

PAGAN SACRAL KINGSHIP IN THE KONUNGASÖGUR

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As everybody knows, the mere notion of sacral kingship in ancient Scandinavia is a very much debated problem (1) and, as far as I see, has never led to definitive conclusions. Although the idea of a sacred king is certainly antique and spread all over the world - as well in the Indo-European area as elsewhere - we come, when we consider the Old Scandinavian aspect of the question, on difficulties which seem rather hard to explain. These difficulties concern very essential points, such as : what is a "king"? who is or may be king? and where? when? Is the situation the same in the three Scandinavian countries?

The fact is that, when we try to tackle with the problem, we have necessarily, so to say, to take our informations first of all out of Snorri Sturluson's konungasögur. Ynglinga saga, chapters 10, 11, 15 and 43, Hákonar saga góða, chapter 11, Hákonar saga svarta, chapter 9, between other passages of the Heimskringla, are our main sources and, nolens volens, we are more or less obliged of resorting to them if we want to get a rather clear and rational view of the matter. True to say, faithful to his habit, Snorri does not write out of mere fantasy. He uses to rely on scaldic sources, the main being Þjóðólfr's Ynglingatal, but the demonstration has been made many a time that he tries to re-interpret, arrange or explain, as well to himself as for us, his readers, the passages or details that are somewhat obscure to him. On the other hand, what he has to tell us is, on the whole, coherent and offers an image of the sacred king which may seem satisfactory. But which is very often contradicted by the teachings we may draw of our other sources. I am not concerned, here, with strictly historical datas, but with the mere notion of sacral kingship. We all know that an author, especially in ancient times, is always prone to apply to the reality he is depicting the situation he is very well akin with since it is the current state of facts in his own time. Accordingly, what if we try to study pagan sacral kingship without taking Snorri's works into consideration? And, consequently, what can we learn of the way Ynglinga saga's author has

chosen to present the subject? Here are a few reflections I should like to propose on this matter.

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First, a constatation. Old Norse has a remarkable amount of words to express the idea of king, chief, sovereign. Even though we omnsiously take here words, frequent in scaldic poetry, which may obviously be mere heiti, we get a very eloquent list : bragningr, dróttinn, jarl, goedingr, goði, gramr, harri, hildingr, hilmir, höfðingi, jöfurr, konungr, lofðungr, mildingr, rígr (in Rígsþula), roesir, stillir, vísi or vísir, þjóðann, öðlingr. If some of them may be merely poetical or evident qualifications (e.g. bragningr, höfðingi, mildingr, vísir), the great variety of ideas so displayed (war is in dróttinn, gramr, harri, hildingr, hilmir - probably; excellence by birth or liberality in bragningr, goedingr, mildingr, roesir; wealth in goedingr, öðlingr; divinity in goði; peace in stillir) is highly interesting : it can reflect the complexity of the notion or the variety of the acceptions according to which we may envisage a king.

But let us take four words which seem to characterize more clearly and directly a "king" :

We have first dróttinn, derived from drótt, the home-folk of a chief, his bodyguard (Greek *stmatetes*, latin *comitatus*, got. *ga-drauhsts*). Drótt may have had , from the very beginning, a military meaning, but its sense wad probably more extensive, as we can see by the fact that it has been replaced, on anglo-saxon influences, (*hired*) by *hirð* which is not confined to warlike aspects. (2)

þjóðann (the king as þjóðkonungr) goes back to *x*þlod-, *x*þiud : the people, got. *þiudans*, verb *þiudanōn* : to reign, *þiudangardi* and *þiudinassus* being the realm. Old Saxon *þiodan* means king as representative of the people. This corresponds to Greek *ethnos* (*Wulfila*), Old High German *diot*, whihh we find in *Svi-þjóð* or *Goð-þjóð*.

Appearantly, the word was superseded by *konungr* (Old English *cyning*, Old Saxon *cuning*, finl. *kuningas* - not present in *Wulfila's* text). Many scholars consider that the word is not Scandinavian : it could have been borrowed to East-Germanic (cf *kuningas* in Esthonia and Finland, slav *knjaz'*, about the 3d century) and is mo st probably an innovation in the North. Now, the word clearly derives from *konr* (<*x* *kunja*) : race, lineage (cf IEur. *x*gen- in latin *gens*,

Genus, greek -genēs, genos). Konr would be a noble man (because he is) akin to, parent of, substantive kyn. The Slav knjaz' gives the idea of a primacy within a family, not of a genuine kingship according to the present definition of the word. Konr is present, in the North, only in poetry, in Xth-XIth centuries, it becomes obsolete afterwards. Konungr does not convey military or martial ideas, except, perhaps, in saakonungr, herkonungr which may be rather recent.

