

***Brennum öll fyr innan: the Stiklastaðir tradition
in verse and in prose***

Sverris saga (henceforth *Sv*) has many features deviating from the narrative standard of Old Icelandic Sagas and gives a unique impression: it was composed by order of king Sverrir himself and its account is apparently partial to the *Birkibeinar* and their version of Norwegian history; the saga was scribed partly during Sverrir's lifetime, partly shortly after his death [Indrebø 1921, LII], so it makes no epic distance to the events it tells from, and the narrator somewhere utters his personal evaluations. At the same time, the text of *Sv* shows many parallels and allusions both to Nordic prose as to Nordic poetry. These parallels restore *Sv* in the scope of Medieval Nordic literature. One of the finest observations was made by Ludvig Holm-Olsen [1952] who noticed that bishop Nikulás' s speech dated from 1199 A. D. includes a quotation from one of the scaldic stanzas (*vísur*) attributed to Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld in the Stiklastaðir episode (1030 A. D.). This *vísa* opens with a warlike appeal to king Ólaf the Saint to commit to flames all the abods of *frændir*:

*Brennum öll fyr innan
innin, þaus vér finnum
- land skal herr með hjörvi -
Hverbjörg - fyr gram verja.*

In the second half of the stanza the scald expresses the wish that the king's enemies, i.e. the inhabitants of Prandheimr "will have to collect cold ashes" of their houses:

*Ýs, taki allra húsa
Inn-Prændir kol sinna,
angr mun kveykt í klungri
köld, ef ek má valda.¹*

The conflict with *Frændir* is revived on another occasion in 1199 A. D. when bishop Nikulás Árnarson besets in Niðarós king Sverrir and population supporting him; once again the wish to burn the enemy's houses is pronounced in front of the army and turns into a slogan or instruction; the words ascribed to the bishop literally reproduce the phraseology of the above mentioned scaldic piece:

¹ Þormóðr's stanza is preserved both in the *Fóstbræðra saga* (both in the *Hauksbók* as in the *Flatexjarbók* redactions) and in a number of king sagas about St. Ólaf. It is probable that it was already present in the eldest written version, labelled as "Eldest Saga of St. Ólaf" (*Elzta saga*) which is believed to be written shortly before or parallel with *Sv* [Kristjánson 1972, 223]. *Elzta saga* is now lost as a whole, but its material has been used in more recent versions including Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and *Ólafs saga in sérstaka* and the so called *Legendary Saga* (*Helgisaga*).

En allit ætla ec, at ver Baglar hirtum um hvar hann feR med hafhruta sina er hann lætr saman reca þar i bœnum, væntir mic at þrændir hafi fyr col allRa sinna husa en þeim comi þat at gagni [Sv s 155]

The similarity of the contexts excludes pure coincidence and it is highly plausible that we deal both with a quotation in a modern sense and with a conventional “anti-trøndersk” motif. The goal of the present paper is to keep these ingredients apart and to explain the continuity of the poetic and historiographical traditions in the XI - XIII centuries.

The correspondence between the stanza and the passage of Sv provokes a list of questions: was the piece attributed to Þormóðr perceived as classical in the beginning of the XIII century? Who quoted the scald: the bishop or the Icelandic narrator's of Sv? Is the stanza authentic or at least ancient? Should the cited fragment be regarded as a poetism or not? Which ideology stands behind the appeal to burn the farmers' houses? Is it reasonable to take this appeal seriously? In what degree were the events of remote ages modernized by the authors of king sagas?

The conflict between the population of Trøndelag and the Norwegian kings may be traced back to the X century: it is often disguised as conflict between old and new customs and institutions, first and foremost between paganism and christianity. This motif runs through Snorri's *Heimskringla* where it occurs thrice - in *Hákonar saga góða*, in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* and in *Ólafs saga helga*. King Hákon Adalsteinsfóstri tries to persuade mighty landlords from Þrandheimr to accept christianity but they refuse and force the king to obey the heathen rituals [Hkr I, 112-114]. Then Ólafur Tryggvason threatens the new generation of chieftains to accept the new religion on law assemblies [Hkr I, 219], but people go on making offerings - this fact is confirmed e.g. by Ólafur the Saint's controversy with Ölfir á Eggju [Hkr II, 138]. As everybody knows, this king fulfilled his mission, but finally had to pay his life and fell at Stiklastaðir fighting against the rebellious Trønds. The spreading of St. Ólafur's worship and his popularity turns the king's name into an authority to whom various fighting groups and social lays use to appeal.

