

Matthew Townend

Like father, like son? *Glælognskviða* and the Anglo-Danish cult of saints

An amusing anecdote in the Flateyjarbók version of *Óláfs saga helga* tells how Knútr inn ríki learned of the burgeoning sanctity of his old adversary Óláfr Haraldsson:¹

Þórir hundr ferr til Englands ok segir Knúti konungi allt, hversu farit hafði. Konungr varð mjök óglæðr við þessa sögu. Þórir spurði, hverju þat gegndi. Konungr svarar: “Ek þóttumst þat vita, at annarhvárt okkar mundi heilagr vera, ok hafða ek mér þat ætlat. Þó skal ek nú leggja fé fyrstr til skrinis Ólafs konungs hans óvina ok trúa fyrstr helgi hans, ok eigi skal ek koma í Noreg, með því er Ólafr er heilagr.”

Even though it is late and comic, this anecdote contains a recognition of two important points: first, that Óláfr's sanctity posed a problem for Knútr, and second, that the best way of dealing with it was in fact to acquiesce and positively promote Óláfr's cult. In this paper I want to examine the genesis of Óláfr's cult, and the important early poem *Glælognskviða*, from a Knútr-centred rather than Óláfr-centred perspective; as will be seen, this is more or less equivalent to taking a view from England rather than a view from Norway. In short, the question to be asked is: what was the attitude of Knútr and his dynasty towards the cult of Óláfr?

I Context

The poem *Glælognskviða*, probably composed in 1032 and thus the earliest extant text to celebrate Óláfr's sanctity, is addressed to Knútr's son, Sveinn.² The political circumstances of Sveinn's reign in Norway (from 1030 to 1034 or 1035) are well-known and need only be rehearsed here. In 1028 Knútr succeeded in driving out Óláfr Haraldsson, seemingly without a battle, and appointed as regent Hákon Eiríksson, who was the son of Eiríkr Hákonarson, earl of Hlaðir, and therefore from a family with long-established credentials in the Trondheim region. However, Hákon drowned in 1030, and at this point Óláfr decided to return from exile in Russia and make another bid for the Norwegian throne. An alliance of Knútr-supporting magnates defeated Óláfr's forces in the battle of Stiklarstaðir (29 July 1030), and rule in Norway was taken up by Knútr's designated successor to Hákon, namely his young son Sveinn (in association with Sveinn's English mother Ælfgifu). The next four years saw increasing dissatisfaction with the reign of Sveinn and Ælfgifu, and sources speak variously of famine, harsh laws, and pro-Danish discrimination. In 1034, therefore, Óláfr's young son Magnús was invited to return to Norway by many of the same magnates who had earlier supported Knútr, his father's enemy; and at the arrival of Magnús (whose father was by now

¹Sigurður Nordal, Vilhjálmur Bjarnar and Finnogi Guðmundsson (eds), *Flateyjarbók*, 4 vols (Akranes, 1944-45), II 488; also in Snorri Sturluson, *Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga: Den store saga om Olav den hellige*, ed. O.A. Johnsen and Jón Helgason, 2 vols, Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-Institut (Oslo, 1941), II 832 ('Þórir hundr goes to England and tells King Knútr everything that had happened. The king became very unhappy at this narrative. Þórir asked what the reason for this was. The king answers: "I had expected that one of us would become a saint, and had intended that for myself. Nonetheless I shall now be the first of his enemies to give money to the shrine of King Óláfr, and the first to believe in his sanctity, and I shall not enter Norway for as long as Óláfr is a saint."').

²For text see Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, 4 vols (Copenhagen, 1912-15), IB 300-1, Hallvard Magerøy (ed.), *Glælognskviða av Torarøy Lovtunge*, Bidrag til Nordisk Filologi 12 (Oslo, 1948), and Jessica Rainford, 'Óláfr Haraldsson, king and saint of Norway, and the development of skaldic style (ca.1015-ca.1153)', unpublished DPhil thesis (University of Oxford, 1995), 73-115. For the poem's date see Magerøy (ed.), *Glælognskviða*, 43-44, and Rainford, 'Óláfr Haraldsson, king and saint of Norway', 73-74.

acquiring a reputation for sanctity) Sveinn's supporters deserted him, and he and his mother were forced to flee Norway and return to his brother Hǫrða-Knútr in Denmark.

In terms of both skaldic verse and saga prose, of the three sons of Knútr it is Sveinn who features most prominently in Scandinavian literary tradition, with Hǫrða-Knútr a long way behind in second, and Haraldr almost invisible in third place.³ It is true that Sveinn himself has a low profile in English sources (he is not mentioned at all in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* nor by name in the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*), yet he was, as far as we can now judge, Knútr's eldest son, and was given the name of the conqueror's illustrious father (just as his two younger brothers continued the sequence by being given the names of Knútr's grandfather and either great-grandfather or great-great-grandfather).⁴