Remains rīg < <sup>x</sup>rēg, latin regere, rex, celtic <sup>x</sup>rīg (in, for instance, Vercingeto-rix, the tribes of the Bituriges, Casturiges), sanskrit <sup>x</sup>rāj- (maha-raj-ah : the great king), got. <sup>x</sup>rīg reihs Reich. The word cumulates, as it is visible in the North, the idea of authority and the notion of wealth (Gudmundr inn ríki).

Thus, we have a lexicological diversity and wealth which are doubtless significant : Old Norse had no sure, fast and immutable word for "king". The variety of the connotations is striking : the idea may be of a warlike environment (drótt), of the intervention of the people (þjóð), of the belonging to a family, a clan (konungr), of the abundance of riches (rígr). This could give a basis to a study of the notion in a diachronical perspective. In any case, it does not allow us to draw clearcut conclusions.

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If we now consult the main corpus of our sources, Snorri more or less excepted, we make a quadruple constatation.

Of course, and once more, sacred kingship is a universally known phenomenon, as old as mankind, probably. The king as an intermediate between the divine world and ours, benefitting, by this fact, of special charisms, embodying in his person (by a symbolic transfer or metaphore of the divine) the powers possessed by the supernatural forces, is a well known conception. This power may be, according to Dumézil, juridico-magical (1st function), purely martial (2d function) or relevant to the fertility-fecundity (3d function), or else a mixture or a synthesis of the three, it remains the mark and the privilege of the king.

The Old Scandinavian figure of the sacred kingship, however, in the same time is not so clear as to fit in one of the categories above and presents certain specificities which are certainly the most interesting features of the notion for us. Be :

- the Scandinavian king is of divine origin
- which comes far more from his family than from his own person
- he has to be rich
- he must have a special amount of luck.

But nowhere it is said, if we keep to sources anterior to the Christian period in the North, that he must be a great legislator, a great administrator or a great warrior.

1) That he must be of divine origine is clear. The link between gods and kings is so obvious that such names as Ing- or Týr will be "naturally" applied to Scandinavian kings (Ynglingar, Angantýr and the like). Tacitus is the first to draw a connection between Ingvaeones and kings (Ynglingar). The fact is very striking about Freyr, whose name is possibly not a proper name but a qualificative, freyr being lord. It has often been suggested that freyr could be the nickname of Njördr, which, as everybody knows, Tacitus equates to Mother Earth (Nerthus id est Terra Mater), an idea connected with ritual festivities in Spring, such as reflected by the Skirniför, and processional celebrations, an echo of which we discover in Ögmundar þáttr dytts. This may have been more precisely felt by the Swedes, if we are to believe Adam of Bremen. But well before him, Jordanes (Getica, written in 551) precised that the ancestors of the Gots "were not simple human beings, but semigods called Ansis". We see the etymological link between Ansis (sponymic gods, accordingly) and the Aesir.

Rimbert, in his Vita Anskarii (end of the IXth century), chapter 26, reports the tale of a Swede who says he has seen a meeting of the gods discussing to adopt among them the king Eiríkr who had just died: "if you wish to have a greater number of gods and think our present number is not sufficient, we will unanimously welcome in our assembly your king Eiríkr in order that he will belong to the gods (3). This, with a lot of other similar instances (4) shows that, as E.O.G. Turville-Petre recommended to say, we are dealing indeed with "divine kingship", preferably to "sacred kingship". We may even adopt F.Ström's opinion when he suggests (5) that konungr could be derived from kona, woman: the king could be the consort of the goddess of fertility in a matriarcal cultural system, a view that would be supported by the fact that Njördr or Nerthus (masculine/feminine) or Freyr-Freyja (same thing) remind us of the divine twins becoming kings when humanized, like the Vedic Násatya or Asvín, reflected by the Alci depicted in Tacitus's Germania 43:4.

There is no surprise, accordingly, when we see that a change in religion, with the conversion to christianism for instance, always begins with the king.

So : the king, either is supposed to be of divine origin, or is divinized. R. Mc Turk, although with careful nuances, comes to the same conclusion : "a sacral king is one who is marked off from his fellows men by an aura of specialness which may or may not have its origin in more or less direct associations with the supernatural" (6) . J.M. Maillefer (7) quotes here Ibn Fadhlān's testimony : the king of the Rūs has four hundred men in his palace, all of them sitting by his throne which is so large that it may contain the king and fourty of his concubines. "Often, he has sexual intercourse with one of them in presence of his fellows. He never leaves his throne." Another manuscript precises : "The king of the Rūs has nothing to do but talking, drinking and entertaining himself." J.M. Maillefer points out that all these details strongly suggest hierogamy and belong more to a god than to a human being.

