

Jónas Kristjánsson, Iceland

## SUMMARY

There are in existence two long sagas of St Olaf Haraldsson, King of Norway. One is the Legendary Saga, so-called because it contains a great deal of legendary material about the king, especially towards the end where the whole of his Legendarium is presented; and the other is the Saga of St Olaf by Snorri Sturluson which exists both as an individual saga and as an integral part of Heimskringla. This saga is sometimes called the Historical Saga of St Olaf to differentiate it from the Legendary Saga. This does not mean to say that it is more accurate and reliable as an historical source as a considerable part of Snorri's saga is derived from an older version of the Legendary Saga itself. A few fragments of that version called the Oldest Saga of St Olaf are preserved in the State Archives in Oslo. It was for a long time considered the oldest of all Nordic sagas, written shortly after the middle of the twelfth century, or by about 1180 at the latest.

On account of the age of this saga it followed that material from several other works which are believed to have influenced the Legendary Saga could not have been part of the Oldest Saga when it was in its complete and original form. Scholars believed that the Oldest Saga had been abbreviated in the Legendary Saga and had formed a kind of central core, while the remainder of the younger saga had been completed with a variety of additional material from several other sources. In his book on the Saga of St Olaf Sigurður Nordal maintained that this was an exaggeration and put forward convincing proof that the Legendary Saga was for the most part a shortened version of the Oldest Saga. Nonetheless he suggested four other written works as additional sources: 1) Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum. 2) Fóstbræðrasaga. 3) Written work on Olaf's missionary activity. 4) The Legendarium at the end of the saga.

My own research into the Legendary Saga has confirmed that the missionary sections and the Legendarium have indeed been added to the original saga. On the other hand I feel certain that additional material derived from Ágrip had already constituted part of the original Oldest Saga. Hence it follows that the Oldest Saga cannot be older than c. 1190 and, in my opinion, was probably written around 1200. It has also been the chief source for the short Saga of St Olaf in Fagrskinna. Concerning Fóstbræðrasaga, I have come to the conclusion that it is far too young to have had any possible influence on the Legendary Saga and that the concluding section (on the Battle of Stiklarstaðir) is, in my opinion, but an improved version of the Oldest Saga's account, which has been preserved with minor variations in the Legendary Saga.

## THE LEGENDARY SAGA

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In ms Delagardie 8 in the University Library in Uppsala there is preserved a saga of St Olaf Haraldsson, King of Norway. The ms is Norwegian and, according to the unanimous opinion of scholars, mostly based on the research of Marius Hægstad, was written in Brændalög around 1250. The saga is to a considerable degree based on an older saga which is now for the most part lost. The Uppsala saga contains a great deal of legendary material about King Olaf, especially towards the end, where the whole of his Legendarium is inserted into the saga. For this reason it has been called the Legendary Saga, as opposed to the "Historical" Saga of St Olaf by Snorri Sturluson. The Legendary Saga, at least as regards its main body, is one of the oldest Icelandic-Norwegian sagas which have been preserved and for this reason it occupies an extremely important place, not only as a stage in the development of Icelandic-Norwegian literature but also as a source of Norwegian history. Recent studies of other sagas in which I have participated have considerably altered people's ideas about this old saga. But it has not itself been made the subject of a separate study, and so I think it is worth saying a few words about it here.

The Legendary Saga was first published in 1849, by Rudolf Keyser and C.R.Unger. Along with it they printed a few fragments from a similar saga which had been found in scraps of ms in the binding of a book in the State Archives in Oslo (NRA 52). These fragments are from an Icelandic ms which is reckoned to have been written early in the 13th century, something like a quarter of a century earlier than the ms of the Legendary Saga in Uppsala. The saga which is preserved in these fragments is also thought to be Icelandic. Gustav Storm subsequently published the fragments in a separate book and appended two fragments from an Icelandic ms in the Árni Magnússon Collection (AM 325 IV 4to) which he thought were from the same saga. He called this work *Otte Brudstykker af den ældste Saga om Olav den hellige* (Eight Fragments of the Oldest Saga of St Olaf), and consequently the saga from which the fragments come has been called the Oldest Saga of St Olaf, or simply the Oldest Saga.

