

THE CULT OF ST. OLAF IN NOVGOROD

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A year after the death of Olaf Haraldsson in the battle of Stiklastadir in 1030 bishop Grimkell translated his remains to a church founded by Olaf in Nidaros and declared him a saint. From its beginnings the cult of St.Olaf, the same as his image in the written tradition, was manifold. Olaf the Viking, Olaf the King, who consolidated Norway, Olaf the Law-giver, Olaf the Missionary and finally Olaf the Martyr - these were major components of his image which conditioned different aspects of his cult.

Since the introduction of the saint's day by his son Magnus after his return to Norway in 1036, St.Olaf's cult gained the state status and the saint became the patron of the royal dynasty (Hoffmann 1981). At the same time the successors of Olaf, Harald Hardrada among them, were renowned not only for their political but also for their military activities. Neither Olaf himself lacked the fame of a viking whose many deeds-of-arm were praised by his skalds. It was only natural that already in the reign of Magnus the Good (1036-1047) Olaf started to be considered the protector in military affairs and the patron of Norwegian warriors.

By the end of the eleventh century Olaf became also the patron of Scandinavian merchants especially of those participating in the long-distance trade (Friedland 1981). It is in the Hanseatic time that his cult spread particularly wide from England to Riga. In Eastern Baltic, however, the trade connotations of the cult emerged much earlier. His cult was especially popular on Gotland. The *Gutasaga* regarded him as the baptizer of the island and narrated about a construction of a chapel in his honour by Ormika who was converted by Olaf during his stay on the island on his way to Rus. Later sources mentioned the foundation of St.Olaf's church in Visby by the Danish king Eirik the Good in 1102 (Perlnar 1981).

Though the official canonization of Olaf by the papal curia took place only in the end of the 12th century (Metzler 1936), his local sanctification still presupposed the compilation of a liturgical text for his holiday, of his *vita* and of his miracles. These requirements seem to be fulfilled as about two decades after Olaf's death the earliest text of *Officium* was introduced into an Anglo-Saxon manuscript (Brit.Mus.Harley, 2961, c.1050. See: The Leofric Missal, p.274). Grimkell became the author of the oldest clerical composition, *Translatio Sancti Olavi*, now non-extant. It mentioned the omens of Olaf's sanctity and narrated about the translation of his remains to Nidaros (Holtmark 1937). The earliest secular reports of Olaf's miracles belonged to the skalds, contemporaries of Olaf. Sigvat Thordarson, his skald and retineman, mentioned the mass served on the saint's day and referred to a number of miracles worked by Olaf in his *Funeral Poem* (*Erfidrápa*, c.1040). The skald of Knut the Great and Svein, Thorarin the Praise-Tongue, also related about a number of miracles of Olaf in the poem *Sea-Calm Lay* (*Glælongskviða*) glorifying Olaf (between 1030 and 1036).

The formation of the *miraculi* corpus started thus already at the time of Olaf's canonization. The *Translatio*, as well as the poems of Sigvat and Thorarin presented miracles mostly based on two hagiographical *topoi*. The first group was dedicated to the omens of Olaf's sanctity, the irradiation of light over Olaf's burial place, the chime, the incorruptness of Olaf's body, the growth of hair and nails, etc. The second elaborated the motive of healing: the appearance of a healing spring at the burial place, the restoration of sight and of speech.

Later the number of miracles grew and their plots become more diverse. Among several dozens of stories in different texts there are healings (usually of blindness and muteness), rescues from fire, assistance in battles, release of prisoners. It seems that already in the 1150s a Norse legendary of St. Olaf was compiled which included miracles of different types (Louis-Jensen 1970). Since 1170 when archbishop of Nidaros Eysteinn compiled *Passio et miracula Beati Olavi*, the canonization of some of the *miracula* took place. Eysteinn picked out 20 stories which formed the 'canonical' corpus of miracles. This collection was later revised in *Acta sancti Olavi regis et martyris* and translated into Norwegian in the *Gammel Norsk Homiliebook* (the turn of the 12th and the 13th centuries) which gave rise to many legendary and homiletic books of the 13th century and later.