We spoke of a processional cult attached to the fertility gods. Saxo (book V) has a similar tale about king Frotho who has been killed by a "sea-cow" and Fawreyinga saga says the same thing of Grímr Kamban - who was not a king (8) - whereas Snorri attributes to Freyr the same story. It is certainly not by chance that Herodotes offers us a similar description of the funerals of the king of the Scythians (9).

These few details are sufficient, I think, to show that there is a clear link between kingship and the supernatural. We may discuss whether the king is sacred because he is a king, or whether he becomes sacred through magical means. But his functions, his status actually surpass the human normal possibilities.

2) . But the question has just been raised of knowing if this sacred character is simply attached to him. The answer appears to be clear : if he is divine, divinizable or divinized, he is such because of (or through) his family.

We know that family (aett, kyn) is a fundamental notion in the mental world of the Old Scandinavian peoples. Tacitus, once more, stressed the fact already in the beginning of our era. The sagas continue, more than a millenium afterwards, to think in terms of families, not of individuals. And certain striking features of this

civilization (the importance of genealogies, the roll of women in quality of guardians of the tradition, the living cult of the ancestors, between other) do not require any other explanation.

Thence, the principle : in the Germanic society, there was a certain number of families which were esteemed to be royal, or apt to give kings to the community, without any precise justification, in our eyes, except, probably, the fact that they were of a high antiquity and had a well-known and renowned past. As far as we can see, these families were supposed to be of divine ancestry, perhaps because - this point seems capital to me - they were specialized in the practices of the cult. Cult was the central notion in this religion, it was even, possibly, the religion itself which had no dogmas, no temples, no specialized body of duly initiated priests. This "religion" needed a (grand)priest-sacrificer. That there may have existed a certain number of families where such sacrificers could be found, the fact must reasonably not be excluded. It was among these families that a choice could be made of the so-called king : a choice, since we do not find any trace of royal heredity, of automatic filiation, nor any instance of a king choosing his successor.

There is another principle : there was only one "king" although we are not able to precise if he was "king" of a whole country, of a "land", a district or any naturally delimited area. Tacitus is clear on this point : *apud illos /.../ unus imperitat*. But we are allowed to shade a little this affirmation. Bede the Venerable(10) has an interesting comment about Willibrord's mission by the Frisians: "These Old Saxons have no kings, but several lords who are placed above the nation. When a war is on the verge of bursting, these lords cast lots impartially to know the one the chance will fall onto : he will be followed and obeyed by everybody as long as the war will last; but as soon as the war is over, the lord goes back to an egalitarian status." This is clear enough, I think, to contradict the so frequent exaggerations about this subject, such as this dry statement by Louis Rougier (11) : "By the Germans, the kings were considered as beings coming from the gods, possessing a magical power on nature, all chosen by election in a same family /.../ which went back to Wotan". G. Dumézil, in *Mythe et Épopée* (12) studies in detail the examples of Yayati (India) or Eochlaid Feidlech (Ireland) to show that the "kingship" of a man is unseparable of the relations with his kinship. Kinship - kingship : the English language offers, here, an opportune case

of words association! Perhaps is it in that way we have to understand Adam of Bremen's affirmation about the Swedes : *reges habent ex genere* (that is race, lineage, family) *antiquo*. Snorri must echo this tradition when he states, in *Óláfs saga Helga*, chapter IV, that Óláfr was given the title of king (*konungsnafn*) when he took for the first time in his life the command of a ship, since *herkonungar, þeir í víking váru* (.../ þá báru þeir konungsnafn þegar, er þeir váru konungbornir (my underlining)).

Nevertheless, if the fact of belonging to a notorious family is a necessary condition to become a king, we must stress the fact that it is not a sufficient one. There is no king without popular consent. Once more, Adam, about the Swedes : *Reges /.../ quorum vis tamen in populi sententia!* All our sources agree on this point : if the choice of a king will be done among certain families, the opinion of the people remains predominant. He has to be chosen at a þing (13); this choice is felt as a judgment (*dómr*) : they "judge" both the royal "blood" and the public meaning that the candidate will be worthy of his function. And the legitimacy of his birth does not seem to have been requested initially : it will become necessary afterwards; the so called hereditary monarchy is not original.

