The Impact of Christianity on Sexuality and Marriage in the Kings' sagas

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Rauðúlfs Þáttr contains an interesting story of King Óláfr helga's conversation with Rauðúlfr's son Dagr. Told by the young man that he possessed the gift of physiognomy, the king asked Dagr what fault in character he saw in him. Although reluctant to answer at first, Dagr finally revealed that the king suffered from what afflicted most men, excessive love of women. Óláfr readily agreed that he was right.[1] The story may have originated independently, but it became incorporated into the saga of Óláfr helga at the point when his voyage to Upplönd in 1028 came to include a visit to Rauðúlfr and his sons.[2] The saintly king's many sexual adventures were well attested by that most reliable of historical sources, scaldic poetry.[3] That marriage did not curtail this activity is apparent from the fact that his successor Magnús was born by Álfhildr, a servant of the king, after his marriage to Ástríðr, daughter of the Swedish king. The author of Rauðúlfs Þáttr does not suggest that the king harbored bad conscience over this behavior, but he does admit that it was a skaplöstr, a fault in character. It is doubtful whether any Scandinavian king would have shared such a conscience by the first half of the eleventh century, but it is also clear that by the time the story was composed, the author, although aware of human frailty, saw excessive male sexual activity as a fault and felt that the saintly king ought to be have been aware of the new mode of behavior.

Known by Snorri, our story was probably written about 1200.[4] Snorri's use of the story is equally of interest. He also made the king ask Dagr what his skaplöstr was, but he does not reveal Dagr's response, except to say that the king agreed

with him.5 One might ask why Snorri chose not to give the full answer. A sufficient reason would undoubtedly be that it did not fit into Snorri's depiction of the king's saintly character; he also avoided the references to the sexual adventures mentioned above, although he could not hide Álfhildr's existence since she played a fairly important role during her son's reign. It may also be possible to argue that Dagr's revelation of the king's sexual behavior was an embarrassment for Snorri personally. Sturlunga saga informs us that Snorri was "fjöllyndr, fickle, and had children with more women than Herdís (his wife)".6 If this interpretation is correct we see Snorri not only accepting the restraints on sexuality of his own time at least to the extent that he hides the fact that his hero did not adhere to these ideals two centuries earlier, but also revealing his bad conscience concerning his own behavior at the time of writing.

The purpose of this article is to disentangle within the Kings' sagas an older, pagan sexual morality from a younger, Christian and to see how the latter transformed the former. As demonstrated by the analysis of the above example no direct approach can be taken, since all our sources, with the exception of some scaldic poetry, have been mediated through the authors' Christian consciousness and therefore do not present an undistorted view of the pagan code.

I

At the beginning of Norwegian history stands the imposing figure of Haraldr hárfagri. The first to be sole king over the country, his reign may have extended over more than seven decades during the ninth and tenth centuries. His sexual energy, however, was to affect Norwegian history for the next three centuries. Reputedly the father of as many as twenty sons and several daughters[7], his male offspring and their descendants dominated and devastated Norwegian society, causing endless civil

wars until the male sexual drive had been domesticated by the influence of the Church and the succession brought under the rule of legitimacy and promogeniture during the reign of Hákon Hákonarson in the first half of the thirteenth century.

We know very little about the women with whom Haraldr hárfagri procreated. According to Snorri, some were wives, others were concubines who, simply summoned by the king were placed next to him in bed. These liaisons seem to have been both serial and simultaneous.[8]

None of the different versions of the history of Haraldr hárfagri indicate disapproval of his sexual behavior but rather show pride in this ancestor whose sexual prowess provided both the framework and the material for the narratives. It may be no coincidence that the narrative sources stop at the same time that the monarchs'sexual behavior was controlled. Familiar with the dream of King Hálfdan, Haraldr's father, of the king's long hair taken to symbolize his descendants, Snorri inserted before this dream another, attributed to Haraldr's mother Ragnhildr. Before his birth she dreamed that she took a thorn out of her dress. Growing rapidly, this thorn became a huge tree with branches spreading over all Norway. Later Snorri interpreted the dream to symbolize Haraldr's descendants, adding that all the kings of Norway had belonged to his kin.[9] Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta informs us that at the age of sixty when many of Haraldr's sons were grown and some already dead, he decided to make his remaining sons kings. The saga further stipulates that descendants in the male line should be given king's name while sons born of daughters should be made earls.[10]