At the same time the miracles of St. Olaf became also an integral part of the literary tradition. The poem of skald Einar Skulason *Sunbeam* (*Geisli*, c.1152) introduced a number of earlier unknown miracles. A larger or smaller sets of miracles differently arranged are present practically in all sagas devoted to Olaf Haraldsson, their greatest number being included into the *Legendary saga of Olaf the Saint* (LegÓSH) of the early thirteenth century and Snorri's *Heimskringla* (Hskr), c.1230, where St. Olaf's miracles are placed in several sagas (Whaley 1987).

Most of the miracles attributed to St. Olaf are connected with Norway. Thus, the scene of fourteen out of twenty 'canonical' miracles is either Nidaros or other localities in Norway. Very few of them are told to have happened in other Scandinavian countries, and only two are localized in England and in Ireland. However, in all cases, but two, the recipients of the miracle are Norwegians. It seems all the more interesting that among these Norway-centered set of stories there appeared a rather large group of miracles - seven in number - connected with Eastern Europe, more specifically with two major centers where many Scandinavians resided for some time in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, namely with Novgorod and Constantinople.

The group of Russian, or Novgorod, miracles comprises four stories. Two of them occur only once in different compositions. They do not belong thus to a widely known and popular miracles of St. Olaf. Two others were included into the "canonical" collection of miracles and were introduced in a number of sagas too. However, none of the Russian miracles of St. Olaf were used by Snorri Sturluson in his text though he cited the poem of Sigvat who told about one of them. No mention of them was made by Einar Skulason either.

Miracle	Sigvat c.1040	Passio c.1170	Acta after 1170	GNH c.1200	LegÓSH early 13 c.	Flat 1328-87
1.Olaf's hair return sight to Valdimar	(Hskr, ÓSH, k.245)	-	-	-	-	-
2. A boy is cured by Olaf of quinsy	-	-	-	-	k.79	-
3.A mute artisan is cured after visting St. Olaf's church	-	s.93-4	XIX	s.178	k.124	-
4.The priest of St.Olaf's church stops the fire in Novgorod	-	s.89	XIV	s.174	k.117	II,s.507

The earliest Russian miracle is attested by Sigvat:

Lýgk, nema Óleifr eigi
ýs sem kykvir tívar,
gæðik helzt í hróðri,
hárvøxt, konungs óru.

Enn helzk, þeims sýn seldi,
svøðrðr, þanns óx, í Gørðum
hann fekk læs, af ljósum,
lausn Valdamar, hausi.

(I do not lie if the hair grew on Olaf as on a living man; I extol gladly the konung's men in my song. But especially the man who had the vision: the hair that grew out of the bright scalp; in Gardar he returned sight to Valdamar).

The interpretations of the content of the miracle differed (Jakson 199, p. 188-189 with bibliography). Finnur Jónsson thought that the miracle told about the gain of sight by a Valdimar, a Russian by name, with the help of Olaf's hair (Finnur Jónsson 1921, b.1, p.244). A.Holtsmark suggested a more general healing motiff - the deliverance of pains or sufferengs and connected it with another miracle worked by Olaf in Rus, the healing of a boy of quinsy (Holtsmark 1938, p.122 ann.2). Though the second interpretation can not be excluded, the first seems to be in better concordance with St.Olaf's special ability in healings: in the next strophe Sigvat stressed the restoration of sight and speech as the most frequent manifestations of the saint's powers (*Erfiðráða*, str.24, the same is told by Thorarin in GL, str.8). In the corpus of St.Olaf's miracle-stories there are no less than ten with the same plot. It is worth noting also that stories

dealing with the healing of blindness were among the earliest (cf. the miracle about a blind beggar gaining sight through St.Olaf's blood in *Geisli*).

Whatever the interpretation of the miraculous event may be, the most important thing about the miracle-story itself is the localization of the event. A decade after the death of Olaf a Norwegian skald knows of a story about Olaf's healing of a Russian (*Valdimar*, OR *Vladimir*) in Rus (*i Gǫrðum*). It is hardly probable that such a story could have originated in the milieu other than Scandinavian residents in and travellers to Rus. They must have had permanent and tight connections with Norway for the news of Olaf's canonization to reach them and for its echo, a story about St.Olaf's miracle, to return to Norway by 1040.