Let us quote Tacitus once more : *Reges ex nobilitate sumunt, duces ex virtute*. This is a very puzzling passage. *Nobilitas* certainly conveys the sense we have proposed above about family, race, lineage. The distinction, however, is strongly done between kings (*reges*) and ... *hersir? jarls? (duces)*. The meaning of the latin word is clear : *dux* is *wač-chieftain*. By way of conclusion, let us notice that the king (*rex*) was not supposed to make war, that *virtus* was not craved of him!

The *Áldre Västg. Lag* (Rb 1) confirms : the *Svíar* have the privilege of *taga* a king and also of *vráka* (dismiss) him. Of course, we do not know which is the decisive criterion that legitimates the choice (nor which is the part the *lagmenn* played in this ceremony) but I do not see any reason to think that it is not his belonging to a well known family.

3) Because there is still another important point onto which, as far as I know, the stress has never been sufficiently put : the fact is, really, surprising since, in my mind, it could be the most decisive factor. The king has to be rich (14). This feature must be very old : according to our Indo-European mentality, liberality is

the mark of the "great one". Scaldic poetry is eloquent here : the prince, the chieftain, the king is the "ring-breaker" (*baugabryótr*), his notoriety comes from this ability. On another hand, it goes without saying that the king has to be rich if he wants to provide for a sufficient number of warriors serving him and, to begin with, an impressive *drótt*, or *hird*. This is probably the reason why the Danish laws stipulate that *hvað ingen ejer, ejør konung* : he must be in constant need of riches if he is to repay everybody serving him.

Tacitus was aware of the fact that kingship and wealth are inseparable. One of the manuscripts of *Germania* reads so : "By the Suiones, wealth too is object of honour : it is the reason why a single person has the power". In other words, we understand that a king's power depends greatly on his ability to reward his followers, and also that he has to live differently from the other chieftains (15). When Snorri tries, in *Ynglinga saga* chapter X, to explain the meaning to give, according to him, to *Uppsalaudr* - a term which must have been venerable since we find the same kind of tradition recorded by Saxo, book V, about Frotho - he may refer, consciously or not, to a kind of principle : in order not to alienate his riches, the king neither can nor must alter his patrimony, since it is highly probable that this patrimony is the ultimate justification of his function. *Rígsþula* 45 is eloquent : "Then he got the patrimony / and took great care / of having himself called *Rígr*". And the *Upplands Lag* explains : "The *lagmenn* will award the king the crown and the royal power to govern the province and administrate the kingdom, have the laws respected and maintain peace. Then, the king is doomed apt to *Uppsala* 8th". This is possibly too the reason why his properties are inalienable and must remain unshared. The texts give the list of the *bona regalia* (16) to which, eventually, a king can add the goods of his own patrimony.

A contrario, a poor king has no meaning, no value, does not exist. Ostentation and wealth are the tokens of genuine kingship. One remembers, as a proof of the vitality of this tradition, the example of Gustav Wasa with his notorious greediness!

And the roots of this conception must be very deep. Lennart Ejerfeldt (17) notes that *gifta* is the translation of *gratia* (/gift of the/grace) and that *Wulfila* translates *karisma* by *giba*. Which means clearly that, even in this field of Christian notions attached to the supreme power of God, the idea of divine power is connected with the notion of gift, (spiritual) riches.



4) This last remark offers us a good transition to the fourth point, which perhaps, eventually, <sup>is</sup> the most central and decisive. Gaefa/gifta is also, chiefly, good luck. I tend to see here the key-notion attached to sacral kingship. Because he is king, or in order to become a king, the konungr has to have a special good luck, or, to follow our reasoning, his family renders him worthy of becoming a king because it has always got a peculiarly effective luck, a famous hamingja. All the sagas, Íslendingasögur (18) (for instance Egla), samtíðarsögur (where, for instance, Kolbeinn ungi, in Íslendinga saga, is rightly given for a gaefumadr who benefits of a hamingjuskripti with his enemy at a decisive moment), but chiefly konungasögur insist on this point. It is possible that, once more here, we are influenced by Snorri and his personal views of kingship. But one cannot but be impressed by the astounding frequency and importance of the theme in Óláfs saga hins helga. Very often, reference is made to Óláfr's hamingja (19). It is really surprising to hear him saying, just before the battle of Stiklarstadir : þá mun auðna ráða sigri, and not, as would be proper for a saint : þá mun guðs gaefa ráða sigri. Wallace-Hadrill (20), comparing Roman paganism with the Germanic one - he, rightly, does not see so many differences between them - concludes : "The kings of the Germans of the folkvandrings-tíð, as well as those of the Seandinavians, were sacred, by what we mean that they were cult-kings representing moral life and home ideals of their peoples, including good luck." That this idea is very antique, is my conviction. According to the brilliant analysis F.Ström made of the notion of eiginn máttur ok megin, this capacity and ability of succeeding, in every field, in one's enterprises, it is not surprising to see that, besides a jarðarmegin, a Ássmegin and the like, there has existed a konungsmegin, a kind of sacred, magical, inherent force attached to the king. (21). Saxo, book V, remembers the old idea when Grep specifies that the king's hamingja rebounds on his whole retinue or house : he qualifies his king of "royal guardian deity". Which reminds immediately us of Amianus Marcellinus (22), speaking of the Burgonds : Apud hos generali nomine rex appellatur Hendinos, et ritu veteri potestate deposita removetur, si sub eo fortuna (my underlining) titubaverit belli, vel segetum copiam negaverit terra."