No society can give uncontrolled rein to sexual activity, not even to its rulers, and pre-Christian nordic society did regulate marriage, although, as we have seen, more casual sexual relations were common for kings. At a time when fathers arranged the marriages of their daughters, one might ask where and how men obtained their more casual bedfellows. Herfang, the

taking of women in warfare, undoubtedly continued as a source for acquiring women, since it was prohibited by the Church as late as 1176.11

Married women were off limits for other men in pagan as well as Christian times. Husbands did not take kindly to the idea of sharing with other men their sexual rights over legally acquired wives. Sigurðr slefa, one of Haraldr hárfagri's sons, had slept with Álof, the wife of Klyppr þórðarson, against her will and he was killed by the husband.12 The Church was of course also against this behavior, but that such activity did not stop, is shown in the story of Sigurðr Jórsalafari who tricked the husband of Sigriðr Hranadóttir to go to Ireland so that he could have an affair with her.13

More likely candidates were single women living away from their families or even daughters living at home, who in pagan times seemed to have benefitted far less from parental protection against the sexual advances of prominent men than wives did from their husbands. There are even indications than a father welcomed the attention of a king paid to his daughter. Morkinskinna details a story about King Magnús góði who, when visiting an important chieftain þrándr, wanted to sleep with þrándr's daughter Margrét. Aware of Margrét's unwillingness, her father nevertheless prepared the bed for both of them.14 Such liaisons were often encouraged in the hope of offspring as is clear from Jómsvíkinga saga. King Haraldr of Denmark spent a night with Ása,the daughter of a farmer Atli with the father's approval. When the father noticed that she was pregnant, he affirmed that his respect for her would increase with the social prominence of her lover.15 A similar attitude was expressed by a rich man Símun, who had a beautiful woman þóra in his service. When one day King Sigurðr Jórsalafari came riding by, he was so taken by her singing that he dismounted and laid with her. Símun watched her closely thereafter. When she gave birth to Hákon, the future King Hákon herðibreiðr, Símun let the boy be raised

together with his own two sons.16

As long as any son born of a king had a chance of becoming a king himself, regardless of his mother's status and relationship to his father it is understandable why fathers did not protect their daughters as well as husbands did their wives. Since such a liaison was casual at best, however, it is no wonder that whatever expression given to restraining male sexuality may be found in the kings' sagas, it is voiced by women.

Knýtlinga saga relates the story of a beautiful woman, the wife of a priest, who when ordered by the equally married Danish King Knútr to sleep with him, was able to persuade the king to leave her alone by appealing to his obligation as a model of moral matters. Convinced by her arguments Knútr "found another bed for the night", apologized to--not the woman of course--but her husband whom he gave a present.17

The reference made by this woman to Christian morality clearly indicates the source of the new behavior in sexual matters. Knútr was not the only king to be persuaded to accept the new morals. Placed chronologically a half century before the priest's wife, Margrét, whom we left in bed waiting for the arrival of King Magnús góði, avoided sleeping with the king by the miraculous intervention of his father Óláfr helga. Magnús concluded that the saint did not approve of this behavior and he arranged instead an honorable marriage for Margrét.18 Both these stories are indicative of the attitude during the thirteenth century, the time of writing, and not necessarily the eleventh century of the actual events.

The only suggestion of male agreement with the Church's new morality comes from Óláfs saga hins helga where Óláfr's father Haraldr grenski turned down an explicit offer to spend the night with the widowed queen of Gautland, Sigríðr stórráða, with the comment that his wife Ásta was sleeping alone and so should he. Having regretted this answer he returned the following year, but this time Sigríðr was no longer interested, not even in a regular

marriage proposal, because by then Haraldr's wife had given birth to Óláfr, whom Sigríðr coveted as her son.[19] Haraldr's sexual restraint, surprising for a pagan king, must be explained as evidence of the author's tacit acceptance of Aristotelian embryological theories. Because the father was responsible for the total personality of the child, the mother was merely the vessel for carrying the embryo. Hence Sigríðr could desire to carry this fully-formed future saint, but refuse her services after his birth. On the other hand, the saintly Norwegian king could not have had a Swedish mother, and therefore the author was obliged to make Haraldr refuse the initial offer.[20]