The second miracle story is attested only in LegÓSH (k.79, s.74; Jackson 1994, p.180-181). It tells about a healing of a young son of a noble woman of quinsy by Olaf during his stay in Rus. This is a very rare occasion of a miracle worked by Olaf in his lifetime. Of special interest is the stress on the fact that miraculous abilities of Olaf were then still concealed from all but Ingigerd: "*Gac þu kvað hon (Ingigerd) firir Olaf konong. Oc bið hann nokcora hialpræða. En hann man æigi læcner kallazc. En þu skalt þat sægia at þu hævir þat hæyrt. Ef konongrenn lægði brauð i munn manne at þa man batna*". The healing of the boy revealed and promulgated the divine power of Olaf thus prophesing his sanctity.

Both subject-plots, like those of the majority of St.Olaf's miracles, reflect everyday human problems and aim at glorification of the saint and the exposure of his saintly power. There is no intermediary between the human being and the saint. The sick person pleads with the Saint to heal him and receives help directly from him. This first-hand communication of the Saint and his worshipper is especially obvious in the second miracle story where the healing is told to be achieved by Olaf's placement of a piece of honeycombs into the mouth of the sick.

Miracle-stories 3 and 4 which belong to the 'canonical' set of St.Olaf's miracles are of a different nature. The third one deals with the deliverance of Novgorod from a devastating fire (Jackson 1994, p.189-190). The desperate inhabitants of Novgorod turned to *Stephán*, the priest of St.Olaf's church in Novgorod, in search of rescue. On hearing their prayers he took the icon of Olaf and put it in front of the fire which immediately ceased. The fourth tells about a mute young artisan slave who was bought by a *varingus quidam in Ruscia* (Acta, s.143), *væringr æinn i Garðum* (Hb, p.178). The youth was thought to be a Norwegian as he made and decorated the weapons in Northern manner. Being freed because of his poor health, he came to Novgorod and resided by a woman who was a great worshipper of Olaf. One night St.Olaf appeared in her dream and told her to take the boy with her to his church in the morning. In the church the boy fell asleep and saw St.Olaf who granted him speech and deliverance of all illnesses.

Both stories contain a number of local details, the name of the priest who stopped the fire, the description of the weapons produced by the artisan, but first of all they both mention the church of St.Olaf in Novgorod. The introduction of

specific details was not alien to *miraculi* as a literary form. They provided a trustworthy background for a miraculous event and thus substantiated its actual reality. In our case the particulars seem to be authentic and they betray familiarity with the life of Scandinavians in Novgorod. Even more eloquent is the form *varingus* in the Latin texts of the fourth story, as well as the whole phrase *varingus... in Ruscia*. The root vowel *-a-* in *varingus* could hardly derive from Old Norse *væringr*, but it corresponds to the Old Russian *varjag* which suggests the borrowing of the term from Old Russian. A possible borrowing of the term can explain also a seemingly unnecessary introduction of the explanation *in Ruscia*. In Old Russian written sources *varjag* is a general designation of Scandinavians, both in Rus and at home. In Old Norse texts all the usages of *væringr* refer to a Scandinavian in Byzantium and never, but for this case, to Scandinavians in Rus (Melnikova & Petrukhin 1994). As a result the usage of the word *varingus* as applied to a Scandinavian resident in Rus made it necessary to define his location more precisely and add *in Ruscia*.

The miracle-stories 3 and 4, like the first and the second ones, manifest the miracle-working abilities of Olaf and his readiness to help sufferers. However, they seem to contain one more motive which was probably especially important for Eysteinn and which made him include just these miracles in his collection. Contrary to miracles 1 and 2, these two stories stress the role of St.Olaf's church in Novgorod as an intermediary between a human being and the Saint. In both miracles to get the help of the Saint, the inhabitants of Novgorod (the mute artisan could not get cured before he came to Novgorod) have to pay a visit to St.Olaf's church and to turn to the priests. It is the priest of the church, named or unnamed, who is said to perform or to get involved into the performance of St.Olaf's miracle.