Storm attempted to establish the age of the Oldest Saga from various internal characteristics in the fragments and came to the conclusion that the saga was written between 1155 and 1180, although elsewhere he says that there are good grounds for assuming that the date of composition is closer to the middle than the end of the 12th century. This statement of Storm's, along with the name itself *Oldest Saga*, was responsible for its being regarded as in actual fact the oldest of all the sagas. In older books it can be seen referred to as "Os.1160", i.e. the Saga St Olaf from 1160.

In his book on the Saga of St Olaf, Sigurður Nordal points to weaknesses in Storm's argument, but all the same he does not want to make the saga much younger. He is most inclined to the view that it was composed in the years 1160-1185. He does not give any clear reason why the saga needs to be so old, but seems in spite of his criticism to follow to some extent Storm's arguments. He is also inclined to the view that the saga is probably older than the Saga of Olaf Tryggvason by the monk Odd Snorrason; this is thought to have been written about 1190 and cannot be much younger than that. But neither Nordal nor any of the others who regard the Oldest Saga as being older than Odd's Ólafssaga can produce any good arguments in support of this. It is simply considered likely that because Olaf Haraldsson was a saint his saga was written first, but this is pure speculation. There is in fact a good deal to indicate that the oldest Icelandic writers of sagas had a high regard for Olaf Tryggvason, probably more than for his namesake Olaf the Stout - which is the surname consistently given to him by Ari fróði, never St Olaf. And since no incontrovertible evidence has been found of the influence of the Oldest Saga on the Saga of Olaf Tryggvason by Odd Snorrason, this is of course indirect evidence that they are each independent of the other. Perhaps they were written at about the same time, but in different parts of Iceland, and in fact they are very unlike in construction - and moreover one of them is in Icelandic but the other originally composed in Latin.

It is pointed out that the Oldest Saga is rather clumsily composed and primitive, and this of course suggests that it is rather on the old side. But it is hopeless to try to use language and style for precise dating - for example to try to establish whether the Oldest Saga was most likely composed about 1170-80 as Nordal supposes (Sagalitt. p.200) or around 1200 as I think most probable.

Jonna Louis-Jensen has reprinted the fragments in the AM.-Collection, i.e. Storm's Fragments 7 and 8. (Bibl. Arn. XXX). Storm thought they were copied from the Oslo manuscript while it was still intact, but J.L.-J. shows that there is no reason to suppose this. She draws attention to the unanimous view of scholars that the text on the second sheet (Fragment 8) can hardly have been originally a part of the Oldest Saga, but must derive from the Legendarium of St Olaf. But she compares the text of the first sheet (Fragment 7) with the Legendary Saga and other works. She does not come to any final decision as to whether this fragment is from the Oldest Saga, but calls for further study on the basis of the new evidence.

In my book on Fóstbræðrasaga I go a step farther and try to show that Fragment 7 is definitely not from the Oldest Saga. But most of Storm's in any case extremely weak arguments are in fact restricted to precisely this Fragment 7 and must automatically be discarded if it is proved that this fragment is not originally

part of the Oldest Saga. I produce arguments to show that the saga is younger than Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum, and Ágrip is in its turn younger than the work of the monk Theodoricus and hardly written before about 1190. It is difficult to find a precise terminus ante quem, though it is quite certain that the Oldest Saga is older than Fagrskinna, since a version of the Oldest Saga is the basis of the short saga of St Olaf in Fagrskinna. But when was Fagrskinna written then? As things are, most scholars put it in the third decade of the 13th century, and it cannot be younger if Snorri used it in Heimskringla, which I regard as absolutely certain, especially since the work of Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Om de norske kongers sagaer, pp.173-236). One might also mention the age of the fragments in Oslo, which have been dated around 1225. This dating is of course not precise, but a comparison of the Oldest Saga with Fagrskinna and the Legendary Saga shows that the original work or the first version of the Oldest Saga must have been considerably older than the fragments which have been preserved. It is therefore probably safe to assume that the first version was composed not later than about 1210. According to this the date when it was written down could be anytime between c.1190-1210.