As I mentioned earlier, it is not possible to discern any open or latent criticism of King Haraldr hárfagri's sexual behavior. This is not the case with one of his successors who was ruler of Norway, if not in name, at least in fact. Hákon Hlaðajarl, the clearest spokesman for paganism in the pages of the kings' sagas, is together with Haraldr hárfagri the best exampel of unrestrained pagan sexuality. Among the Latin sources only Theodoricus mentioned his concubine Thora[21], but beginning with Ágrip the Old Norse sources reveal both abundant details and criticism of Hákon's sexual behavior. Although married and with two legitimate sons, he became sexually insatiable in his old age. Summoning women to his place from everywhere, he placed them next to him in bed, kept them for a brief period and returned them to their kinfolk.[22] This behavior resulted in the epithet Hákon the wicked and in an uproar in which he was killed by his last remaining slave.[23] The simultaneous arrival of Óláfr Tryggvason from England with a program of Christianization of Norway and personal monagamous behavior heightens the pagan-Christian contrast.[24]

Although never clearly defined, we can now outline a pattern af sexual behavior among the pagan kings of Norway. While they do not follow all the rules about engagement and marriage known from the lawcodes and the Icelandic family sagas[25], they do

enter into marriage unions with some women, thereby implying a certain stable relationship. Some powerful women may even have enjoyed monogamous marriages as seems to have been the case of Gunnhildr in her marriage to Eiríkr blóðøx.26 But marriage did not hinder the kings from taking other women to bed for longer or shorter periods. Offspring of both types of unions were considered equal in their chances for succession.

II

This behavior did not disappear easily after the acceptance of Christianity. We have already mentioned the sexual behavior of some Christian kings towards married women. Many kings were still adulterous, and most of the kings and pretenders between Óláfr helga and Hákon Hákonarson were of illegitimate origin. The comment made about King Magnús Erlingsson at his death in 1184 that he was kvenna-maór mikill, a great womanizer, would fit most of the kings in this period.27 King Haraldr Sigurðarson was a notorious bigamist, marrying Ellisif Jarizleifsdóttir in Russia and þóra þorbergsdóttir in Norway.28 King Haraldr gilli was killed in the arms of his mistress þóra Guthormsdóttir, because he was tricked into admitting to the supporters of his rival, that he intended to spend the night with her and not with his wife Ingiriðr.29

Still, things were changing. The sagas will not reveal a precise program in the manner of the ecclesiastical legislation, but the authors who described the reign of the three sons of Magnús berfættr, Eysteinn, Sigurðr, and Óláfr from 1103 to 1130, included incidents that cleary reveal a new sexual morality. King Eysteinn developed a warm friendship with a beautiful and intelligent woman Borghildr, daughter of an important chieftain. People began to talk and she felt that her only recourse was to clear herself of suspicion by submitting to the hot iron ordeal. She went to Sarpsborg, the place where she had come to know King

Eysteinn, fasted before the test and was cleared. While we are not told directly that she did this under the auspices of the Church, we know that churchmen were present at other hot iron ordeals[30], and Borghildr's preparation by fasting implies the Church's involvement. We thus have a suggestion of the importance the Church placed on keeping sexuality within marriage, of course with the woman bearing the burden of proof. Borghildr seems to have gotten the worse of both the old and new systems. No sooner had she cleared herself in this painful way before she was snapped up and made a mistress by Eysteinn's brother Sigurðr. Their son Magnús later became king.[31]

We recall that Sigurðr also had an affair with a married woman[32], but he eventually married Málmfríðr Haraldsdóttir from Russia. Developing an intense dislike for her, perhaps caused by his increasing madness, he wanted a divorce in order to marry a rich woman, Cecilía, but here he encountered the fierce resistance of Bishop Magnús. Characteristic of the old ideas, the king simply prepared a big veizla, party, to celebrate his brullaup, wedding. When the bishop realized what was happening, he confronted the king with a declaration that it was against God's law for him to marry while the queen was still alive. Fearing for his life and realizing that he could not stop the king, the bishop commuted the prohibition to a heavy fine paid to the Church. The king agreed, married Cecilía, and came to love her greatly, but when he fell sick a short time later, his friends and even Cecilía saw it as God's punishment and begged him to separate from her.[33] While in pagan times a king simply would have taken a new woman to his bed or established a polygamous union at most, by the third decade of the twelfth century Sigurðr could still indulge his will, but only at a great financial cost and at the risk of alienating the Church.

III

We have seen the Church's stand on the issue of sexuality outside marriage. Closely connected was the problem of the royal succession. The old system had permitted any male whose father had been a king, no matter how small the territory, to try to become a king himself. As long as a united kingdom was more an exception than a rule, as in the case of Harald hárfagri, a large number of royal siblings could be accomodated in the numerous small territories. Since we are aware of only a few royal sons in the eleventh century, the problem was not yet serious. Even during the first three decades of the twelfth when three half brothers, illegitimate sons of Magnús berfættr with three women, ruled together, the succession functioned smoothly.

