but has also to be understood as part of a narrative whole (Grønlie 2013, 19–20).

[6] Concerning the different redactions of this saga, see Ólafur Halldórsson 1982. NGÞ and HÞÞ were added to the redaction in AM 62 fol. (Grønlie 2013, 30–31).

[7] In the *Þáttr* Grímr gives Óláfr Tryggvason two gold-decorated drinking horns (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44, I, 165, chap. 1). A gold ring with special qualities said to have belonged to the legendary King Hálfr also figures in the story (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44, I, 166, chap. 2). King Hálfr was another legendary king from the same west Norwegian milieu as King Augvaldr. Norna-Gestr's poem is an Óðinn story within the main Óðinn story. In the poem a man variously called Hnikarr, Fengr, and Fjølnir,

further analysed into two versions: NGÞ I, which comprises most of the common elements in the Óðinn stories, and NGÞ II, which has only some of them. HÞÞ has an ending that differs somewhat from the other versions of the Óðinn stories.[8] Another source that contains an Óðinn story is *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* (BSS). One of the late *Íslendingasögur*, its oldest fragments are from *c.* 1390–1425 but it is preserved complete only in manuscripts from the seventeenth century (Lassen 2005, 93–94 n. 6). This complex text deals with supernatural beings in early Icelandic society, basing itself on *Landnámabók* (Barraclough 2008), and, as can be expected, fantastic elements are more prominent here than in the other variants of the Óðinn story.[9]

Óláfr Tryggvason is most often the king who receives Óðinn or an Óðinn-like figure as a guest but in some variants of the story his place is taken by Óláfr Haraldsson. A meeting between the latter king and Óðinn is recorded in *Óláfs saga helga* (OSH), as extant in *Flateyjarbók* from *c.* 1390, and contains much the same elements as the stories about Óláfr Tryggvason and Óðinn in OMS and HK.[10]

all of these names being aliases for Óðinn, gives advice on how to win battles. Gestr is baptized and dies immediately afterwards, but the story ends with practically the same sentence as in the Qgvaldsnes story: 'þótti konungi at mikit mark at sǫgum hans, ok þótti sannast um lífdaga hans, sem hann sagði' (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44, I, 187, chap. 12) ('The king thought his stories were highly significant and thought they had proven truest regarding his own lifetime: our translation). The story could appear to accentuate a Christian ending but this is ambiguous. Óláfr is here not portrayed as the teacher of Christianity; he is the one being taught about the heroic pagan past by Gestr. Óláfr's encounter with the past through Norna-Gestr is in the end more important than Gestr's salvation: see McDonald 2011, 6–8.

[8] In this story three men, Helgi and two men named Grímr, come to Óláfr Tryggvason at his manor Alreksstaðir. The guests explain that they are sent by Guðmundr of Glasisvellir, another representative of the pagan past. They bring a gift from Guðmundr, two very special drinking horns decorated with gold. The king welcomes them, invites them to the hall, and fills the drinking horns. He has a bishop bless the drink. The guests realize that the king has deceived them and disappear with a loud noise. The king keeps the drinking horns and uses them (Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1943–44, III, 419–26, chaps 1–2).

[9] Óðinn wears a helmet, a sword, a gold ring/necklace around his neck, and another gold ring on his hand. He challenges those present to try to claim these objects. Then he disappears. Óláfr Tryggvason asks Gestr who this was. Gestr suggests King Rakni, an ancient king said to be buried with his ship and five hundred men in a huge burial mound. Then the king orders Gestr to go and get hold of the objects. They reach the burial mound and after a long fight with the inhabitants of the mound succeed in obtaining much gold, a gold neck ring, and a gold arm ring. In a miracle King Óláfr appears and helps defeat King Rakni and makes it possible to gain the objects (all references from Valdimar Ásmundarson 1902, 48–57, chaps 18–21).

[10] A difference is that Gestr asks Óláfr which of the old kings he would prefer to be if he

The above account shows that there are two distinct groups of Óðinn stories, one first written down in the late twelfth century and early thirteenth century and a later one first written down in the fourteenth century. Continuity between the two groups exists. For instance, NGÞ has the same fixed structure and common elements as the oldest stories and one sentence is practically identical to its counterpart in OMS. But there are also new elements which cannot be proven to have an older inspiration. In *Flateyjarbók* we find a version of the obviously much older Ǫgvaldsnes story (see Table 8) placed close to NGÞ. They are probably meant to be read together. We will focus on the elements which the earlier and the later Óðinn stories have in common.

In these stories there is a symbiosis of narrative, rituals, mythology, politically important factual places, existing prehistoric monuments, material culture, and real, very significant historical figures. We will analyse these intertwined elements as a totality. The fixed elements in the stories are as follows: Óðinn is disguised as a one-eyed man hiding his face with a cloak or hat. He usually uses the name Gestr or Grímr.[11] Sometimes his old age is noted. He appears in the evening during Christmas or Easter celebrations, when the king is in residence at one of the royal manors. These are real places which comprise some of the politically most important locations of the time. Feasting is taking place in the hall when Óðinn appears, and welcoming and drinking rituals are being performed. The scene where the king welcomes Óðinn is given particular emphasis. Sometimes it is underlined that bidding the guest welcome has to be done in the right way. During Óðinn's stay the king asks him to talk about the past. The god shows extensive esoteric knowledge of legendary kings and battles. The king's interest in the rulers of the past is emphasized in the stories; he repeatedly seeks further information. The conversation usually continues after the festivities in the hall have ceased, often in the middle of the night, when Óðinn and the king are alone.

could. The king says he wishes to be no heathen man but when Gestr insists he chooses Hrólfr kraki. Gestr is not satisfied with the answer and asks the king if he would rather be the king who achieved victory in every battle and was so handsome and good at sports that nobody was better. The king understands that it is Óðinn who stands before him. He takes a book of hours (*tíðabók*) and goes to hit Óðinn on the head with it. Gestr then disappears (all references from Sigurður Nordal 1944–45, 218–19, chap. 106; Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68, II, 134–35, chap. 106).

[11] Óðinn is disguised in all the stories. The name Grímr means 'helmet', 'mask', 'unknown and hidden person'. Óðinn was always masked when he travelled among humans: see Steinsland 2000, 2. The word Gestr means 'guest' or 'stranger', a word also used by certain members of the king's *hirð*: see Kaplan 2004, 94.