In the majority of St.Olaf's miracles the locality does not play any special role. St.Olaf helps any sufferer wherever he can find himself, in a town square, in a forest, in a hut, etc. Only a few miracles are connected with churches, mostly with the foundation of St.Olaf's churches, like the one in Stiklastadir on the site of the first burial place of Olaf (*Acta*, XX). They seem to belong to a specific group of temple miracles which originated as a substantiation of an exceptional importance of the church and its being under the special patronage of the saint. The emphasis placed on St.Olaf's church in Novgorod and on its priests might indicate the temple origins of miracles 3 and 4 and their emergence among the clergy and the parishioners of the church. It is this peculiarity of the stories that might attract the attention of Eysteinn and induce him to select them for inclusion into his set of miracles as they not only glorified the saint, but also propagated the church dedicated to him.

The church of St.Olaf in Novgorod is mentioned for the first time in the Sjuta runic inscription (U 687) carved by a runemaster Øpir who is believed to work in the last decades of the eleventh century (Melnikova 1977, p.113-115). The stone is erected in memory of a Spjalbudi who "died in Holmgard in Olaf's church". A Varangian church (*Varjazhskaja bozhnitsa*), though without the name of its patron, is mentioned twice in the First Novgorod Chronicle (NC, p.29 &

215, 37 & 226). It tells s.a. 1152 and 1181 about large fires in Novgorod during which the church was burnt down. The last testimony dates to the second half of the thirteenth century and comes from a draft version of a trade treaty between Novgorod, Gotland, and German towns (Andrejevski 1855, p.29, note 93). The property of the Gotlandic trade court in Novgorod was specified there, the church of St.Olaf being named among other possessions together with a cemetery and a meadow.

The church of St.Olaf whose cult as a patron of merchants was gaining popularity was first and foremost the church of Scandinavian merchants who spent winters in Novgorod. But it seems to become the main source of his worship among the local population too. A significant role in the spread of St.Olaf's cult was played by the priests of the church. In the twelfth century a special punishment was provided for those Novgorodians who "took their children for prayers to a Varangian priest (*k Varjazhskjmu popu*)" (RIB, col.60). The introduction of this offence into the orthodox regulations indicate that it was a rather common practice of Novgorodians. It is probably not a mere coincidence that in the mid-twelfth century the names of several Scandinavian saints, Olaf among them, were included into the litany of a prayer to the Holy Trinity (Lind 1990).

It is probably indicative also that in three out of four miracle-stories the recipients of Olaf's benefaction are Novgorodian citizens and not Scandinavian newcomers. It is worth noting that in the majority of miracles St.Olaf helps Norwegians, and only in a few cases the sufferers are Swedes or Danes. Novgorodians are thus perceived to have good right to enjoy Olaf's help. The belief that there exists special relationship between St.Olaf and Novgorodians might derive, especially in the early days of his cult, from his stay in Rus for two years. The two visits of Harald Hardrada, Olaf's step-brother, on his way to and from Byzantium could reinforce the memories of Olaf among Novgorodians and facilitate the spread of his cult.

The stories about St.Olaf's miracles in Novgorod thus seem to have emerged not in Norway, but in Novgorod. The earliest story, about the healing of Valdimar, appeared practically immediately, in the first decade, after the canonization of Olaf by Grimkell. Together with miracle-story 2, it does not betray any connections with a specific social or national milieu. Their authors were probably Scandinavians residing in Novgorod and very well acquainted with Novgorodian realities but local inhabitants might have participated in the formation of these narratives as well. The miracle-stories 3 and 4 seem to be created by the clergy and the parishioners, of both Scandinavian and local origin, of a church dedicated to St.Olaf which was founded between 1030 and the end of the eleventh century.

The intensity of activities resulting in creation of miracle-stories suggests that the cult of St.Olaf enjoyed popularity in Novgorod both among Scandinavians and a part of local population. It emerged practically simultaneously in Norway and in Novgorod and by the twelfth century it attracted Novgorodians to such an extent that the church authorities had to take measures to prevent its further spread.

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- LegOSH - Óláfs saga hins selga. Udg.av J.A.Jonsen. Kristiania, 1922.
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