Between the death of Sigurðr Jórsalafari, the last of these brothers, in 1130, and the coronation of Magnús Erlingsson in 1163 [34] no less than nine contenders asserted the royal title and attempted to become the sole ruler by fighting against their rivals. All nine claimed to be kings' sons, but only one, Ingi Haraldsson, could assert legitimate birth. In five cases the father's sexual relationship with the mother was so well known that the paternal origin was not questioned.[35] A sixth contender, Eysteinn Haraldsson arrived from Scotland, but since his father had previously admitted paternity, he was accepted. Two other candidates who also arrived from abroad had to prove their paternity by going through the hot iron ordeal. Sigurðr slembidjákn Magnússon who had been assumed to be the son of a priest until his mother said he was the son King Magnús berfættr, after his return to Norway in 1136 claimed that he had undergone the hot iron ordeal in Denmark in the presence of five bishops.[36] About a decade earlier Haraldr gilli Magnússon, the father of four of these pretenders and a pretender himself had been forced by his half brother Sigurðr Jórsalafari to undergo the hardest ordeal ever administered in Norway, to walk on nine glowing plowshares, assisted by two bishops.[37] By the second decade of the twelfth century the Church was using the hot iron ordeal as a

means of ascertaining both premarital sexuality and illegitimate paternal origin.

By the early 1160s all the pretenders had killed off each other. Although other candidates were available, Erlingr skakki, who was married to Kristín, the legitimate daughter of King Sigurðr Jórsalafari, talked the leaders and people into accepting their son Magnús as king and even won the Church's agreement to his coronation. Erlingr gained the support of the Church by arguing that although not of royal lineage himself, his son bore the royal blood from his mother, and most important in the eyes of the Church, that both mother and son were born of legitimate marriages.[38]

It quickly became clear that royal descent through the female line was too novel a concept and that legitimacy was not yet sufficiently important to encourage its acceptance. During a twenty year reign Magnús Erlingsson had to fight a half dozen contenders, all claiming royal descent through the male line. The most serious was Sverrir who was accepted as king in 1177 and eventually won over both Erlingr and Magnús. Illegitimate himself at best, Sverrir had made a vague offer of submitting to the ordeal, but was accepted without it.[39] Although he also was crowned, he had to contend with nine rivals, all who claimed to be kings' sons, among them three naming Magnús Erlingsson as their father whom we remember as a great womanizer.[40] Two others could be shown to be frauds.[41] The only one whom Sverrir took seriously was his alleged half brother Eiríkr Sigurðarson. At Eiríkr's arrival from abroad in 1181 Sverrir forced him to undergo the hot iron ordeal. When he passed, the king accepted him as brother but was unwilling to share the kingdom, and only reluctantly made him earl in 1185. At the simultaneous death of Eiríkr, his wife and his son in 1189 rumors about poisoning began to circulate. Through such means Sverrir may well have kept down the number of rivals.[42]

Norwegian historians are still divided over the issue of

Sverrir's paternal origin. Whether or not he himself was an impostor, his descendants became the accepted lineage in the country. The forty-six year rule of his grandson, Hákon Hákonarson (1217-63) was the first to rival Haraldr hárfagri's rule in length. In his family and dynastic policy he presents, as we shall see, a sharp contrast to his pagan predecessor.

After the sudden death of Sverrir's son Hákon in 1204, no less than twelve candidates appeared besides the illegitimate, posthumously born Hákon Hákonarson.[43] By 1227 they were either dead or had been defeated by Hákon, but in 1239 he was also faced with the long awaited declaration that his own father-in-law, Skúli Bárðarson was king. Only five of these thirteen men were legitimate. Among the others, Erlingr Sverrisson had been recognized by his sister Kristín on his arrival from the Faeroe islands in spite of the deathbed declaration of their father that he had no other son but Hákon, no matter how many might come from the West pretending to be his sons.[44] Hákon Hákonarson himself had found it necessary to have his mother Inga undergo the hot iron ordeal as late as 1218 [45], three years after it had been prohibited by the Fourth Lateran Council. When Cardinal Vilhjálmr came to Norway to perform the coronation of Hákon in 1247 he specifically outlawed this procedure.[46] The method had already been discredited thoroughly by the fraudulent ordeal of 1204 involving a man who pretended to be Erlingr steinveggr. Telling this impostor that he was perfectly aware of his origin, and bragging that he could turn the ordeal any way he wanted, Bishop Niculás of Oslo had administered the test. Hiding this man's hand in his own when the bandages were lifted, the bishop declared that he had never seen any hand more unharmed by the iron. This man, now certified as Erlingr steinveggr, son of Magnús Erlingsson, went on to cause great harm to the Sverrir party as also did his son Sigurðr ribbungr, in spite of notoriety of the fraud.[47]