In some of the stories a bishop takes part and in various ways tries to interrupt them. Often Óðinn gives the king symbolically significant objects like gold rings and gold-decorated drinking horns as gifts or makes it possible for the king to obtain them in other ways. These objects are related to the legendary kings of whom Óðinn speaks. Ancient monuments in the form of grave mounds and standing stones related to the ancient kings are mentioned; these are all factual and some still exist today. In several stories Óðinn's information is verified either by a direct statement that he tells the truth or by exploration of the grave mounds.

The references to the Norse god need some elaboration. In some of the stories it is clearly stated that the stranger is the god. In others, in particular some of the later ones, the association to the god becomes more subtle. But the guest consistently bears an Óðinn name or is referred to as being one-eyed, very old, and wearing a low hat, well-known Óðinn characteristics. Merrill Kaplan has examined the references to the god in the stories in *Flateyjarbók*. Here they are weaker than in the older versions: 'It is left to the reader to draw the conclusion that the mysterious, wisdom-spouting figure was in fact Óðinn' (Kaplan 2004, 109). But, as Kaplan observes, a stranger named Gestr appearing on the royal threshold probably would have been enough of a hint for a medieval audience to identify the visitor. An important aspect of all the stories is that the stranger who visits the kings is a powerful representative of the past.

There also exist some other narratives which follow the same general pattern but with significant differences. Some of these are of interest to our analysis. One is the story where Óðinn meets Óláfr Tryggvason when the king is building his big warship 'Ormrinn Langi' (the Long Serpent).[12] Another is found in the Eddic poem *Grímnismál*, dealing with the mythological King Geirrøðr.[13]

[12] This story is found in several versions of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, including *Flateyjarbók*. Óláfr is unable to obtain timber suitable for a keel to fit the ship's size. Óðinn then comes to him using the name Forni. He has brought with him good timber as a gift. Óðinn says he is an old friend of the king, possibly referring to his visit to the king earlier. When Óláfr Tryggvason sees the timber he asks his men to cut it in two. Then a venomous snake comes out of it. The king realizes that Óðinn had been his guest and asks the bishop to bless the timber. It is then used for the keel and they succeed in building the huge war ship (Ólafur Halldórsson 1961, II, 173–74).

[13] The story about King Geirrøðr is told in *Grímnismál*, from the so-called *Poetic Edda*, compiled in the thirteenth century (Neckel 1962). In 'the darkest days of the year' (Christmas) Grímnir comes to Geirrøðr. The king had in his youth received knowledge from Óðinn but later, after becoming a powerful ruler, he forgets the god who had helped him. Óðinn then travels to the world of humans to find out what Geirrøðr does. He comes to the king's hall and sits down, uttering nothing even when spoken to. The king tries to force him to speak, but Grímnir sits

Finally we draw attention to the *þáttr* about the entering of the burial mound of Óláfr Geirstaðaálf, a legendary petty king from the Viking Age in Vestfold, east Norway.[14]

Common Elements in the Stories

a) Place: The Royal Manors

Place is significant in the stories. In Scandinavia the royal manors constituted the seats of power in the later Iron Age and early medieval period. They were key administrative centres, particularly important on ceremonial occasions like the pre-Christian celebration of winter solstice (*Yule*/*Jól*), later absorbed within the Christmas festival, when the king and his men and allies gathered for the great feasts where drinking rituals played an important part.

Óðinn visits the kings at the following places:[15]

- Ǫgvaldsnes, present day Avaldsnes on Karmøy, south-west Norway, a royal manor associated with petty kings; legends of the past often have their setting there. Ǫgvaldsnes must have been important for ancient kingship in the area known as Rogaland.

there between two fires for eight nights, without food and drink. On the ninth night the guest finally talks, at great length, about esoteric topics in the world of gods and men, things that no human can know. Now King Geirrøðr understands whom he had mistreated as a guest in his house. Óðinn's last greeting to the king is the words: 'Yggr wants you, soon your life will come to an end', whereupon King Geirrøðr stumbles on his own sword and dies. *Grímnismál* v. 2 states (Neckel 1962, 57): 'Átta nætr sat ec milli elda hér, svá at mér mangi mat né bauð, nema einn Agnarr, er einn scal ráða, Geirroðar sonr, Gotna landi' (For eight nights I sat here between the fires, such that no man offered me food except Agnarr and he alone shall rule Gotland: our translation). Agnarr, who had treated Óðinn well and welcomed him with something to drink, now becomes the new king. On *Grímnismál*, see Steinsland 2005, 170–71.

[14] The legendary King Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr comes to a man called Hrani, also an Óðinn name, in a dream and asks him to open Óláfr's burial mound and take out the sword, ring, and belt. These objects make it possible for Ásta to give birth to the child who is to become King Óláfr Haraldsson. The latter obtains the valuable items as a gift, creating a belief that Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr's soul has been transferred to Óláfr Haraldsson. This *þáttr* is preserved in six different texts: see Spurkland (1997). An analysis of the story is given by Røthe (2000).

[15] See Table 8 for references. Not all stories give the name of the place where the meeting between Óðinn and the king occurred.

Table 8: A summary of important elements in the Óðinn stories. OT = Óláfr Tryggvason, OH = Óláfr Haraldsson.

Source	King	Royal manor	Feast in the hall on sacred days	Óðinn in disguise, Óðinn name, or Odinic appearance	Drinking/ welcoming ritual	Stories told in a private room at night	Tales of ancient kings	Transfer of objects	Type of objects/ gifts
OMS	OT	Ǫgvaldsnes (Avaldsnes)	Christmas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes ('haugbrot')	Bones from a legendary king
HK	OT	Ǫgvaldsnes (Avaldsnes)	Easter*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Possibly meat of high quality
NGÞ I (Grim)	OT	Hláðir (Lade/ Niðaróss)	Christmas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (gift)	Drinking horns, gold rings
NGÞ II (Gestr)		Same		Yes			Yes	Yes (possibly inheritance)	Fragment of the gold saddle ring of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, hair of Grani, teeth of Starkað
HÞÞ	OT	Alrekstaðir (Årstad/ Bergen)	Christmas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (gift)	Drinking horns
BSS	OT	Yes (unnamed)	Christmas	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes ('haugbrott')	Gold rings
OSH	OH			Yes		Yes	Yes	No	No

* The meeting between King Óláfr and Óðinn takes place at the same time as the story about the sorcerers who were put on the skerry Skrattasker to die (Heimskringla, chap. 63).