Then what is there to say about the age of the Legendary Saga? Its first editors, Keyser and Unger, thought it was "put together" in the period 1160-1180, but were in fact basing their view on certain details in the Legendarium at the end of the saga. Gustav Storm on the other hand disregards the Legendarium when determining the age of the Legendary Saga, although he arrives at the age of the Oldest Saga on the basis of amongst other things the miracles related in Fragment 7. He doesn't hesitate to shift the age of the Legendary Saga by nearly a whole century and supposes that this form of the saga is from the middle of the 13th century. He bases this view on the age of the ms, which he reckons to be from this time or even younger.

Later scholars who have discussed the Legendary Saga at greater or lesser length have mostly avoided discussing its age, and this is rather surprising considering how forward people are on the whole in specifying the age of the sagas.\* But a lot has been written about its relationship to other sagas, especially the badly preserved Oldest Saga, and in this connection various ideas as to its age have emerged. It is clear that it is generally placed somewhere between the Mid-Saga of Sigurður Nordal and the Uppsala ms, and this means that it must have been put together in the period 1210-1250.

To what extent does the Legendary Saga give a true picture of the Oldest Saga? What are the main changes which have been made between the Oldest Saga and the Legendary Saga? What was the Oldest Saga like while it was intact and undamaged? People have been considering these questions for a long time and will continue to do so for some time yet. I don't want to tire you by going

into the theories and speculations of former scholars, as it may be enough of a strain to have to listen to what I have to add to the debate. But it will not be possible to avoid giving a step by step account of certain specific points in previous ideas about these sagas.

1. Where the Legendary Saga reflects the Oldest Saga.

In the Oldest Saga there are various more or less independent accounts of Icelanders, especially poets who had been at the court of King Olaf. Sometimes these are only short anecdotes, often quoting the verses of the poets. To this type belong the account of some nuts which the king sent to Sighvatr and Óttarr svarti, also the account of how the poet Þorfinnr composed a verse about a scene on a tapestry, and the account of the dealings of Steinn Skaftason with the king (without verses). Sometimes these accounts are a kind of short sagas (bættir), such as the description of the arrival of Óttarr at the court and above all the story of the stay of Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld at the court of Knútr ríki (Canute the Great) and his first meeting with King Olaf, and this short saga has been extracted from the Oldest Saga (the Legendary Saga) and printed as a separate þáttur. This might be accounted for by the Icelandic tradition which is very closely connected with the court poets and their poetry. It is safe to assume that all such anecdotes and Íslendingabættir in the Legendary Saga are derived from the Oldest Saga. One might mention the account of Hjalti Skeggjason and Egill Síðu-Hallsson which occupies quite a considerable amount of space in the Legendary Saga; and in the Legendary Saga there are various other more or less independent episodes which belong to the same genre as these Íslendingabættir, such as the þáttur of Ásbjörn Selsbani which is also in the fragments of the Oldest Saga, and the þáttur of Sigurðr Ákason, as well as the comic tale of the dispute of Einarr þambarskelfir and Queen Alfifa at the assembly, which has caused scholars unnecessary difficulties as a result of Storm's wrong ideas about Fragment 7. This comic tale belongs to the same family as other short anecdotes in the Oldest Saga and there is no doubt it entered the Legendary Saga from this source. It is also found in Fagrskinna which depends directly on the Oldest Saga, a point which I shall return to later.

There are other and more serious accounts in the fragments of the Oldest Saga as well: accounts of the disputes of King Olaf with landowners in Norway, such as Erlingr Skjálgrsson and Þórir hundr, and with Knútr ríki of Denmark. It may be presumed that other accounts dealing with the same subject in the Legendary Saga are also derived from the Oldest Saga.

The first part of the Legendary Saga has nothing in common with the fragments of the Oldest Saga, right up to chapter 46 (chapter 48 in the old edition). It is safe to assume that in the Oldest Saga there was something about the youth and younger days of King Olaf and it may be regarded as certain that the accounts

in the Legendary Saga are derived from this. It is not so certain that the accounts of Olaf's viking expeditions are derived from the Oldest Saga, but it must be considered very likely. A rough examination of the style indicates that this is the case, but it would be necessary to make a detailed comparison of the style of the fragments and the Legendary Saga, chapter by chapter, to determine what is common to them both and what is different. In this connection it is also necessary to mention that the Oldest Saga, as it has been called, is probably not the first thing that was written about St Olaf in the vernacular, and I shall return to this in more detail later. The vocabulary and style of older works that the author of the Oldest Saga used may therefore crop up in places.