Clearly, a new policy was needed, and it was found in

Hákon's new family program. The first Norwegian king to promote carefully his lineage, he personally groomed his sons for the succession and planned the marital future of all his children. Before the final showdown in 1240 with his rival Skúli he had his son the young Hákon, born 1232, accepted as king, thus ignoring an older, illegitimate son Sigurðr, born before his marriage to Skúli's daughter Margrét.[48] In 1251 the young Hákon was married to the Swedish princess Rikiza, and the king began to plan for the marriage of his younger son Magnús born 1238.[49]

1257 was a crucial year for the king's family program. Early in the year he had received a request from the king of Aragon to marry his daughter Kristín to one of the king's brothers. Having summoned the young King Hákon to discuss this important matter, he was informed of the disastrous news, that the young man had suddenly died on May 5. Consulting with the important churchmen of the country, the king forged ahead with the plan, equipped a ship and dispatched the young woman to Spain by the end of the month. In the beginning of June we find the king encouraging his advisors not to lose hope, since a good candidate as future king remained in his youngest son Magnús. The latter was accepted as king on June 24, a mere six weeks after the death of the older brother.[50] With only one son left[51] it may seem strange that Hákon was willing to send his daughter away, thereby effectively cutting off a possible branch of his own lineage. It was precisely the passing of the royal line from Sigurðr Jórsalafari through his daughter Kristín to Magnús Erlingsson, however, that had been the griveous fault of the previous generation. Erlingr skakki's attempt to stabilize the succession by the coronation of Magnús had only aggravated the mistake for which both Sverrir and Hákon himself had on several occasions blamed Erlingr and Magnús.[52] The speed with which Hákon negotiated his daughter's marriage immediately after the death of his son might almost suggest that he was not unhappy about having this potential line of future pretenders removed

from the nordic stage. In 1257 Hákon could still be sanguine about the future of his lineage, because not only did Magnús look promising, but he also had a grandson Sverrir, the son of Hákon and Rikiza, of whom he was very fond. In 1261 when the young boy died[53], however, Hákon speeded up the negotiations for the marriage of the remaining branch of his family tree. The marital plans between Magnús and the Danish Ingibjörg, started ten years earlier, had been taken up again before Sverrir's death. Now Bishop Hákon of Oslo virtually abducted the princess from a Danish nunnery, brought her to Norway where she was married to Magnús in record time on September 11, 1261.[54] After having met the young woman Hákon commented that he had always planned to welcome her warmly, but now he found her so giptusamligr (auspicious, or more specifically, marriable) that he would grow more fond of her than he had imagined.[55] Here he expressed not only a fifty-seven year old father's pleasure in a beautiful, young daughter-in-law, but also his relief in securing the future of his royal lineage. Ingibjörg did not disappoint him, becoming pregnant immediately thereafter and giving birth to Óláfr the following year.[56]

Hákon Hákonarson's concern for the legitimacy of his lineage was not only expressed indirectly through the marriage plans for his children, but also in a direct statement of policy. In 1236 when tension between Hákon and Skúli was increasing, Skúli demanded that his illegitimate son Pétr whom he had recognized only a few years earlier, should inherit his part of the country after his death. Hákon refused in the strongest possible terms, declaring that none of his own offspring would inherit unless born by Queen Margrét.[57] Thus through word and action Hákon expressed the two new principles of legitimacy and primogeniture.

Hákon was lucky that he never had to face inheritance in the female line. It is difficult to determine the origin of the resistance to this idea. The ideal succession, from father to son

in such a way that no kvennkné (female link) intervened, was often referred to by pretenders as being a law promulgated by Óláfr helga and thus presumably Christian in origin, while leaders of the people implied it had pagan roots.[58] Unfortunately there is no case of a grandson following his royal grandfather while skipping a father who did not obtain the title, but it seems clear that it was not only the bestowing of a royal title that distinguished the pretenders, but also their family blood. The male succession thus reveals a perception of biology that makes the man primarily responsible for the future child, relegating the woman to a mere vessel carrying the fetus. Such were the views of Aristotle eventually accepted and incorporated in the Christian doctrine. If the leaders of the people were correct in claiming an independent, pagan origin of this idea we see the Nordic and the Greek tradition agreeing on a secondary reproductive role for women.[59]