There is also, in Gesta Hammaburgensis, to quote this excellent source once more, a passage about Óláfr Tryggvason where Adam envisages him as a magician, able of overruling fate : "There are some people who report that Ólavus had been Christian, other, that he

had forsaken Christianity; however, they all assert that he was clever in practising divination, that he respected the casting of lots and that he set all his hope in the prognostics of the birds. It is why he was nicknamed Craccaben". If, indeed, as we suggested above, the king was the grand-priest-sacrificer, he had, ipso facto, to pay an important part in blót and seidr, the main features of both operations being to know the decisions of fate. This reminds us of the so called Origo gentis Langobardorum (written about 670) which states that the Lombard kings are descendants of Godan through the intermediary of twin-kings, Ybor and Agio : a new expression, thus, of the Dioskouroi. Godan is the dispenser of victory, a fatidical figure, then.

Snorri himself offers us a plausible summary of all the main considerations we have studied above. In Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, chapter 50, he gives this portrait of Hákon inn ríki Sigurðarson Hladajarl, the one who defeated the Jómsvíkingar in Hjörungavágr and was finally murdered : "/.../ We owe to the truth to say that he had many things to be a chieftain. First, his great lineage, then his wisdom and his ability to manage riches, his valiance at battle and, moreover, his hamingja to get victory and to kill his enemies. Hákon was the most liberal manng men."

Snorri, for reasons which remain to be explained, sets the stress on warlike virtues. But for the rest, he agrees with our other conclusions. We spoke of Freyr, master of ár ok fridr, that is to say of good luck. The king assumes, by transfer, both notions. This belongs to his family's hamingja. If we accept, for this last word, an etymology ham-gengja, a kind of alter ego, of Doppelgänger which passes from a generation to the next one inside a family, the good luck of a king, which caused that he was elected til árs ok fridar (and sacrificed if he failed to assume them) is obviously his main prerogative, but he is not personally responsible for it : it belongs to his lineage.

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Let us try to sum up the above considerations : which are, finally, the functions of a king? Benveniste, in his Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes stated already that the Indo-European king was an entity more religious than political and proposed to make a clearcut difference between the king with his

charisms and the hero with his bravery, a possible passage or link between them being offered by what we use to call a culture hero.

a) The king is the representative of his people, he has the charge to lead him. The people wants him to perform the cultural operations : there is a clear similitude between the father in the family, responsible for the rites of the private cult devoted to the ancestors, and the king, expression of his people, responsible for the rites of the official cult. The king is a kind of primus inter pares, religious and lay in the same time, just as will be, in Iceland, the godi as far as we may see. Such was the case, in Rome, formerly. In an archaic stage of history, before the expulsion of the kings in 509 B.C. the king was rex sacrorum or rex sacrificulus, his functions were liturgic before all. Of course, this is not necessarily exclusive. The Laws of Södermannland (about 1320) specify that the king's functions may be cumulative : "The king has the power of command, the government of towns and provinces, Uppsalaauðr, the royal properties and all the royal incomes" : that is, the three dumezilian functions, in the order second-first-third, but the text is very recent. Politically, he is the arbitrator and the pacifier, but not the legislator : this last prerogative, as assumed by Óláfr Haraldsson in Norway, was certainly a novelty. As for war, he summons the army and receives the envoys of the other sovereigns, but he is rarely "seen" as a war-chæftain. In any case, he is not a despot. Rimbert states that, although the king has allowed Anskar to preach in Birka, he must renounce because of the opposition of the people. And Óláfs saga hins helga, chapters 88-90, which must be reliable since it goes against the Christian views of Snorri, as we will soon see, gives us a good instance of a king, the Swede Óláfr Eiríksson, being obliged to yield before the stórbaendr under the leadership of lögmaðr þorgnyr, in order to make peace with Óláfr Haraldsson. Which proves that the king is not the supreme magistrate. Rimbert's Vita Anskarii, chapter 26, does not leave place to any doubt : "The custom of the Swedes is that every public affair depends more on the unanimous will of the people than on the royal power"