It can also be considered certain that quite a lot would have been said in the Oldest saga about the battle of Stiklarstaðir and the death of King Olaf. The accounts of these events in the Legendary Saga are clearly related to the Oldest Saga. The Icelander Þormóður Kolbrúnarskáld is in fact the central character of the battle and there are many quotations from his poetry. One could say that he steals the scene from the king himself at Stiklarstaðir. Other stylistic features of the Oldest Saga also clearly appear there.

According to this by far the greatest part of the Legendary Saga is clearly related to the Oldest Saga and is probably derived from it.

## 2. Where the Legendary Saga departs from the Oldest Saga.

A comparison with the fragments shows that three kinds of textual change have been made in the Legendary Saga version of the Oldest Saga: Firstly it is shortened "all the way through from beginning to end so that the Legendary Saga has apparently not reproduced any part of the Oldest Saga of any length unchanged. Mostly it is only a question of condensation: the narrative is made more concise, the descriptions less wordy, dialogue is changed into a brief statement in indirect speech and so on" (Nordal). But shortening or omission of the subject matter seems to be very inconsiderable.

Sometimes the order of the episodes has been rearranged. There is one clear example of this and it has probably occurred in some other places. It seems to be done in order to arrive at a more natural sequence of events than in the Oldest Saga. The Legendary Saga has been judged harshly by scholars, it is said to be "exceptionally confused" and people complain that it often relates the same events twice with very little variation. It is clear that the composer of the Legendary Saga has sometimes tried to remedy this kind of fault in the Oldest Saga, and it is probably safe to assume that formal blemishes and repetitions in the Legendary Saga are on the whole a legacy from the Oldest Saga. On the other hand, some scribal errors occur in the ms of the Legendary

Saga, as might/expected: Þorgrímr for Þormóðr (Kolbrúnarskáld), stíka for stífla etc. The correct reading then often appears in the fragments, as far as they go, and they are in any case the older ms.

Then, thirdly, there are in the Legendary Saga some insertions or additions to the text of the Oldest Saga. People have not been altogether of one opinion as to what are additions and what not, but there is agreement on two points. One is that additions have been made to the Legendary Saga from a specific work or part of a work which has been called the Kristníþáttur. This tells first how King Olaf retreated in face of his enemies from Mæri eastwards over the mountains to Lesjar. When he arrived there he began to force people to adopt or re-adopt Christianity, both in Lesjar and in Lóar. He employed extremely violent means, threatening to attack them and burn their homes. Most of them made their peace with the king, but some fled south to Dalir. The King followed them there, and in the Kristníþáttur there are excellent accounts of his dealings with Dala-Guðbrandr, which ended with Guðbrandr and all the men of Dalir being baptised, while those who had been christened returned to Christianity and afterwards remained faithful to it. The king carried on across Heiðmörk, Haðaland and Hringaríki, and from there to Oslo and finally Raumaríki, where he "bettered men with beatings" as it says. After these exploits the king made for the Sóleyjar and did not stop until he reached Sweden.

Snorri also inserted the Kristníþáttur into Heimskringla, and there the wording is very similar to that in the Legendary Saga. But both Snorri and the compiler of the Legendary Saga thought it unlikely that King Olaf would have had the resources to force people to adopt Christianity on this flight of his, and have therefore divided the Kristníþáttur into two parts, and inserted the later part of the þáttur into the saga of King Olaf much earlier. There is though a difference in that the þáttur is not divided at the same place in Heimskringla as in the Legendary Saga and the first part is the longer, which is better since then the accounts of missionary activity are more coherent.