With the future of his lineage secured Hákon departed from Norway on an expedition against the Orkney Islands where he died on December 12, 1263. On his deathbed he was asked by the churchmen present whether he might have any other sons, if misfortune should befall Magnús or whether they could look for his offspring any other place. Although enfeebled, the king answered firmly that he had no other son but Magnús and no daughter unknown to the people.[60]

On the issue of marriage and succession it is hard to imagine a greater contrast than between Haraldr hárfagri in the tenth century, who used his sexual energies with abandon, creating in Snorri's imagery the huge tree stretching its branches over all Norway, and Hákon Hákonarson in the thirteenth century who pruned and developed his lineage in legal marriage, producing in the end a single trunk through which the succession progressed smoothly. When the Oddaverja annáll remarked about Magnús Hákonarsson at his death in 1280 that he was the first to have ruled Norway as king without having incited envy (öfund-

lauss), it was due to the result of the new sexual and marital policy first implemented by his father.61

Endnotes

1. O.A. Johnsen & J. Helgason eds., Den store saga om Olaf den hellige 2 (Oslo, 1941), pp. 655-82; esp. p. 663, 671.

2. Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder, 13, 678-9. Jón Helgason in Den store saga om Olav den Hellige, 2, 1129-31. A. Faulkes, "Rauðúlfs Þáttr", Studia Islandica, 25 (1966).

3. Den store saga om Olaf den hellige, 2, 683, 685. The king and his faithful companion Sighvatr skáld þórðarson used to brag about their sexual exploits to each other and compose poems about them; ibid. 2, 699-701.

4. Sigurður Nordal,"Sagalitteraturen," in Litteraturhistorie B: Norge og Island, Nordisk Kultur 8:B (Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, 1953), p. 207. J. E. Turville-Petre, The Story of Rauð and his sons. Viking Society Translation Series, vol. 4 (London, 1947). Repr. 1982. Introduction.

5. Snorri, Óláfs saga helga, chap. 164.

6. Sturlunga saga, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, Kristján Eldjárn, Reykjavik, 1946, 1, 242.

7. Snorri's Heimskringla either in the edition by Finnur Jónsson, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur (SUGNL) 23; 4 vols. (Copenhagen, 1893-1901) or by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit 26-28 (Reykjavik, 1941-51) (ÍF). Ágrip, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek, 18 (Halle, 1929). Historia Norwegiæ in Gustav Storm ed., Monumenta Historica Norwegiæ (Kristiania, 1880). Snorri, Haralds saga hárfagra., chaps. 17, 21, 25, 37 where both the names of the mothers and their children are listed. Ágrip (chap. 2) gives the information that the king had twenty sons with many konur (wives or women), but lists only one of them by name. The names of the sons are given, but not the daughters. Historia Norwegiæ lists sixteen named sons (p. 104). In Snorri's separate saga of Óláfr helga he indicates that Haraldr had twenty sons or more who grew to adulthood and gives the names of three daughters, but says that the king also had other daughters. While Haraldr hárfagri's case is unique, it is common to find many more boys than girls in lists of siblings, and it is likely that it is evidence of some female infanticide. But underrepresentation of females should also be taken into

account, since girls are often mentioned by the author only if the future spouse is known, or at a time when the husband is brought into focus. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson argues from the poem Hákonarmal composed in the ninth century, that Haraldr only had nine sons (introduction to Heimskringla, ÍF,26, LXX).

8. He seems to have married Ása, Ragnhildr, and Snæfríðr, although only the father's insistence made him go through the formalities in the last case. Þóra was his ambátt in his old age, while his youthful inspirer Gyða was brought to him. When he married Ragnhildr he sent nine women away.

9. Snorri, Hálfdanar saga svarta, chap. 6; Haralds saga hárfagra, chap. 42.

10. Óláfr saga Tryggvasonar en mesta, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson. Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, Ser. A. vol. 1 (Copenhagen, 1958) chap. 2.

11. Diplomatarium Islandicum (Copenhagen 1857-76) 1, 234. Norges gamle Love (Kristiania, 1846-95), 1, 409.

12. Snorri, Haralds saga gráfeldar, chap. 14. The story is also found in Ágrip (chap. 9) and Historia Norwegiæ (p. 108).

13. Saga Sigurðar Jorsalafára, in Fornmanna sögur (Copenhagen, 1832) 7, chaps. 27, 28, 32. The affair continued for the duration of the husband's absence. See also Morkinskinna, ed. F. Jónsson, SUGNL, 53 (Copenhagen, 1932), chap. 55.