- Alrekstaðir, present day Årstad, west Norway, a royal manor also associated with legendary petty kings. The site was very important for the region known as Hǫrðaland. Close to Alrekstaðir was the medieval town of Bergen.
- Hlaðir, present day Lade, a manor in Trøndelag, central Norway. The earls of Hlaðir ruled Norway during certain periods of the late Viking Age. Close to Hlaðir was the medieval town of Trondheim (Niðaróss).

Óðinn thus meets the two kings at key sites associated with old petty kingdoms ruled by some of the legendary kings mentioned in the stories. These places were of great symbolic importance for all medieval Norway. The symbolically significant objects which Óðinn gives Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, or makes it possible for the kings to obtain, are related to these legendary kings and petty kingdoms. The person who had the right to use, live at, and perform vital rituals at such places, recognized as being of special significance in the minds of a large group of people, could claim special political authority.

b) Time and Occasion: Feasting on Sacred Days

Most of the Óðinn stories take place during the Christmas period. The participants in the midwinter feast, in celebration of *jól*, the pagan antecedent of Christmas, seem to have represented a microcosm of society. The king and his political allies gather to create or confirm their relations (Hille 2007, 43–48). In the hall there is feasting with an abundance of food and drink of especially high quality. A significant aspect is the emphasis on hospitality and the right welcome, sometimes through use of a drinking cup or horn. Showing hospitality constituted a fundamental ideal in Viking and medieval society and held special importance at the midwinter feast, both in pagan tradition and subsequently. The stories clearly concern the rules and dangers involved in the act of hospitality.[16] To welcome Óðinn the right way can be seen as one of the most important aspects. Christmas was the darkest time of the year and a turning point filled with fear of the future. It was critical because at that time powerful and potentially dangerous beings could appear, in particular Óðinn (Hille 2007). His nickname *Jólnir*, a derivative of *jól*, signals that he played a central role at this time of the year (Weiser-Aall 1982, 8). The dangerous forces appeared at night. Óðinn visiting

[16] For an interpretation of the Óðinn stories in *Flateyjarbók* and the importance and danger of hospitality, see Kaplan 2004; Kaplan 2011, 151–91.

kings at the darkest hours during Christmas should be seen in this context. If rules of hospitality were broken when these otherworldly beings turned up, the consequences could be severe.

Having a key role in society's most important feasts and showing the ability to perform hospitality were vital aspects of legitimate political authority. Any political act taking place on such occasions automatically gained an aura of legitimacy. Hospitality, generosity, feasting, drinking rituals, and the time of the year carry subtle associations with fertility symbolism. Failure to conduct the rituals in the right way could affect the future. If we compare the Óðinn stories to the Geirrøðr story, this aspect becomes more pronounced. In the latter there is a clear requirement for the king to provide for his people, be generous, and show hospitality. Such ideas could seem to be distorted and ambiguous in the Óðinn stories but there is a clear focus on the importance of the right welcome, drinking rituals, and an abundance of special food. Whether or not ideas existed as to the kings' duty and ability to 'bestow blessings on their people, such as harvest, prosperity and peace' is a topic that has been extensively canvassed (summarized in Sundqvist 2002). Some scholars have suggested that the ability to bestow prosperity and fertility was a requirement for the right to rule. Such a criterion shows similarities to the demands of glorious origin and access to divine knowledge (Gunnes 1971, 31). Nature's fertility is seen as God intervening in the chosen king's favour. The sagas fairly often refer to good or bad harvests in connection with the rule of kings, in pagan as well as Christian times. Sverre Bagge finds these ideas compatible with Christianity (Bagge 1996, 103). Of importance here is that the Óðinn stories underline the requirement for the king to uphold the rules of hospitality, perform the rituals at vital turning points of the year, and show the ability to be generous and provide for the people. In the Geirrøðr story we see the consequences for a king who failed to do this: he lost the right to rule and died. It will be of particular interest to find possible references to such beliefs in stories about the missionary kings.

c) Transfer of Knowledge

Óðinn's offer to share his knowledge about heroic kings of the past and the world of the gods is a central theme in the stories. This communication of knowledge usually happens late at night, after the feasting in the hall has ended, in a private setting well-suited for occult stories. The situation carries associations with forms of rites of passage, where initiates gain access to secret knowledge in a sequestered location (Van Gennep 1999 [1909]). The story about Óðinn's meeting with

Óláfr Haraldsson seems to have a double meaning. It appears that Óláfr rejects Óðinn and yet Óðinn achieves his objective. The rites of passage were performed according to rule on this occasion as well. A parallel occurs in the Eddic poem *Hyndluljóð*. According to Gro Steinsland the poem tells how a godlike figure initiates a young man to become king. This is part of an ideology of kingship associated with Óðinn where such a transfer of knowledge is vital (Steinsland 1991, 242–59; Steinsland 1997, 125–54; Steinsland 2012, 97). An older myth about initiation might be the background and inspiration for these stories. Jens Peder Schjødt, in his interpretation of the Haddingr myth in *Gesta Danorum*, analyses Óðinn as an agent of initiation, conferring advice and skills on the young hero. The phenomenon of initiation comprises the whole spectrum of functions that can be seen in Óðinn (Schjødt 2004, 43–56; Schjødt 2008). Both the kings in the Óðinn stories, like Haddingr, gain an elevation in status through their meeting with the Norse god, irreversible except by Óðinn himself. The endeavour to give people the impression that the king has access to unique knowledge may be interpreted as an attempt to construct royal authority. Olof Sundqvist (2002) has emphasized that ritual initiation is an absolute requirement for the right to rule. Such an initiation would be of special political importance in a situation with competing rivals (Fleck 1970, 39–49; Steinsland 1997, 145–46).

d) Chosen and Tested

An important aspect in all the stories is that Óðinn chooses a king when he visits him on his own initiative. Steinsland underlines this in her interpretation of the story about Geirrøðr (Steinsland 2005, 170). Annette Lassen has shown that in *Grímnismál* Óðinn is portrayed as a god who can decide who should be allowed to reign (Lassen 2011, 356–57). The story about Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr and the birth of Óláfr Haraldsson can also be seen in this light. Being chosen by a god to be king is an obvious foundation of legitimate royal authority. The legitimacy of a king who succeeds in giving the impression that he has such a powerbase cannot be questioned. It provides an individual with a political position which rests upon connection to powerful cosmological forces (Metcalf and Huntington 1991).