In the last fragment of the Oldest Saga there is in fact an account of the king's journey over the mountains and his flight from the country, but in very brief form, and this shows that the Kristníþáttur was not present in the Oldest Saga. Heimskringla and the Legendary Saga are also to a large extent identical word for word, as I mentioned earlier, which proves that the þáttur is unshortened in the Legendary Saga, but it would surely have been shortened just as the other parts of the saga if it had been taken from the Oldest Saga. It is out of the question that Heimskringla is based on the Legendary Saga or the shortened form of the saga which appears there.

The other section which has certainly been added to the Legendary Saga is the Legendarium of St Olaf, which appears at the end of the saga, in the same form in which it is found in the Norwegian Homily Book. There is, however, a slight difference between these two legendaria, and what concerns us here is the fact that there are three miracles in the Legendary Saga which are not in the Homily Book, but which correspond on the other hand to miracles in Fragment 7, which Storm thought was from the Oldest Saga, as I have already mentioned. According to the old theory these three miracles are all that remains of the original saga-ending preserved in the Legendary Saga. But a closer scrutiny shows that these miracles have, in fact, nothing to do with the Oldest Saga. They are to some extent in a different order in the Legendary Saga from that in Fragment 7; they are not as alike in wording as one might expect; and what is most significant, they are not shortened - rather the opposite, two of them are in fact longer in the Legendary Saga than in the fragment. Moreover one may mention a point that must have considerable weight, which is that at the end of the historical part of the Legendary Saga, just before the Legendarium, is material which seems obviously to have come from the Oldest Saga, and this matter would surely have appeared in Fragment 7 if it was from the Oldest Saga. So it is safe to assert that Fragment 7 is certainly not a part of the Oldest Saga. It is, as Árni Magnússon says on the cover of the ms, "Ex Miraculis Sancti Olavi".

On the other hand, some may think it likely or even obvious that the Oldest Saga ended with some kind of account of the miracles worked by King Olaf after his death. But without doubt these accounts must have been fewer or less developed than the Legendarium in the Homily Book, and so the compiler of the Legendary Saga rejected them, putting the more detailed accounts in their place. It is also conceivable that the Oldest Saga may have ended with simply some kind of paeon in praise of the glory of the king.

In addition to these two works, the Kristnipáttur and the Legendarium, which have undoubtedly been inserted into the Legendary Saga, scholars have done their best to find various other "additions" in the Legendary Saga. This is a particularly tempting subject since the Oldest Saga is for the most part lost, so that it is possible to come to almost any kind of conclusion one likes about its content or lack of it. If scholars found anything to criticise in the Legendary Saga, it was convenient to be able to explain away all the faults as simply changes and additions in the Legendary Saga. But as I mentioned before, the fragments show that the Oldest Saga itself had precisely these same faults in plenty, and the Legendary Saga has, if anything, tried to reduce them.



In his book on the saga of St Olaf, Sigurður Nordal surveys the theories of previous scholars, especially Finnur Jónsson and Storm, concerning various additions and interpolations in the Legendary Saga. He argues that most of them were in fact in the Oldest Saga, or that it is at least unnecessary to assume any large degree of interpolation. But he thinks that the Legendary Saga probably borrowed from four written works. Here he means the two works which I have already referred to in this paper, that is the Legendarium and the account of Olaf's missionary activity, and in addition two other works, Ágrip and Fóstbræðrasaga.

Nordal's theories about the composition of the Legendary Saga have been allowed to stand unchallenged until very recently, like many other things which that brilliant scholar has written during his long life. But in the preface to his edition Oscar Albert Johnsen tries to say a little in defence of the author of the Oldest Saga: he thinks he had a good taste in anecdotes and thinks it unfair that Nordal should throw doubt on the author's critical judgement. Johnsen considers that the author was a man with an understanding of politics and with a developed, independent judgement. He has a high opinion of the Legendary Saga as a historical source, but finds it to be of little value as literature. But though he seems therefore to have a much higher regard for the Oldest Saga than for the Legendary Saga, he still accepts without reservation Nordal's theories about how little it has been altered in the Legendary Saga. "The content was the same in broad outline in both the works, and the same applies to the order of events" he says, and only allows for additions from the same four works as Nordal. We must now look more closely at the ideas of Nordal and other earlier scholars about interpolations from Ágrip and Fóstbræðrasaga.