14. Morkinskinna, ed. Finnur Jónsson. SUGNL, 53 (Copenhagen, 1932), chap. 14.

15. Jómsvíkinga saga, ed. Carl af Petersen. SUGNL, 7 (Copenhagen, 1882), chap. 8.

16. Snorri, Haraldssona saga, chap. 18.

17. Knýtlinga saga ed. Bjarni Guðnason. ÍF 35 (Reykjavik, 1982), chap. 31.

18. See note 13.

19. Olafs saga hins helga, ed. Anne Heinrichs et al. (Heidelberg, 1982), chaps. 1, 7.

20. Snorri describes in lavish details the splendid banquet Sigríðr prepared for Haraldr, including the drink she offered him after he had gone to bed, but he is careful to point out that she left the room after Haraldr had fallen asleep. Snorri's enigmatic comment, that "Sigríðr was a wise woman, able to see into the

future" (Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, chap. 43), may simply be his reflection of this feature concerning her motherly wishes borrowed from Óláfs saga hins helga.

21. Monumenta Historica Norvegiæ, p. 18.

22. Although having praised Hákon earlier, both Ágrip (chap. 13), Oddr Snorrason (chap. 20) (Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1932)), Fagrskinna (chap. 20)(Fagrskinna, ed. Finnur Jonsson, SUGNL 30 (Copenhagen, 1902-03)), and Snorri (Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, chaps. 45, 47) make a direct connection between his sexual excesses and the uproar of the chieftains. In Ágrip the resistence was started singlehandedly by a woman Guðrún lundasól, but in Snorri's account she was given a husband who took the initiative. Oddr Snorrason made Brynjólfr the organizer because he had suffered the insult of having his wife dragged out of his bed and brought to Hákon.

23. The author of Ágrip permits himself the pun that "lauk svá saurlífismaðr í saurgo húsi sínom dögom ok svá ríki" (chap. 13).

24. Óláfr had married Gyða in England, but she did not follow him to Norway. She may have died (as indicated in Flateyjarbók, 1, 206) (Flateyjarbok, eds. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C. R. Unger, 3 vols. (Christiania, 1860-68)) like his first wife, Geira in Vendland. He later attempted to marry Sigríðr stórráða, but gave up the idea because she did not want to become a Christian. He was married briefly to Guðrún Járn-Skeggjadóttir, and finally acquired the Danish þyri Haraldsdóttir as his wife. Both Oddr Snorrason and Snorri emphasize that these two marriage did not involve bigamy, Oddr by saying that Óláfr left Guðrún immediately after his marriage to þyri in spite of the first wife's displeasure (chap. 54), Snorri by inventing the story that Guðrún tried to kill him the first night in bed. He assures his readers that "Guðrún did not since sleep in the same bed as King Óláfr." (chap. 71)

25. The only case where Haraldr hárfagri went through the formality of festa, engagement to his bride involved the Finnish woman Snæfriðr whose father insisted that it be done according to the law (Snorri, Haralds saga hárfagri, chap. 25), although other expressions such as fekk (Ragnhildr), átti (Svanhildr and Áshildr, chap. 21) can also imply regular marriage.

26. According to the family sagas, the widowed Gunnhildr showed evidence of sexual behavior normally associated with men, initiating affairs with young men coming from Iceland, although at least in one case she wanted it kept a secret. See Njáls saga. ÍF, 12, chap. 3; Laxdæla saga. ÍF, 5, chaps. 19, 21.

27. Sverris saga. ed. G. Indrebø (Kristiania, 1920), chap. 98.

28. Snorri, Haralds saga Sigurðarson, chaps. 33, 64, 82. It is amusing to notice that he named his oldest child, María after a young greek woman whom he had wanted to marry during his stay in Constantinople; ibid., chaps. 13, 33. Grágás permitted a married Icelander to take a wife while in Norway, an arrangement justified by the three-year absences such journeys often entailed; Grágás Ia, 226 (ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen, 1832); 2, 70 (ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen, 1879). No similar stipulation existed in Norwegian law and would not have applied in Haraldr's case since he eventually had both wives with him.

29. Snorri, Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla, chap. 15. Fagrskinna, chap. 81.

30. When Haraldr gilli came to Norway and claimed to be the son of Magnús berfættr and hence the half-brother of the three reigning kings, Sigurðr let him undergo the hardest hot iron ordeal that ever had taken place in Norway, to walk across nine (or seven in some accounts) glowing plowshares. During the walk he was led by two bishops; Snorri, Magnússona saga, chap. 26.