Óðinn finds out who is a worthy king by using a test, a fundamental element in the stories. The test consists of at least three parts: 1) hospitality and generosity expressed in the way Óðinn is welcomed; 2) interest in Óðinn's knowledge, in particular about the past; 3) acceptance of his gifts. While most of Óðinn's gifts are accepted and used some are rejected. Kings like Geirrøðr and Hrólfr kraki did not show hospitality, rejected the god's gifts and knowledge, and thereby failed

the test. Geirrøðr lost the kingship and died. Losing the right to rule was thus the consequence of failing Óðinn's test. Both Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson passed the test and proved themselves worthy kings, a fundamental requirement for royal authority. Military success and legendary battles play an important role in the Óðinn stories. A reward for passing the god's test is apparently to become victorious in war, a requirement for legitimate rule. Hrólfr kraki exemplifies a king who failed the test and therefore lost his ability to win wars; eventually he also lost the kingship. This does not exclude that a successful, victorious king might eventually die in battle — construed as Óðinn or the Valkyries choosing him to dwell in Valhǫll with the Einherjar.

e) Transfer of Signatures of Kingship

In the Óðinn stories the kings receive some highly significant symbolic objects from the god, or else Óðinn provides the kings with the information they need to find these themselves. The objects, which stem mainly from old grave mounds and belonged originally to powerful rulers or heroes of the past, are gold rings, gold-decorated drinking horns, bones from an old king's grave, and in the Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr story a sword, ring, and belt. In NGÞ II there is a transfer of highly symbolic objects to Óláfr Tryggvason from another powerful representative of the past. Gestr carries with him a fragment of the gold saddle-ring of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, a lock of hair from Grani's tail, and two molars from Starkaðr. Grani is an Óðinn reference since the horse was a gift from the god and had been sired by Sleipnir. Starkaðr was a Norse mythological hero closely connected with Óðinn. Gestr dies and Kaplan suggests that these important objects would have passed to King Óláfr as inheritance. Gestr, the old representative of the past, with an Óðinn name, was here 'a channel through which heritable good might flow' (Kaplan 2004, 98–99, 101).

Receiving such special items must constitute a very significant political act. The symbolic objects appearing in the Óðinn stories seem to be ancient regalia or bones or objects with similarities to relics, originating in pre-Christian petty kingdoms. Attaining these objects gave the kings a connection to the ancient rulers associated with the places where the stories take part. An assumption of control of the royal manors and these objects could be interpreted as gaining ritual possession of the land over which these petty kings once ruled. With the transfer of emblems of kingship a transfer of power also takes place. This must be a vital part of what the Óðinn stories want to tell. The *þáttr* about Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr also indicates a transfer of the right to rule from a legendary ancient king to the new king Óláfr Haraldsson (Røthe 2000, 179). We find a parallel

in *Gesta Danorum* where Óðinn comes to Haddingr and gives him the tools he needs to be king. To obtain these objects must have been especially important if a pretender's descent from the old legendary kings was lacking or in question. The transfer of the objects creates an impression of continuity of power, suggesting that the kings in the stories are the rightful heirs of the rulers of the past. In this way the major burial mounds and the objects from them could serve as a form of legal documents or charters which proved the right of ownership (Steinsland 2012, 84; Skre 1997, 37–52). Possibly the main objective of the ritual of so-called 'haugbrot' (breaking open of grave mounds) was to legitimate transfer of power and the right to rule over regions or the petty kingdoms in which the royal manors were key political sites (Soma 2007, 6; see also Brendalsmo and Røthe 1992). This transfer of old legitimate power from the past to new kings could likewise be the main objective in the stories.

The Construction of Royal Authority

It appears that most important common elements in the Óðinn stories are chosen to construct authority. Bruce Lincoln has suggested that

> discursive authority is not so much an entity as it is (1) an effect; (2) the capacity for producing that effect; and (3) the commonly shared opinion that a given actor has the capacity for producing that effect. More precisely, it takes the effect to be the result of the conjuncture of the right speaker, the right speech and delivery, the right staging and props, the right time and place, and an audience whose historically and culturally conditioned expectations establish the parameters of what is judged 'right' in all these instances. (Lincoln 1995, 10–11)

If broken up into single factors, the Óðinn stories contain 'the conjuncture of' exactly those elements:

> the right speaker = the most important Norse god/founding father kings
> the right speech = stories of a golden past
> the right staging = feasting in the hall
> the right props = emblems of kingship/relics
> the right time = most important days of the year
> the right place = the royal manors

In this way, it appears that old requirements of legitimate authority are put together in the Óðinn stories to create the basis of a new political order. The stories seem to show a way of obtaining the basic requirements of royal authority.

The king has legitimate authority when he is part of a long tradition, is beneficial to the people (gives prosperity and protection and is victorious in war), is morally just (worthy), and has received power from a god. This comes close to Max Weber's definition of 'traditional authority' (Weber 1958). The main difference is that according to the Óðinn stories the right to rule and thus royal authority were given by a god instead of through membership of the right dynasty. This gives the impression of a pragmatic 'whatever works' attitude as the underlying principle behind the selection of the different elements in the stories. Pragmatism is a good point of departure in a process of creating authority. Partly contradictory sources of legitimacy may constitute a challenge and put fragile states in a precarious position. In the Óðinn stories we find an intermingling and a compromise between two such contradictory sources of authority, one based on having been there for a long time and in line with tradition — a form of 'traditional authority' — and one that represents a break away from this. According to the latter, political authority was no longer achieved through descent from an old royal family. Instead the right to rule was given by a god. In this way highly contradictory needs were reconciled into a comprehensive and meaningful narrative. Elements from an older culture are synthesized and transferred to a new political order with weak inheritance rights. The facts are old, but brought together this way they form a new understanding of the new kings and the order of society they represented. And because the different elements in the stories are old and real and most likely very significant in the minds of the audience, telling these stories could have a profound impact.

This has consequences for the relationship between the king and the people. The fate of the people is closely related to the fate of the ruler. By reforming his own life the king could improve the situation of the people. Should the king fail, all inhabitants of the realm would be punished with calamities like famine, pestilence, and defeat in war. The Óðinn stories leave no doubt that the acts of the kings influence human welfare in a fundamental way. When the ideals of kingship are upheld, society thrives. The coming of a new ruler with a legitimate authority who respects the old values and traditions could introduce another golden age. Therefore a king's relationship to his people is critical for society. He is a good or a bad ruler depending on his ability to realize the ideals expressed in the stories.