Although Snorri himself says that his account is based on the evidence of scaldic poetry [Hkr I, 2] and his reasoning concerning kings' conduct is somewhere close to expressions spread over in the scaldic stanzas he quotes², it remains doubtful that scaldic poetry may altogether support the “anti-trøndersk” program. In order to prove it, one must study the functions of folk names by scalds. The limitations of space make us restrict ourselves with the frame of *Heimskringla*. It seems also helpful to examine the stanzas referring to the Stiklastaðir episode and to the theme of inflammation.

The analysis shows that local Norwegian toponomastics occurs by scalds of X-XII centuries in three cases: a) where Norwegian kings are outside of the country; b)

² Cf. the advice given by jarl Sigurd to king Hákon den Gode with warning of scald Sigvatr, addressed to king Magnus den Gode:

A) Sigurðr jarl bað konung gefa þrændum þetta ekki at sök, segir svá at *konungi muni ekki þat duga at heitask eða herja á innanlandsfolk hér*, ok þar sízt, er mestr styrkr var landsins, sem í Þrandheimi var. [Hkr I, 114];

B) *ofrausn es þat jöfri / innan lands at vinna* “it does not become the king to plunder within the country” [Hkr III, N 30]

in situations where kings or chieftains pass by some locality ; c) in situations where kings are described in conflict with their vassals, especially with obstinate landlords. Only in the last case tribal names play a role of their own.

1) **Ornamental style.** Scaldic poems describing the given king at his campaign abroad often apply the so called pseudo-kennings (*viðkenningar*), i.e. identifying expressions as "son of X" or "lord of X" or "murderer of X". In this case, all local folk names as well as names of *fylks* and law districts (e.g. *Agðir*, *Prændir*, *Brandheimr*, *Heinir*, *Eynir* etc) behave as poetic synonyms (*heiti*) of Norway and Norwegians according to the principle *pars pro toto*. Thus, *Lista þengill* "the ruler of Listi" by Sigvatr [Hkr II, N 77] means just "the king of Norway" and *þraendir* by Hallfrøðr [Hkr I, N 168] is nothing more but a scaldic paraphrase for "Norwegians". Note that the ornamental style allows only praising designations and prohibits those implying the split within the home country; hence follows that a king praised in a *drápa* or *flokkr* may be called e.g. *Bulgara brennir* "the burner of the Bulgarians" (Arnórr jarlaskáld about Haraldr harðráði), but certainly not **Verðæla brennir*, even if his biography gives hints to it.

The first examples of this kind are found in the beginning of the XI century by Halldórr ókristni - *Eyna konungr* [Hkr I, N 165] and Hallfrøðr vandræðaskáld - *missti gengis þrænzka drengja* [ibid, N 168] - both refer to Ólafr Tryggvason in the battle of Svoldrö. In the 1040-1060 the device turns into a standard cliché: the scalds of Magnus góði and Haraldr harðráði Arnórr jarlaskáld and Þjóðólfr exploit it quite systematically and describe these kings during their campaigns against Denmark by using the whole scale of local names: *hilmir Hōrða*, *ræsir Þrænða*, *Skáninga harri* (Skáney is treated here as belonging to Norway), *allvaldr Egða*, *upplenzkr hilmir* etc. [Hkr III, NN 37,38,41,46, 55, 57,58,63,75,87]. In the XII century, the material grows more scarce. Einarr Skúlason gives one of the last examples: *Dæla dróttinn* "the lord of Gudbrandsdalen" (about Sigurðr Jórslafari) [Hkr III, N 202].

2) **Landscape style.** The most interesting example of this type can be observed in *Tøgdrápa*, a poem belonging to Þórarinn loftunga [Hkr II, NN 113-118]: the scald follows the wake of Danish king Knut the Mighty at his sailing along the Norwegian shore and tells important boundaries on his way - *Límafjörðr* in Denmark, *Agðir*, *Listi*, *Eikundasund*, *Staðr*, *Stim*, *Nið*.