31. Snorri, Magnússona saga, chaps. 19, 20; Saga Sigurðar Jórsalafara, in Fornmanna sögur (Copenhagen, 1832) chap. 22. Magnús later married Kristín, a Danish princess. He did not like her and had the audacity to send her back; Snorri added the comment, that afterwards "everything went worse for him", perhaps a criticism of his marital behavior; Snorri, Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla, chap. 1.

32. See note 13. He also had as his mistress the sister of two prominent brothers; see Morkinskinna, chap. 83.

33. Morkinskinna, chaps. 65, 66; Ágrip, chap. 60; Saga Sigurdar Jórsalafara, chaps. 52, 53. Málmfríðr later was married to King Erik Emune in Denmark; Saxo, Gesta Danorum, Ed. J. Olrik, H. Raeder (Copenhagen, 1931), 13.11.

34. This is the date indicated by Heimskringla; Sverris saga and Fagrskinna give the date of 1163. See Knut Helle, Norge blir en stat 1130-1319 (Oslo, 1964) p. 38. The following account is primarily based on Heimskringla, Sverris saga, Böglunga sögur, (Fornmanna sögur 9 (Copenhagen, 1835)) and Hákonar saga Hákonarson (ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon. Icelandic Sagas, vol. 2 (London, 1887)).

35. Magnús Sigurðarson, Sigurðr munnr Haraldsson, Magnús Haraldsson, Hákon herðibreiðr Sigurðarson, Sigurðr Sigurðarson.

36. Magnus saga blinda ok Haralds gilla, chap. 13. The friends of the king, Haraldr gilli claimed the Danes had lied.

37. Magnússona saga, chap. 26. See note 28.

38. Magnús saga Erlingssonar, chap. 21.

39. Sverris saga, chap. 11. "...hans mál væri áðr birt við nockorum sannendom".

40. See note 25.

41. Jón kuflungr; Sv. s., chaps. 101, 109; and Sigurðr brennir; Sv. s., chap. 110.

42. Sv. s., chaps. 59, 113, 115.

43. Erlingr steinveggr, Guthormr Sigurðarson, Ingi Bárðarson, Magnús Erlingsson, Philippús Baglakonungr, Erlingr Sverrisson, Guthormr Ingason, Hákon galinn, Knutr Hákonarson, Sigurðr ribbungr, Beni skinnknífr, and Magnús blaðstakkr.

44. Sv. s., chap. 180; Böglunga sögur, chap. 40.

45. Hákon saga Hákonarsonar, chaps. 41-45.

46. H.s.H., chap. 255.

47. Böglunga sögur, chaps.5, 9; H. s. H., chaps. 134, 139, 143. For his support the bishop obtained that Erlingr accepted his nephew Philippús as earl.

48. H. s. H., chaps. 174, 187, 223, 225. An older son Óláfr born 1226 had apparently died; ibid., chap. 158. Hákon had used Sigurðr earlier by handing him over to Skúli as a hostage when the tension between the two began to mount. At Hákon's coronation in 1247 Sigurðr participated in the ceremony in an important but clearly secondary role to the young king Hákon; ibid., chap. 253.

49. Ibid., chaps. 194, 272.

50. Ibid., chaps. 287, 288, 290-292. The acceptance of Magnús now was as urgent as Hákon's in 1240, since the king was leaving immediately for an expedition against Denmark. On Kristin's marriage see Jenny M. Jochens, "Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law, Life, and Literature", forthcoming.

51. The illegitimate Sigurðr had died in 1254, but would probably not have been considered a candidate by the king. H.s.H., chap. 282.

52. Sv. s., chaps. 36, 99, 112; H. s. H., chap. 247.

53. H. s. H., chaps. 296, 303, 304.

54. H. s. H., chaps. 304-309. On the marriage negotiations see Jochens, "Consent in Marriage."

55. Ibid., ch. 308. Flateyjarbók, 3, 211.

56. H. s. H., chaps. 312, 313. Óláfr died young, but she produced two other sons.

57. ibid., chaps. 164, 187.

58. Of the many references see H. s. H., chaps. 4, 88, 89, 199.

59. Unfortunately, the acceptance of female inheritance in the royal line in 1302 falls outside the period for which we have the rich narrative sources; see N.G.L., 3, 44-55.

60. H. s. H., chap. 329.

61. Gustav. Storm, Islandske annaler, (Kristiania, 1888) p. 484.