In the preface to his edition of the Oldest Saga (pp.10 ff.) Gustav Storm has something to say about its relation to the Legendary Saga and other works. Towards the end of the Legendary Saga (chapter 88 (101) ) there is a short passage from Ágrip about the "Age of Alfífa" and St Olaf's reign in Norway. This chapter is not in Fragment 7, and from this Storm drew the conclusion that the borrowings from Ágrip which are found at various places in the Legendary Saga were not in the Oldest Saga. He arrived at the same conclusion from a comparison with Fagrskinna. He thought that Fagrskinna was a summary of the Oldest Saga, and since the interpolations from Ágrip did not appear in Fagrskinna then they had not been in the Oldest Saga either.

There are two things to say about this: In the first place Fragment 7 is almost certainly not a part of the Oldest Saga, as I have said before, so that it has no value as evidence in this context. Secondly, it is not true as Storm says that none of the borrowings from Ágrip appear in Fagrskinna. Sigurður Nordal gives

examples of such borrowings in his book on the Saga of St Olaf (p.159), and I have added more examples in my book on Fóstbræðrasaga (pp.192-200). The parts influenced by Ágrip are an integral part of the Legendary Saga, and must have reached Fagrskinna through the Oldest Saga, which was its main source. So it is clear that Ágrip was among the sources of the Oldest Saga.

But how can it be shown that the source of Fagrskinna was the Oldest Saga, and not for example the Legendary Saga or Nordal's Mid-Saga - or some other form of the Saga of St Olaf? Storm thought he could prove it by pointing to the fact that Fagrskinna omits the detailed account of Olaf's mountain journey and flight from the country (i.e. Kristniþáttur), which is an interpolation in the Legendary Saga, as I said before. Nordal was not willing to accept this as proof. On the contrary, he thought that Fagrskinna was derived from an interpolated saga. Nordal's main argument is that Fagrskinna contains the account of Einarr þambarskelfir and Alfífa at the assembly, which is also found in the Legendary Saga but not in Fragment 7 - and must therefore be an interpolation according to Nordal. To account for all these interpolations Nordal therefore invented a Mid-Saga which had the advantage of being entirely lost: so it was possible to collect together in it all the additions and make it pass them on to the younger works. The idea proved so useful that people gradually began to assume the existence of even more Mid-Sagas. Thus Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson flirts with the idea that there was a separate Mid-Saga between Nordal's Mid-Saga and the Saga of St Olaf by Styrmir fróði, a saga which is almost entirely lost and so almost as convenient to the system as the Mid-Sagas.

But now that it is clear that Storm's Fragment 7 is not part of the Oldest Saga, our task is made a lot easier. It may then be supposed that the chapter about Einarr and Alfífa was in the Oldest Saga and entered both the Legendary Saga and Fagrskinna from there. Most of the arguments for the great age of the Oldest Saga - which were in fact never very convincing - now disappear, because they were restricted to Fragment 7. It may be assumed that the Oldest Saga is younger than Ágrip and that its author or compiler adopted some material from Ágrip. People should not be led astray by the name Oldest Saga: it is a modern invention and has no value as evidence. It makes no difference in this context that the interpolations from Ágrip do not appear in the fragments of the Oldest Saga, because they don't appear either in the corresponding chapters in the Legendary Saga.

But we still have to mention the strongest argument against the theory that Fagrskinna and the Legendary Saga are derived from some supposed Mid-Saga. All three of these works: the Oldest Saga, the Legendary Saga and Fagrskinna, coincide in certain places, and the correspondence is so close and detailed that there is no room for any Mid-Saga. If Fagrskinna were derived from an

expanded and altered Mid-Saga, and on top of that also from a very changed version of Styrmir's Saga of St Olaf, as Nordal supposes, then this would certainly appear in the comparison of these works which I make in my book on Fóstbræðrasaga (pp.174-176). This comparison shows that Fagrskinna derives from the Oldest Saga as Gustav Storm thought, but neither from the Legendary Saga nor from any Mid-Saga. A comparison of Fagrskinna with the Legendary Saga, on the other hand, shows - as I have said before - that the material from Ágrip had already been interpolated into the Oldest Saga which Fagrskinna used. But in Fagrskinna, on the other hand, there is no trace of Kristnipáttur or the Legendarium, and this confirms the conclusion that we had already arrived at: these works were not used in the Oldest Saga, but they were inserted into the Legendary Saga.