3) **Action Style.** The theme of obstinacy and punishment is traditional for the scalds of X-XII centuries. But here again, whatever the historiography tells us, the stanzas do not confirm the view that landlords from Trøndelag have a special priority to provoke the royal anger. In fact, only one and rather late scald reports about repressions against trønds and it is Björn krepphendí who speaks of king Magnús berfættir (1093-1103): *hráfngræddir vann hrædda... þrænka drót* "{the king} did frighten the people of T." [Hkr III, N 177]. Other folk groups reflected in poetry as severely punished by kings are represented by *Heinir* [Hkr II, N 51; Sigvatr - about young Ólafr the Saint; Hkr III, N 146; Þjóðólfr - about Haraldr harðráði], *Upplengingar* [Hkr II, N 85; Arnórr jarlaskáld about two kings - Ólafr and Haraldr harðráði], *Raxumar* [Hkr III, N 145; Þjóðólfr - about Haraldr harðráði], people of *Halland* [Hkr III, N 171; Björn krepphendí - about Magnús berfættir]. It should be emphasized that all these scalds just state the fact of punishment without expressing stable sympathy or hatred to the kings and to the punished ones: for them the roles of chastiser and victim cannot be separated from particular situations the stanzas tell from. For instance, the above mentioned Björn krepphendí who provides evidence

about king Magnús's conflict with Trønds, nevertheless refers to him as to "Trønds noble ruler", *lofðungr Frænda* when he describes the king's viking trip to the Manx island [Hkr III, N 181].

The same relations reveal themselves in poetry of the Stikiastaðir circle: the war-like calls "to exterminate the Trønds in Óðinn's play" [Hkr II, N 139] ascribed to the participants of the battle do not exceed the limits of the Verdalen valley and scarcely survive 29 juli 1030 A.D. Moreover, our utmost scaldic authority Sigvatr testifies ca. 1040 A.D. that even "the landlords now repent of their victory", *brændr... iðrask nú... þess verks* [Hkr II, 149].

The theme of "punishment through fire" is usually unfolded in the scenes of viking trips. The Danish campaign led by Magnús góði and later by Haraldr harðráði constitutes the standard situation where plundering and burning the foe is regarded as martial virtue. The scalds Arnórr, Þjóðólfr, Valgarðr and Þorleikr fagri are impressed by Norwegian kings who have successfully burned Zealand [Hkr III, N 57], Fyn [ibid., 58-59] and the town of Hedeby in Jutland [ibid., N 109-110]. The same methods, yet applied to Norway, are, as stated before, neither praised nor blamed. There exist two remarkable places where this problem is discussed at some length by a scald: in both cases it is Sigvatr who speaks. Surprisingly enough, he offers two different solutions on two different occasions. One extreme is found in the famous "Blunt Stanzas" (*Bersöglisvísur*) where the scald forbids the unexperienced king Magnús to "struggle within the home country" (cf. above, foot. 2). The other extreme is embodied in Sigvatr's poem in honour of Ólafr where he praises Magnús' father exactly for such a conduct: Snorri quotes three stanzas from this cycle in [Hkr II, 261]. One of this stanzas, *Gull buðu oft* [Hkr II, 130] obviously counterparts with one the Blunt Stanzas addressed to Magnús -*Hverr eggjar þik höggva* [Hkr III, N 30] :

[Hkr III, N 30]

Hverr eggjar þik höggva
hjaldragnir, þú þegna?
ofrausn es þat jöfri
innan lands at vinna...
rán hykk rekkum þínum,
reiðr's herr, konungr, leiðask

[Hkr II, 130]

Skör það hann með hjörvi
herland skal svá verja,
ráns biðu rekkar sýna
refsing, firum efsa

At first sight, there is no contradiction, since in [Hkr II, 130] Sigvatr seems to speak about vikings and robbers, i.e. exactly those people who plundered and burned their home country: this interpretation is partly corroborated by the prosaic comment³. Nevertheless, careful examination shows that it is only a cover, since Snorri a few lines further jumps to the conclusion that it was the struggle for justice that led to the rebellion against the king:

Var þat upphaf til þeirrar uppreistar, er landsmenn gerðu í móti Ólafrí konungi, at þeir þöldu honum ekki réttindi... [ibid., 261]

It is evident that Snorri and Sigvatr (given that Snorri has understood him correctly) aim not at robbers but to chieftains and patrimonial society that were constantly in discord with St. Ólafr. Sigvatr's trick may be explained not only with

³ En síðan er Ólafr konungr tók konungdóm, þá friðaði hann svá land sitt at hann tók af rán öll þar í landi "...he redeemed his country so that he stopped all robberies" [ibid, 261].

different communicative tasks of his poems (funeral poem vs actual political pamphlet) but also with the genre - specific taboo on praising the conflict between the king and his vassals. This suggestion is confirmed by the fact that Sigvatr's stanzas arrive first in the chapter which explains why the king had to leave the country and why he has grown so unpopular. If our analysis is correct Snorri hides the clue to these stanzas in *Haralds saga harðráða* where he lets Halldórr son of Brynjólfr the Camel pronounce the words which might have stood already in the *Ólafs saga*:

Ólafr konungr braut landsfólk til kristni ok réttra síða, en refsaði grimliga þeim, er dauðneyðusk til [Hkr III, 140].