The Óðinn Stories in a European Perspective

The kings' visits to the most important royal manors, the feasting, and the transfer of objects from the old regime to the new ruler can be compared to the

adventus ritual practised in kingdoms further south in Europe. The adventus of a lord was the obligatory ceremonial reception of a new king on his arrival at a place of importance. It was used by both Christian and pre-Christian rulers and symbolized the beginning of a new age of peace, fertility, happiness, and victory. The arriving king represented the ideal ruler. The ritual often included references to the past and the founding fathers of the kingdom (Lundin 2006, 372–73). The king's formal journey through his new kingdom could also take him to the places where the former rulers were buried, thereby gaining legitimacy, creating the impression of continuity, and taking possession of the land. During these visits key members of the previous regime signalled their acceptance of the new king by welcoming him (Koziol 2012, 105–08).

To better understand the form of political thinking behind the Óðinn stories, it is necessary to investigate whether they were part of a common European tradition. Charlemagne's role for the French state after his death seems relevant. The 'haugbrot' described in the Óðinn stories can be compared to the opening of the emperor's grave (Geoffrey Koziol, pers. comm., 2013). In the eleventh, as well as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Charlemagne's reign stood out as a golden age, seeming to symbolize the ideal of Christian kingship. He was seen as the progenitor of Capetian France. In subsequent epochs any perceived or actual connection to Charlemagne helped to legitimate claims of kingship (Stuckey 2006, 78–79). A Norwegian example is the introduction of 'Magnus' as a common name of kings and pretenders to the throne, the first being Magnús Haraldsson inn góði (king 1035–47). Charlemagne's tomb became an important part of political praxis. It was opened twice: Otto III officiated at the first opening in 1009 and Frederic Barbarossa at the second in 1165. Barbarossa removed bones from the grave, an act calculated to establish him as the emperor's heir, working for a revival of the empire, with its peace and prosperity. Being able to connect the royal line to Charlemagne was an important political tool. Anne A. Latowsky shows how some stories about Charlemagne were manipulated to shape the institutions of kingship and empire, and new versions of the stories resurfaced in times of transition (Latowsky 2013). As in the Óðinn stories, it is possible to see the definition of the ideal and legitimate king in narratives of the past. The growing body of legend about Charlemagne presented him as the defender of his people, victorious in battle, a creator of peace and prosperity, and so forth. His respect for traditional 'custom' was another criterion for his greatness. The opposite of these ideals defined a bad king (Stuckey 2006, 79–81, 87–88).

Similar forms of political praxis existed in England. The Norman Conquest was brought about by war and force and to alleviate this the Norman kings tried to emphasize that they were the legitimate successors of Edward the Confessor, the last English king (Jones 2002). During William the Conqueror's kingship (1066–87), the past served as a political tool. He enhanced a dual claim to legitimacy: as a ruler according to the 'customs' of Edward the Confessor and as a representative of the legitimate dynasty (Hok-ming Cheung 2007, 179–96). Edward's tomb was opened on two occasions in the twelfth century. In 1102 regalia were taken out and in 1163/64 Henry II removed Edward's bones (Jones 2002, 107). The translation of the bones on the latter occasion was attended by ambiguous and fantastic tales, promoting the legitimacy of Norman rule (Jones 2002, 115). The Norman development of the cult of Edward reflects the creation of the ideal ruler, as in the Charlemagne narratives.

These examples from important European states like France and England show that from the early eleventh century, if not earlier, the opening of graves of important rulers served as a powerful political instrument. Both bones and objects were in this way transferred to new dynasties whose inheritance rights were weak or disputed but who possibly harboured aspirations of rebuilding a golden past. It was a refined form of propaganda to legitimate new political orders at times of transition and conflict, possibly also fostering a development towards a stronger centralized monarchy, as in Norway.

Storytelling and the Construction of Royal Authority in a Fragile State: The Twelfth Century

Narratives of this kind could be important because

> symbols and historical sagas serve as essential features of social and political life as they help to justify actions, signal expectations, and aid in legitimizing political leadership. In situations of fragility in which different norms co-exist, leaders try their best to secure whatever links with those symbols and historical sagas to strengthen their power. (Bellina and others 2009, 26)

Lack of authority and order are major contributors to state fragility (Bellina and others 2009, 8). We see the Óðinn stories as attempts from political agents in both the eleventh and the latter part of the twelfth centuries to 'secure the links' to the most important historic symbols. Opening the graves of legendary kings in England and on the Continent may have inspired aspiring rulers further north to use the past to seek confirmation of new regimes.

From 1130 onwards, as we have seen, attempts at state formation in Norway became undermined by conflicts between pretenders to the throne and substantial regional division. The resulting civil wars may have given these traditional stories a new relevance, in a context of efforts to create a more legitimate state in the eyes of the community being ruled over. More tangible political measures were also taken to enhance political stability in Norway, for instance the law securing the right of the first-born legitimate son to inherit the throne (1163), reducing the political power of the local assemblies and promoting the influence of the king and his council.

In a recent contribution to explain the late twelfth-century political changes in Norway, the importance of the reformed church and an increasing threat from a revitalized Danish kingdom from *c.* 1160 has been emphasized (Orning 2014). But the increasingly important role of the Church and Danish expansion were also of course very relevant features in the first half of the eleventh century. The founding-father kings in the Óðinn stories successfully promoted Norwegian interests around the turn of the first millennium. When the stories were retold in the latter part of the twelfth century, Danish kings were again claiming supremacy over Norway based on old rights (Bjørgo 1995, 42–43). From this perspective using pre-existing stories to enhance the legitimacy of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson could be a deliberate move by the anti-Danish milieux in Norway.

To try to pinpoint the actual historical agents who may have promoted the Óðinn stories is difficult because of the uncertain dating of the narratives. But perhaps there exists a parallel use of the past that might throw light on the case. The same author who put the oldest of the Óðinn stories into writing, Oddr Snorrason, was also involved in creating or manipulating another story at about the same time, the Sunniva legend. Like the oldest known versions of the Óðinn story, the Sunniva legend occurs in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, a redaction based on the original saga text in Latin from *c.* 1190, and there exists a younger retelling in *Flateyjarbók*. The background to this legend is better known than that of the Óðinn stories. It was first written during the reign of Magnús Erlingsson (king *c.* 1161–84) and the Church played a part in creating it, possibly through the bishop in Bergen (O'Hara 2009). The Sunniva legend could have been used to bolster the uncertain inheritance claims of Magnús. Possibly the king's very powerful father, Erlingr skakki, leader of the 'lendmann' faction, was involved. As O'Hara (2009) has pointed out, the telling of this legend might have been important at a time when a strong, central authority to maintain order was lacking.