On the other hand, if we read the well known account of Ibn Fadhlán about the Rūs, we see that the king has no great competences either : "When there arises a quarrel and that the king cannot intervene, he gives them the order of fighting against each other." So, his power of decision must be weak, compared with that of the þing. If the king may warrant peace and justice, we are allowed to think

that this is a Christian view : we have no proof of the legal existence of this feature in the pagan times.

b) But everything tends to show that, on the ritual level hǫ is supposed to command the forces of the universe : he is, before all, the grand-priest-sacrificer. We have certainly a distant echo of this theme in Hákonar saga góða, chapter 17, but Hervarar saga ok Heidreks komungs is as much explicit when it tells us that king Ingi the Old eyddi blótum when he adopted Christianity (23).

c) As for war, we must not forget a small statement in Tacitus' Germania : the chieftain's liberality takes its means in war and plundering. I think it is in this way, and only in this way, we may look at the king as a war-chieftain, summoning the leidangr or, as the Laws of Svealand or of Hälsingland have it :

Nú biuper kununger lith och leþung út  
biþer út róp oc rep  
þá scal naempnae hamm oc stampn.

But it is rarely he who leads the operations. Tacitus (the difference between rex and dux) and Ibn Fadhlán, with an interval of eight centuries, agree : "/The king of the Rūs/ has a lieutenant who commands the troops, fights his enemies and represents him before his subjects." J.M. Maillefer (24) quotes here a runestone from Gästrikland (around 1050) : "Brusi led the leþung when Emundr reigned", and Adam of Bremen, onee more, is unambiguous (24) : "Those who go to fight obey the king or the one qui doctior ceteris a rego preferetur."

Accordingly, the king bears a responsibility which is more supernatural than material, as far as the public welfare is concerned, as well for the material prosperity (ár) as for the defence (fridr). It seems impossible to say that he is the expression of one of the three dumezilian functions, although it seems highly probable that the third one (fertility-fecundity) is predominant.

In other words, the king's sacrality does not seem to be attached to his "functions" but to his very person, itself being the expression of a clan or of a family, a kindred.

For the limits of his powers are evident : his authority is restricted by the local chieftains and/or the lagmenn. The actual "power" is in the hands of the people (or of the lagmenn). Frostapings Lög IV,50, which appear to be very old on this point, are clear : if the king attacks a man home, the war-arrow will immediately <sup>be</sup> send and everybody will go and kill the king. Do compare with Ammianus Marcellinus' quotation given above, or with Procopius of Cesarea's

statement about the Heruleans in the VIth century (25): "The Heruleans, running mad, revolted against their king, named Ochos : they murdered him suddenly and without reason, simply because they wanted to live thenceforwards without a king."

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If, then, we come back to Snorri and to the picture of the king we may deduce of his works, we clearly notice a good deal of important differences, which induce us to suppose that the notion has suffered a significant evolution, under various influences.

For instance, it could be possible that the king has become a war-chieftain, a herkonungr only with the vandrings-tid, because of the general insecurity of the time. E. Hertsberg (26) suggested, already in 1889, that the king supplanted the old notion of hersir who was simply elected by the people, whereas the konungr, as we know, conveyed an idea of authority or filiation; he had to belong to a well known family. In the place of the hersir, whose name is connected with the idea of army, war, J.M.Maillefer, according to Tacitus' remark (rex versus dux) thinks that warfare was the function of the jarl : he points out the fact that, in Rígsþula, Jarl was older than Konr, and he stresses the fact that there has existed a certain number of genuine dynasties of jarls (Hladir, Moerr, Orkneys, for instance). True to say, <sup>x</sup>erilar in the runic inscriptions seems to suggest magical powers, but if the Old English eorl can mean a warrior, a hero, the common acception is : man of rank, distinguished person.

The idea of kingship, as we are used to it, emerges only after Haraldr inn hárfagri (end of the IXth century) in Norway, and Saint Óláfr is the first to be rex perpetuus Norvegiae. We have to wait Konungskuggsjá, towards the end of the XIIIth century and so clearly in accordance with the whole literature of specula in the Middle Ages, to discover the idea of a king, unique and strong, without any ambiguity. As for the crowning (konungsvígsla), it is a recent practice : it has no ground in the old laws. The first Scandinavian country to have got a single king is Denmark, towards 800, Denmark, the most continental Nordic land, the first to be christianized too.