Pormóðr's stanza and the Stiklastaðir motif.

If Sigvatr's stanza initiates the historical analysis and signifies the attempt to exceed from the limits of genre, Pormóðr's stanza *Brennum öll fyrir innan* makes the impression of an ordinary piece. Its collocations are standard, it has only one simple kenning; the rhyme *Inn-Þrændir ... sinna* has nothing special in itself and is not bound to any particular contexts - it is exploited, e.g. by Sigvatr [Hkr II, N 152]⁴ - *Inn-Trænds* behave here as active enemies (the stanza refers to Stiklastaðir) and by *Porleikr fagri* [Hkr III, N 106]⁵ - the name of *Inn-Trænds* serves as a cover for "Norwegians altogether". The point of the piece, the appeal *taki köld kol sinna allra húsá* is not a poetism but an idiom, the scald's phrase is interesting first and foremost as a speech act, namely, instigation. Hence follows that the stanza is valuable not as a formal construction but as sample of "blunt", "frank" style - a kind of *Bersögli* - and as a manifestation of pugnacious mentality. It is tenable that the stanza is old and descends to the XI century: the redactors of king sagas have hardly had any reason to falsify a text that stood so close to prosa. At the same time, it cannot be traced back further than to Haraldr harðráði's lifetime (1047-1066) when the principal part of the Stiklastaðir verse ought to be established⁶. Pormóðr's authorship cannot be verified, but the fact that the stanza was attributed to him accounts for that that Pormóðr - contrary to recent attempts to revise the image of this character⁷ - had the postmortal reputation of a hard person and heroic scald.

We can now return to the question how one shall interpret the scald's instigation. *Fóstbræðra*, *Helgisaga* and *Heimskringla* give us different answers. The author of *Helgisaga* takes it seriously: here the king replies to the scald - "one may trust you, Tormod, you are speaking frankly what you feel"⁸. On the contrary, the narrator of *Fóstbræðra* saves the vassal's image: the king adds that he "does not think

⁴ ...auk at ísarnleiki / Inn-þrændum lét finnask / rækin grámr, í reikar/ rauð brúnan hjör túnum.

⁵ ...ört í odda snertu/ Inn-þrændá lið finni (about Norwegian army in Denmark).

⁶ King Haraldr took part in the battle of Stiklastaðir, and Snorri attributes him a stanza *þora munk þann arm verja* which the *Legendary Saga* prefer to give Pormóðr [Helg, 354]. The *Flateyjarbók* and the *Hauksbók* versions of *Fóstbræðra saga* tell the legend that Haraldr has completed the last stanza of Pormóðr - *emkák rauðr en rjóðum* [Fóst, 276]. This legend confirms the tradition on Pormóðr's heroic death. *Helgisaga* omits this legend, but preserves the same sequence of stanzas, whereas Snorri changes their order and chooses another stanza for the final death scene.

⁷ Cf. the title of [Simek 1990].

⁸ "Trúa matti þér, Pormóðr", segir konungrinn, "þú segir þat sem þér býr í brjóst" [Helg, 352]

that Tormod would act the way he has announced”⁹. Snorri construes a developed episode; the crowd grows anxious and king Ólafr pronounces a long speech where the theme of “punishment through fire” is combined with the theme of christian mission: gerða ek þá þat at breanna fyrir þeim er höfðu áðr gengit af trú sinni ok tekit upp blót en vildu ekki láta at orðum mínum “I did burn the domains of those who had left the right religion...”[Hkr II, 282].

It seems that Þormóðr has lured Snorri on the wrong way. The crucial problem is actually not what a person like Þormóðr could say in a situation like that but how a modern scholar has to perceive his words in the perspective of Old Nordic epic narratives. The modest text of Fóstbræðra surely gives us a better prompt when it offers to treat them as a conventional bravado. It is arguable that the scald defends the view - or pretends to defend it - that punishment through sword and fire does not imply any crime against king and church at all, since the chieftain and his guards are always in their right to kill a villain. There are enough reasons to treat this ideology as a court gesture and not as social program in a country like medieval Norway, at least in the XI century. To instigate the king to kill the villains was an easy task for some scalds but not for the authors of king sagas who were obliged to provide detailed arguments.