Among the markedly strategic political thinkers of the second half of the twelfth century were Erlingr skakki and his son, King Magnús Erlingsson, with

their close ties to the Church and the archbishop in Niðaróss. Although the authors of the kings' sagas and also many modern historians claim that there was one long dynastic line all the way from Haraldr hárfagri (king *c.* 872–930) to the kings of the high Middle Ages, this is highly disputable (Krag 1989). Two weak links in the chain are exactly the two kings to whom Óðinn paid a visit, Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson. Magnús himself also had a weak power basis, claiming the throne through female descent: his mother was the daughter of King Sigurðr Magnússon (Sigurd the Crusader). Creating an alternative way of transferring the legitimate power of the past to the new king must therefore have been ideologically important. A possible historical context for the Óðinn stories is that they were retold to support claims to the throne from pretenders with weak inheritance rights but with ambitions to build a stable, centralized state parallel to the efforts of Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson.

Erlingr skakki and King Magnús were both defeated in battle and killed by the highly capable Sverrir Sigurðarson (king 1184–1202), leader of the 'birkebeiner' faction. Sverrir made vigorous use of the Óláfr ideology, seeing himself as the heir of the saintly king. His right to the throne by inheritance was in fact utterly tenuous, his claim resting on being the illegitimate son of a former pretender. To improve his position he claimed to have obtained the right to rule directly from God (Helle 1974, 76–78). Sverrir's political ideology was also based on his being the heir of the founding-father kings of the past, in particular the saintly Óláfr Haraldsson, 'Rex Perpetuus Norvegiae' (Norway's eternal king). As a master of political propaganda, Sverrir used storytelling to strengthen his right to the throne (Krag 2005, 53).

Another Icelander besides Oddr Snorrason may have played a role in the first written version of the Óðinn stories. He is Karl Jónsson, the abbot of Þingeyrar monastery in northern Iceland, where Oddr also lived and worked. In 1185 Karl went to Norway, where he got into contact with Sverrir. The king was obviously impressed by the learned Icelander and engaged Karl as author of his saga. The abbot wrote the first part of it in close cooperation with the king (Krag 2005, 46–47). In 1188 or 1189 Karl returned to Þingeyrar, where he was abbot until 1207. Thus Karl, who from his contact with Sverrir must have been very aware of how history could be used to legitimate political aims, was head of Þingeyrar when Oddr wrote down the oldest known version of the Óðinn stories.

Could the Church have played a role here? During the twelfth century the Church in Norway greatly improved its position, economically, politically, and ideologically. As a close ally of Magnús Erlingsson, it worked to strengthen state institutions but after Magnús's death, led by the archbishop in Niðaróss, it increasingly tried to rise above the political factions and regional divisions and

promote stability and peace on a more general level (Helle 1974, 38–39, 68). The Church had also been very significant in the political state building attempts in the eleventh century, promoting stories that idealized the founding father kings in order to strengthen the fragile young state. One way of doing this was focusing on something everybody had in common, for instance the past with its legendary kings and heroes.

In this connection it may be useful to consider what Victor Turner has called the resolution to 'social drama'. When conflict has reached an unacceptable level, a means of achieving harmony is to direct attention to a higher level, to something everybody has in common. This would generate new myths and symbols (Turner 1967, 91–92; Turner 1974, 33, 99) or revitalize old ones. We cannot prove that the Church was actively involved in this but it had a clear motive for contributing to developing a stable state with a stronger sense of unity. The church leaders also knew that using references to a common glorious past was a method to achieve this: 'State-builders cannot do otherwise than draw upon the prevailing cultural resources available to them as they seek to build a unified collective identity, and in doing so mark out the boundaries of the sovereign state as the boundary of the moral community' (Walzer 1967, 3–4). Historically established symbols, such as the bones of heroes of the past, the glory of founding-father figures, traditional rituals, and impressions of sharing the qualities of symbolically important characters, could contribute to forming such a community. This would of course have been a proven method: 'Historical processes of state formation are replete with examples of how the would-be state was able to appropriate existing sources of legitimacy and make them supportive of the emerging state' (Bellina and others 2009, 11).

Thus we suggest that the Óðinn stories can be regarded as strategies of symbolic manipulation in order to legitimate royal authority and improve the symbolic foundations of a stronger state at times of crisis. Those who listened to them were given the impression that Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, the founding-father kings, stood for the ideals of the ancient past, representing a continuation of its legendary rulers. But in reality the stories promoted the beginning of a new political and religious order. Ultimately we see these stories as telling an audience that efforts to create a centralized and unified Norwegian kingdom in the eleventh or at the end of the twelfth century were legitimate. The essential requirements of authority were obtained not by having the right ancestry but as a gift from a god, in this case the Christian god and his representatives on earth, the Church.

Metaphorical Tales

Instead of seeing the Óðinn narratives as stories about two individual kings, they may be looked upon as metaphorical tales about a people and a kingdom at politically precarious times. The kingdom was in crisis, possibly near a breakdown, when the society's identity needed considerable effort to be preserved, or possibly rather created. The state territory during these periods cannot be seen as a fixed entity; it was dominated by constantly changing factions. A focus on a perception of a common origin in a golden age of the past could have been promoted by political leaders wanting to create a sense of unity. Patrick J. Geary has pointed to the fluidity of such old identities, influenced by new groups coming and disappearing. What remained was the belief that the group possessed an ancient and divinely sanctioned past (Geary 2002, 79).

The Óðinn stories' interest in the past is crucial, because the ancient past could provide material for a 'process of distinction', conferring difference from other groups without being overly excluding (Pohl 1998). Names and laws, but also narratives, affirmed the separate existence of a group with an exclusive claim over a certain area (Pohl 1998, 2). Medieval thinkers often looked to the moment of primary acquisition, the first arrival in *terra nova*, to establish a sacred territory and a national identity (Geary 2002, 156). From this perspective the Óðinn stories can be looked upon as a tool to manipulate old traditions, important rituals, legends, monuments, and symbolic artefacts to create a myth of origin which people living in an area dominated by division had in common. The elements in the stories were synthesized and subtly changed to fit a new political order and serve as model for the future. Such a symbolic construction of a society was of course nothing new. It had been an ongoing process that started in Late Antiquity (see for instance Corradini, Diesenberger, and Reimitz 2002). Legends of ethnogenesis are according to Geary (2002, 44, 53) essentially of two sorts. One describes the origins of the royal family that establishes its right to authority over a people. There are examples of a founding king being attached to a god or hero. Like many of the myths of new kingdoms formed in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Bagge 2008, 158), the Óðinn stories deal with the dynasty, not with the people. They are a very short and compressed form of origin narratives. A new and fragile kingdom needed to define itself. Óðinn as a representative of the past accepted the founding-father kings and transferred the power to a new political order. These kings were presented as ideal and worthy rulers with the qualities needed to make society prosper. The Óðinn stories can thus be read as narratives of better times to come, a renewal of a golden age.