When de Vries declares (27) that "by the Germanic peoples, the royal function is of a strong warlike type", he is certainly guilty of an error in diachrony. We tried to show, not only that ársaeill and frídsaeill are more important prerogatives than sigr-

saell, but even that the last one, sigrsaell, must be in connection with fridsaell, not the contrary.

Which means that we have to take into consideration the judeo-christian element, which appears to be decisive here. We remember that Cicero, in *De re publica*, made a clear distinction between *rex* and *dominus*, the last one being the equivalent of tyrant, and, inside the notion of *rex*, between *rex iustus* and *rex iniustus*. *Rex iustus* was *rector rei publicae*.

In this field as in many other, as soon as the influence of Christianity in the North is concerned, we have to pay the greatest attention to Saint Augustine's works and to the deep influence they have exerted on the Scandinavian churches. *De civitate Dei* agrees with Cicero's views, with an addition of Eusebius and Iréneus' ideas. The royal conception, according to a meditation on the Holy Scriptures and as reflection on Cicero's works (28) has its ground in the promotion of peace (*pax*) and *iustitia*. *Pax* does not exclude a *bellum iustum* (in Cicero's own words) if it is to warrant *pax* and *iustitia*, but obviously, such are the ideals which define an ideal king. Tarquinus or Saúl is a *tyrannus* (*dominus*); Servius Tullius or David is a *rex iustus*. Augustine simply does not envisage the case of a king who would not reign alone in a given country. The "divine plan", so dear to Augustine, is to obtain *pax* and *iustitia* everywhere. If war has to take place it is only to restore or maintain peace, and it goes without saying that good peace and effective *iustitia* cannot be assured without law. *Ubi societas ibi jus*. There arises, accordingly, an ideal picture of the king who is alone to exert power, by God's election duly confirmed by sacred rites (coronation, anointing) and public laws where public welfare, justice and war are considered together : the grace of God is bestowed a king in order to support this peculiar mission of him, which he is alone to be able of carrying out since he has got the requested charism or grace. Charlemagne is a model of *rex iustus*, as are Saint Louis or Theodoric of Verona.

Saxo has evidently read Augustine, as has Snorri. Saxo establishes an eloquent contrast between Saint Knútr, a *rex iustus*, and his brother and successor Oluf Hunger, *rex iniustus*. The explanation he gives us is interesting since he does not speak of war or law first, but indeed of *ðár* : "Under his reign (Oluf's) the fields yielded no harvest, the meadows scarcely gave grass, the forests produced some rare acorns, the waters, few fish and hunger heavily harassed the country." One is reminded of Sturla Þórðarson's remark, at

the beginning of Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar, saying about Hákon Hákonarson (XIIIth century) that this king's reign was bound to be great since, the very year of his birth, the trees gave two times fruit and the birds wanted to brood two times too. The same kind of picture is applied to Saint Óláfr by Leofric, in the antiphone of his collectarium (around 1050) : "The creator of justice and of divine law has planted King Ólafr as a fruitful tree which will remain standing in his rich growth on the way of the just."

The notion of a king, hereditary and benefiting of the grace of God to reign over his people, is clearly a Christian one. What Snorri tries to do in his Heimskringla is to connect, if possible, the new Christian ideas with old traditions and to rationalize ancient themes in order to cast them in this new mould. Without trying to debate, here, an interesting question : has it existed in the North a double culture, the tracks of which are visible in our texts, the one warlike and nomad, conveying the notion of, let us say, jarl, the other, sedentary and peaceful, bringing the idea of konungr attached to fertility, we ascertain that Snorri is visibly exerting himself to conciliate the treasure of traditions he knew with the teachings and conceptions of the Church.

The tradition taught him that the king was of divine origin, namely through his family, that he had to be rich and that, in this very fact : being rich and belong to his family, resided his special luck. This could rather easily be reconciled with Christian ideals, through the Person of Christ, or, more precisely, or Christus Rex, Christ as the king of the world. Person of the Christ, person of the king as representative of Christ : sacral kingship, in both cases, is assumed by a divine, or more or less divinized personality. In that case, it is quite normal that a konungr assumes a so to speak cumulative function - all three dumezilian aspects confounded. But this is certainly not the case of ancient kings in the North. This synthetic conception belongs to Christianity or, at least, to Bible and to the culture that has created it.

It is surely why Óláfs saga hins helga occupies such a central position in Heimskringla. Óláfr wanted probably, for various reasons, to become a king according to the Christian point of view. Unless Snorri wanted to have him as a model of Augustinian rex iustus.