It remains to consider one work which it was for a long time thought had provided additional matter for the Legendary Saga, that is Fóstbræðrasaga. This idea is now over 100 years old, starting with Konrad Maurer (Über die Ausdrücke --- pp.562-3), who found a relationship in content and wording between the accounts in the Legendary Saga and Fóstbræðrasaga of the death of Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld at Stiklarstaðir. In the account in the Legendary Saga there is some repetition, and Maurer wanted to account for this by the fact that two sources had been combined, one of them being Fóstbræðrasaga. Sigurður Nordal later adopted this theory in his book on the Saga of St Olaf, and extended it.

But although this explanation of Maurer's was for a long time accepted as true, it is in fact based on a wrong view of both the Legendary Saga and Fóstbræðrasaga. Repetitions and harping on the same word were one of the characteristics of the Oldest Saga and are part of its legacy to the Legendary Saga. The accounts of the death of Þormóðr are in this respect no worse than much else in the Oldest Saga. Nor is it possible to break the accounts down and say: this is from Fóstbræðrasaga. A close comparison of Fóstbræðrasaga with other old Norwegian-Icelandic works shows also that it must be much younger than the Legendary Saga, written some time late in the 13th century. For a long time it was thought to be old, against all probability, simply so it could be fitted into the supposed system of the various sagas of St Olaf. Fóstbræðrasaga is not to blame for the bad text of the Legendary Saga. On the contrary it is obvious that the primitive accounts in the Legendary Saga are being combined and improved in Fóstbræðrasaga.

When this conclusion is arrived at we can say that the last defenses of the Mid-Saga have fallen. It is not only unnecessary, but it is downright unlikely that it ever existed in the form which Sigurður Nordal supposed.

My talk is nearly finished. The conclusion is simple: the

Legendary Saga is a shortened, but otherwise in most respects improved version of the Oldest Saga. In this form two other works have been added on to the Oldest Saga: the account of St Olaf's missionary activities and his Legendarium. Partly on account of these Christian additions one may say that the saga deserves its name the Legendary Saga. But if we omit these additions the work can be regarded as one saga, which would then be the properly called Oldest Saga of St Olaf - the oldest of the extant sagas about him. In its extant form the Legendary Saga was probably put together early in the 13th century.

Of course I am not able to transform the Legendary Saga into a literary masterpiece, but from the point of view of Norwegians one may say that two things have been gained: the responsibility for the messy construction of the saga has to a large extent been transferred on to the shoulders of Icelanders; and as the Legendary Saga comes closer to the Oldest Saga so its value as a historical source increases in proportion. We recall the words of Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson in his excellent preface to the edition of Heimskringla: "The offspring of the Oldest Saga, the Legendary Saga is perhaps the most deformed of all the sagas. But precisely for this reason it probably gives a better idea of the nature of the Icelandic oral tales (in the 11th and 12th centuries) than any other work".

It has often been a warmly debated issue as to whether this saga is Icelandic or Norwegian, but the answer is, in fact, quite simple. The Oldest Saga was without doubt composed by an Icelandic, but it tells of a Norwegian king and is based to some extent on the accounts of Norwegians. The Legendary Saga is also Icelandic in so far as it is little more than a copy of the Oldest Saga. But it is Norwegian in so far as it is interpolated with two Norwegian works and only preserved in a Norwegian ms. Thus this saga, as it has come down to us, is a good example of the close cooperation between Icelanders and Norwegians in the field of literature in the middle ages. It would seem to be a good idea to stop putting this literature into pigeon-holes, one Norwegian and one Icelandic, in the way that has been so much in fashion up to now. Let us rather look at it as one literary whole, one cultural area, as our ancestors who created this literature certainly did.

\* An exception is Anne Holtsmark who suggests in the introduction to the facsimile edition on palæographic grounds that the extant ms has been copied from a Norwegian ms dating from about 1200.