In an oral society where just a handful of people could read and write, story-telling had a vital role that is difficult for modern minds to grasp (see for instance

Raudvere 2005). Storytelling is basically about communication, it concerns the link between those who create the stories and those who listen to them or read them. If this communication does not work, the consequences may be grave: 'Ineffective or poor constructive linkages between state and society are defining features of states in fragile situations' (Bellina and others 2009, 4). Our assumption is that the importance of the stories in question was their ability to communicate something from those who were already in power or trying to get into that position to the people living in the territory over which they wanted to establish the right to rule. This connection leads us to the relationship between storytelling and the symbolic construction of a community.[17] Such a construction creates meaning and identity between individuals and between individuals and collectives.[18] To develop collective identities is crucial in a new and fragile state, particularly during deep conflict. The role of culture in such processes, like storytelling, is often overlooked (Rae 2002). The Óðinn stories in a simple yet sophisticated way delve deep into the nature of kingship and the basis of royal authority in a fragile state with rival pretenders to the throne and new ideas about the nature of the right to rule. Against such a background the stories could function as political tools, a refined form of propaganda to achieve acceptance for a new political order in a time of transition. Seen in this light they are Norse manifestations of a common European tradition of using the past as a political instrument of power.

[17] Based on Cohen 1985. The symbolic construction of community concerns building a sense of belonging to a social and cultural entity bigger than kin-based society. Cohen explores how a system of values, norms, and moral codes provides a sense of identity.

[18] See Jenkins 2004, 18. Identification is the systematic establishment and signification between individuals and also between individuals and collectives, a relationship of similarity and difference.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Finnur Jónsson, ed. 1893–1901. *Heimskringla: Nóregs konunga sǫgur af Snorri Sturluson*, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 23, 4 vols, Copenhagen: Møller

Finnur Jónsson, ed. 1932. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk*, Copenhagen: Gad

Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Carl R. Unger, ed. 1860–68. *Flateyjarbók, en samling af norske Konge-Sagaer med indskudte mindre Fortællinger om Begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt Annaler*, 3 vols, Christiania: Malling

Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, ed. 1943–44. *Norna-Gests þáttr in Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* 1, Reykjavik: Bókaútgáfan Forni

Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, ed. 1943–44. *Helga þáttr Þórissonar in Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* 3, Reykjavik: Bókaútgáfan Forni

Heslop, Kate. 2012. 'Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld Óttarsson. Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar', in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages I: Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, ed. Diana Whaley, Turnhout: Brepols, 400–41

Neckel, Gustav, ed. 1962. *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, I: Text, ed. Hans Kuhn, 4th rev. edn, Heidelberg: Winter

Ólafur Halldórsson, ed. 1958–2000. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ A 1–3, 3 vols, Copenhagen: Munksgaard

Ólafur Halldórsson, ed. 1961. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ A 1–3, vol. II, Copenhagen: Munksgaard

Petersen, N. M., and others, trans. 1836. *Olaf Tryggvesøns Saga af Odd Munk*, Oldnordiske Sagaer 10, Copenhagen: Det kongelige nordiske Oldskriftselskab

Sigurður Nordal, ed. 1944–45. *Flateyjarbók* 2, Akranes: Flateyjarútgáfan, Prentverk Akraness

Schjött, Steinar, ed. 1900. *Snorra Sturlusonar Kongesogur*, Kristiania: J. M. Stenersen

Valdimar Ásmundarson, ed. 1902. *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, in *Íslendinga sögur* 37, Reykjavik: Félagsprentsmiðjan

Secondary Sources

Barraclough, Eleanor Rosamund. 2008. 'Following the Trollish *Baton Sinister*: Ludic Design in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4, 15–43

Bagge, Sverre. 1996. *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed*, Odense: Odense University Press

Bagge, Sverre. 2008. 'Division and Unity in Medieval Norway', in *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs. Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Ildar H. Garipzanov, Patrick J. Geary, and Przemysław Urbańczyk, Cursor Mundi 5, Turnhout: Brepols, 145–66

Bagge, Sverre. 2010. *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom: State Formation in Norway, ca 900–1350*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum

Bagge, Sverre. 2014. *Cross and Sceptre: The Rise of the Scandinavian Kingdoms from the Vikings to the Reformation*, New York: Princeton University Press

Bellina, Severine, and others. 2009. *The Legitimacy of the State in Fragile Situations*, Oslo: Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

Bjørgo, Narve. 1995. '800–1536: Makt — og avmakt', in *Selvstendighet og union. Fra middelalderen til 1905*, Norsk utenrikspolitisk historie 1, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 17–132

Brendalsmo, Jan, and Gunnhild Røthe. 1992. 'Haugbrot eller de levendes forhold til de døde — en komparativ analyse', *Meta* 1–2, 84–119

Cohen, Anthony P. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, London: Routledge

Corradini, Richard, Max Diesenberger, and Helmut Reimitz, ed. 2002. *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, Transformation of the Roman World 12, Leiden: Brill

Fleck, Jere. 1970. 'Konr – Ottarr – Geirrøðr: A Knowledge Criterion for Succession to the Germanic Sacred Kingship', *Scandinavian Studies* 42, 39–49

Freeman, Elizabeth. 2002. *Narratives of a New Order. Cistercian Historical Writing in England, 1150–1220*, Medieval Church Studies 2, Turnhout: Brepols

Geary, Patrick J. 2002. *The Myth of Nations. The Medieval Origins of Europe*, Princeton: Princeton University Press

Grønlie, Siân. 2013. '*Þáttr* and Saga: The Long and the Short of Óláfr Tryggvason', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 9, 19–36

Gunnes, Erik. 1971. *Kongens ære*, Oslo: Gyldendal

Harris, Joseph. 1989. '*Þættir*', in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph D. Strayer and others, 13 vols, New York: Scribner, XII, 1–6

Harris, Joseph, and Thomas D. Hill. 1989. 'Gestr's Prime Sign', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 104, 103–22

Helle, Knut. 1974. *Norge blir en stat 1130–1319*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget

Hille, Ivar Lindtvedt. 2007. 'Den skandinaviske jula: vikingtidens herskerideologi, tro og kult i lys av det gamle vinterblotet' (unpublished MPhil thesis, Oslo, Universitetet i Oslo)

Hok-ming Cheung, Frederick. 2007. 'Conquest. Legitimation, and Consolidation in Norman England', in *The Legitimation of New Orders*, ed. Philip Yuen-sang Leung, Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 179–95

Jenkins, Richard. 2004. *Social Identity*, London: Routledge

Jones, Lynn. 2002. 'From Anglorum Basileus to Norman Saint: The Transformation of Edward the Confessor', *The Haskins Society Journal Studies in Medieval History* 12, 99–120

Kaplan, Merrill. 2004. 'The Past as Guest. Mortal Men, Kings' Men and Four gestir in Flateyjarbók', *Gripla* 15, 91–120

Kaplan, Merrill. 2011. *Thou Fearful Guest: Addressing the Past in Four Tales in Flateyjarbok*, Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica

Koziol, Geoffrey. 2012. *The Politics of Memory and Identity in Carolingian Royal Diplomas. The West Frankish Kingdom (840–987)*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 19, Turnhout: Brepols

Krag, Claus. 1989. 'Norge som odel i Harald Hårfagres ætt', *Historisk tidsskrift* 68, 288–302

Krag, Claus. 2005. *Sverre. Norges største middelalderkonge*, Oslo: Aschehoug

Lassen, Annette. 2005. 'Óðinn in Old Norse Texts Other than *The Elder Edda*, *Snorra Edda*, and *Ynglinga saga*', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1, 91–108

Lassen, Annette. 2011. *Odin på kristent pergament. En teksthistorisk studie*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum

Latowsky, Anne A. 2013. *Emperor of the World. Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority, 800–1229*, New York: Cornell University Press

Lincoln, Bruce. 1995. *Authority. Construction and Corrosion*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Lundin, Andreas. 2006. 'The Advent of the Esteemed Horseman-Sovereign', in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives. Origins, Changes, and Interaction*, ed. Anders Andren, Kristina Jennbert, and Catharina Raudvere, Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 369–74

McDonald, Sheryl. 2011. 'Pagan Past and Christian Future in *Norna-Gests Þáttr* and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*', *Bulletin of International Medieval Research* 15, 164–178

Metcalf, Peter, and Richard Huntington. 1991. *Celebrations of Death. The Anthropology of Mortuary ritual*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

O'Hara, Alexander. 2009. 'Constructing a Saint: The Legend of St Sunniva in Twelfth Century Norway', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5, Turnhout: Brepols, 105–21

Ólafur Halldórsson. 1982. 'Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar', in *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, 21 vols, 2nd edn, Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 12, 551–53

Opedal, Arnfrid. 2010. *Kongemakt og kongerike. Gravritualer og Avaldsnes-områdets politiske rolle 600–1000*, Oslo Archaeological Series 13, Oslo: University of Oslo

Orning, Hans Jacob. 2014. 'Borgerkrig og statsutvikling i Norge i middelalder — en revurdering', *Historisk tidsskrift* 93, 193–216

Pohl, Walter. 1998. 'Introduction: Strategies of Distinction', in *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of the Ethnic Communities 300–800*, ed. Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz, Leiden: Brill, 1–15

Rae, Heather. 2002. *State Identities and the Homogenisation of Peoples*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Raudvere, Catharina. 2005. 'The Power of the Spoken Word as Literary Motif and Ritual Practice in Old Norse Literature', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1, 179–202

Røthe, Gunhild. 2000. 'Fortellinger om Olav den Helliges fødsel og dåp i sagalitteraturen', in *Olavslegenden og den latinske historieskrivningen i 1100-tallets Norge*, ed. Inger Ekrem, Lars Boje Mortensen, and Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 170–85

Schjødt, Jens Peter. 2004. 'Odins viden — dens funktion og betydning', *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 44, 43–56

Schjødt, Jens Peter. 2008. *Initiation between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion*, The Viking Collection 17, Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark

Skre, Dagfinn. 1997. 'Haug og grav. Hva betyr gravhaugene?', in *Middelalderens symboler*, ed. Ann Christensson, Else Mundal, and Ingvild Øye, Bergen: Senter for europeiske kulturstudier, 37–52
Solheim, Svale. 1944. *Folketru og folkeliv*, Oslo: Cappelen
Soma, Rune. 2007. 'Haugbrott og herskermakt. Om gravrøveri som ritual' (unpublished MPhil thesis, Oslo, Universitetet i Oslo)
Spurkland, Terje. 1997. 'Historien om kong Olav Digerbein', in *Gokstadhøvdingen og hans tid*, ed. Tore Frost, Sandefjord: Sandefjordmuseene, 17–24
Steinsland, Gro. 1991. *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi*, Oslo: Solum
Steinsland, Gro. 1997. *Eros og død i norrøne myter*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget
Steinsland, Gro. 2000. 'Odin den maskerte: om forkledning og forvandling i norrøne myter', in *Masker*, ed. Jan Erik Rekdal and Andreas Sveen, Oslo: Sypress forlag, 39–48
Steinsland, Gro. 2005. *Norrøn religion. Myter, riter, samfunn*, Oslo: Pax
Steinsland, Gro. 2012. *Mytene som skapte Norge. Myter og makt fra vikingtid til middelalder*, Oslo: Pax
Stewart, Frances, and Graham Brown. 2010. *Fragile States*, CRISE Overview 3, Oxford: University of Oxford
Stuckey, Jace Andrew. 2006. 'Charlemagne: The Making of an Image 1100–1300' (unpublished DPhil dissertation, Gainesville, University of Florida)
Sundqvist, Olof. 2002. *Freyr's Offspring. Rulers and Religion in Ancient Svea Society*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Historia Religionum 21, Uppsala: University of Uppsala
Turner, Victor. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press
Turner, Victor. 1974. *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors. Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press
Van Gennep, Arnold (trans. Erik Ringen). 1999 [1909]. *Rites de passage. Overgangsriter*, Oslo: Pax
Walzer, Michael. 1967. 'On the Role of Symbolism in Political Thought', *Political Science Quarterly* 82, 191–204
Weber, Max. 1958. 'The Three Types of Legitimate Rule', *Berkeley Publications in Society and Institutions* 4, 1–11
Weiser-Aall, Lily. 1982. 'Jul', in *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, 21 vols, 2nd edn, Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, VIII, 6–14