## NOTES

- (1) I can refer, between other, to studies that have been used for this article : E. Herzberg : En fremstilling af det norske aristokratis historie. Kristiania. 1869.
- K. Maurer : Vorlesungen über altnordische Rechtsgeschichte. I. Leipzig. 1907
- A.E. Christensen : Kongemakt og Aristokrati. København. 1945.
- O. Almgren : Svearikets uppkomst. Uppsala. 1935
- G. Hafström : Das altschwedische Königtum. Reichenau. 1962.
- O. Höfler : Das Sakralcharakter des germanischen Königtums. Lindau. 1956.
- J.M. Maillefer : Recherches sur l'ancienne royauté suédoise et l'idéologie des trois fonctions, dans Etudes Germaniques 1983:4
- G. Dumézil : Les dieux souverains des Indo-Européens. Paris. 1977
- A.V. Ström : The king-God and his connection with sacrifice in Old Norse religion, in La regalité sacra/Sacral Kingship. 1959
- R. Mc Turk : Sacral kingship in ancient Scandinavia, in Saga-Book of the Viking Society XIX:2-3. 1975-1976.
- (2) we have a magnificent instance of the way Snorri is working on his sources, about drótt, in Ynglinga Saga, chapter XVII. Snorri is relying on Þjóðólfr who gives an order Dómaldi-Dómarr-Dyggvi-Dagr. Now, Þjóðólfr calls Dyggvi konungsmadr, and Dómaldi, dróttinn of the Svjar. On the other hand, Snorri must have known the -now lost Skjöldunga saga where we have the series : Danr the Old-Danpr-Dana + Rígr-Danr the Magnificent. Here, he was confirmed in his views by his possible knowledge of the traditions which gave birth to the Rígpula and to Hervarar saga, where we have equally Danr and Danpr. Supposing he knew Rígpula, he may have taken the idea that Rígr was the first to be called konungr, in this poem. And the linking Danr-Danmark is characteristic of the etymological passion of the sagnamenn and of the synthetic mind typical of Snorri, whereas the personification of Drótt could be relevant to Snorri's taste for allegory.
- (3) we remember that Eiríkr (< ein-ríkr, the one who reigns alone) is the name of the first Swedish saint; that the Eiríksmál (an erfiðrápa for Eiríkr Blóðøx, end of the Xth century) describes the king's own reception in Valhöll, as does also Eyvindr skáldaspillir's Hákonarmál, about Hákon hinn góði. And Saxo, bok VII, has something similar to tell us about Haldanus-Biargrammus whom the Swedes considered as son of Thórr, so that "people bestowed him the divine honours".



- (4) for example, Þjóðólfr, in his Ynglingatal, calls the king yngva þjóð or freys áttungr
- (5) in "Kung Domalde i Svíthíod och 'kungalyckan'" in Saga och sed, 1968
- (6) Saga-Book of the Viking society XIX 2-3, 1975-1976, p. 156
- (7) "Recherches sur l'ancienne royauté suédoise et l'idéologie des trois fonctions" in Etudes Germaniques 1983:4 p. 380
- (8) he was the first settler in the Faroes.
- (9) Histories IV:71. The resemblances with Ibn Fadhlán's account of the burial of a Rūs chieftain are striking.
- (10) Historia V:10
- (11) in La regalia sacra. Leyde. 1958
- (12) II. pp. 251-374
- (13) all the Old Scandinavian laws agree, they mention the places, three landsþing, Viborg first, in Denmark, all the main alþing in Norway, and I think of the Eiríksgata in Sweden.
- (14) the language itself shows a progressive confusion auðigr-ríkr
- (15) possibly, the notion of veizla, with its double meaning: a banquet, an income, may find its origin in this fact.
- (16) Yngre VGL: "Vap and Ökol, Vartopter, Gudhem, Lungbo, Hólaesio, Asar and Skalander, they are all Uppsala goods. Them mátte aldrih skota (give) eller veta (yield).
- (17) "Helighet 'karisma' och kungadöme i forngermansk religion" 1970
- (18) I tried to insist on this point in an article to appear in the book of miscellaneous dedicated to Hermann Pálsson: "Is Fate as a deus otiosus a romantic idea?"
- (19) e.g. chapters XXIX, LXVIII: mikít má komungs gaefa, LXIX; CLXXXVI
- (20) Early Germanic kingship in England and the Continent, 1971, p.8
- (21) book V
- (22) Rer. Gest. XXVIII, V, 14
- (23) chapter XVI in Turville-Petre's edition
- (24) Gest. Hamm. IV:22
- (25) War of the Gots II:14
- (26) in En fremstilling... see note 1
- (27) in Kleine Shriften, 1956