Thus, we arrive at the conclusion that nothing in the scaldic practice can support the concept of Trøndis as prototypical public enemies. Þormóðr's instigation from the Stiklastaðir episode embodies the ideology of superiority towards villains, but the notion that a villain should necessarily have his domain in Trøndelag and be pagan or apostate cannot be found elsewhere in Heimskringla. It is therefore important to look at the context of Sverris saga once more.

Ólafr the saint and Þrændir in the Sv.

Bishop Nikulás's philippic against Trøndis is dated from 1199 A.D. when Sverrir ought to be excommunicated. The opposition of Birkibeinar and Baglar for both fighting parties was associated with geographic division of Norway. The antagonism of Trøndis and the other Norwegians is extremely sharp in Sv since both sides of the conflict use to identify Trøndis supporting Sverrir and favoured by him, with Birkibeinar¹⁰. We dare assume that these specific factors were carried from the contemporary situation to the king sagas.

As to ideological background of Sv, both parties have to seek the arguments in the past, since both of them have weak positions: Sverrir is a royal impostor and at odds with church - he is excommunicated [Sv 163] and branded as *devil's priest* if not the *devil himself* [ibid. 106] whereas Magnus Erlingsson is blamed as first Norwegian king who had not been king's son [ibid. 106,119]. It is plausible that both Birkibeinar and Baglar appealed to the authority of St. Ólafr, but in the text of Sv the name of this king emerges almost exclusively in Sverris monologues transmitted in direct and indirect speech: Sverrir prays to St Ólafr [ibid. 35,53 etc]; - refers to the legislation

⁹ “En þó grunum ver ekki þik um at þú myndir svá gera sem þú mæltir” [Fóst, 261]

¹⁰ Cf. the well known passage from [Sv 46]: fal hann þa mioc sitt traust oc trunað undir Þrændi , því at þeir höfðu alla stund verit utruir Erlingi jarli oc hans ríki...Sverrir konungr callaði iafnan sitt heimili i Prandheimi, gerði hann ser Þrændi kaersta allz lanz-foics

attached to St. Ólafr's name [*ibid.* 122,133]; - conquests his banner [Sv 15] and even reproduces St. Ólafr's war-cry in the battle of Stiklastaðir ¹¹.

There exists an instructive context where Sverrir combines the name of St. Ólafr with reference to the ancient legislation of Trøndelag:

scaut konungr iafnan sinu mali til landslaga þeira es setit hafði hinn helgi Ólafr konungr oc til lagaboca þrænda, þeira er cölluð er Gragas, er ritat hafði latit Magnus konungr inn goði Olafsson [Sv 122]

"the king used to refer to that legislation that had been established by saint king Ólafr as well as to those law codes of Trøndelag that are called Gragas and had been written by order of king Magnus Olafsson the Good".

This example shows that both sides in the civil war can use the same basic stereotype but evaluate it in a different way: for Sverrir Trøndelag is a stronghold of patrimonial traditions, for his opponents it is the nidus of apostates. Another lesson we learn from Sv concerns means of propaganda.

Both Sverrir and his opponents are reported to have punished the land of their enemies with fire¹², and that makes the reader suppose that such practice was common. A historian can think that both parties were equally severe. But a philologist must notice the narrative trick: it is only bishop Nikulás who permits himself to call openly for repressions against farmers in the text of Sv, and this fact compromises him and his party in the eyes of a prepared saga reader!

Conclusions.

The parallel between Sv and the sagas of St. Ólafr evidences the interplay of two major tendencies. One of them has oral roots and is based on scaldic stanzas, and to some extent, on saga-like prosaic narratives. Another tradition has its roots in the bookish culture and reflects the development of historiographical conceptions which urged the authors of king sagas to modernize the events of XI-XII centuries. The notion of Trønd's as bulwark of patrimonial traditions and prototypical enemies of Norwegian kings is transferred into the king sagas from the situation of civil war in Norway dated from ca. 1200 A.D. This conclusion can be supported by conjectures and comments to scaldic stanzas of the Stiklastaðir episode.

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¹¹ Ólafr : fram, fram Kristsmenn, krossmenn, konungsmenn ! [Hkr II, 299]

Sverrir: Nu fram allir Cristsmenn cros menn oc hins helga Olafs komungs [Sv 175]

¹² A chieftain from the camp of *Heklungar*, Asbjörn Jónsson accuses Sverrir for burning the houses in Sogn: hann hefir eytt með elldi cristit land [Sv 97].

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