Sveinn is the only son of Knútr for whom we have any extant praise-poetry – namely *Glælognskviða*, and the solitary surviving stanza of the anonymous *Sveinsflokk* (c.1033).⁵ The absence of praise-poems for Knútr's other two sons can be readily accounted for: Haraldr perhaps never set foot outside of England, and hence he made no impact on Scandinavia, while Hǫrða-Knútr was associated with Denmark and not Norway; and skaldic traditions in Denmark were probably never as buoyant as in Norway, and certainly have not been preserved in the Icelandic/Norwegian literary culture which constitutes the main preserver of skaldic verse.⁶ Making the (possibly unwarranted) assumption that the non-preservation of poetry for Haraldr and Hǫrða-Knútr correlates in some way with its non-composition, one might suggest that one can observe in these two Anglo-Danish kings' non-patronage of skaldic poets a shift towards an increasing Anglicisation, leaving behind the more pan-Scandinavian horizons of their father (for whom the lavish patronage of poets played a significant role).⁷ Sveinn, on the other hand, never became king of England but did become king of Norway, and he was thus much more of a major player than his brothers in Old West Norse culture (including literary culture): as has been said, portions of two praise-poems in his honour survive, and he alone of the sons of Cnut finds his way into the thirteenth-century

³Extant allusions to the sons of Knútr in contemporary skaldic verse are as follows (with conventional dates attached). Sveinn: Sigvatr Þórðarson, *lausavísa* 24 (c.1031-33); Anon, *Tryggvaflokk* 1 (c.1033-34); Arnórr Þórðarson jarlaskáld, *Hrynhenda* 7 (c.1045); Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, *Magnússflokk* 3 (c.1045); Arnórr Þórðarson jarlaskáld, *Magnússdrápa* 4 (c.1046-47); Bjarni Halbjarnarson gullbrátarskáld, *Kalfsflokk* 6 (c.1050) (Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Skjaldedigting*, IB 252, 231, 307, 332-33, 312, 364). Hǫrða-Knútr: Þórarinn loftunga, *Tögdrápa* 7 (c.1029); Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Bersöglsvísur* 17 (c.1038) (Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Skjaldedigting*, IB 299, 238). Haraldr: none.

⁴The father of Sveinn tjúguskegg was Haraldr blátönn, whose father was Gormr. In Scandinavian tradition, Gormr's father is held to have been called Hǫrða-Knútr (see Bjarni Guðnason (ed.), *Danakonunga Sögur*, Íslenzk Fornrit 35 (Reykjavík, 1982), 86-87, and Ólafur Halldórsson, *Danish Kings and the Jomsvikings in the Greatest Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason* (London, 2000), 88-90), but according to Adam of Bremen this was an alternative name for Gormr himself (Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*: *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Bernhard Schmeidler, 3rd edn (Hanover, 1917), 56).

⁵For text see Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Skjaldedigting*, IB 393.

⁶See Judith Jesch, 'The Power of Poetry', in Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (eds), *Beretning fra nittende tvaerfaglige vikingesymposium* (Aarhus, 2000), 21-39, at 25-28, and also Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, *Islandica* 42 (Ithaca, 1978), 102.

⁷On Knútr and skaldic verse see Russell Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History: Some Aspects of the Period 1009-1016', *Speculum* 62 (1987), 265-98, Roberta Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', in Alexander R. Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, *Studies in the Early History of Britain* (London, 1994), 106-24, Judith Jesch, 'Knútr in poetry and history', in Michael Dallapiazza, Olaf Hansen, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen and Yvonne S. Bonnetain (eds.), *International Scandinavian and Medieval Studies in Memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber* (Trieste, 2000), 243-56, and Matthew Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*: Skaldic Praise-Poetry at the Court of Cnut', *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001), 145-79.

Icelandic *Skáldatal* or 'List of Poets', where he features between his father Knútr and Sveinn Úlfsson and has one poet listed under his patronage, namely Þórarinn loftunga.⁸

Two poems may not seem very much (especially since only one stanza of *Sveinsflokkur* now survives), but it is in fact a significant quantity when one considers both the absence of skaldic verse in honour of either of Sveinn's brothers, and also the general paucity of poems for Danish patrons in the extant corpus, Knútr himself excepted. Certainly, as has been said, it was enough to ensure that Sveinn was remembered in *Skáldatal* as a patron of skaldic verse. One may suggest therefore that in this respect it is Sveinn who is his father's son, rather than Haraldr or Hǫrða-Knútr, for Knútr's appreciation of the importance of skaldic verse as a competitive medium is one of the most striking features of his Scandinavian rivalry with Óláfr Haraldsson. While not rivalling the impressively high number of eight skalds who are recorded as having composed for Knútr,⁹ Sveinn can at least boast two, and Snorri also relates that following Sigvatr Þórðarson's return to Norway in the early 1030s Sveinn also tried to woo to his own side Óláfr's most famous skald – though without success.¹⁰ In the awareness of skaldic praise-poetry as an important political medium, then, one can see that Sveinn (and his advisors, such as the *jarl* mentioned in the first stanza of *Glælognskviða*) had learnt from his father's example, and attempted to follow it once on the Norwegian throne.

The final important preliminary, before we look at the content of *Glælognskviða*, is to note the identity of the poet. Þórarinn loftunga ('praise-tongue') is in biographical terms an obscure figure, but we know that he was an Icelandic skald who composed at least two extant poems for Knútr, namely *Hǫfuðlausn* and *Tögdrápa* (likely dates c.1027-28 and c.1029) as well as this poem for Sveinn.¹¹ Þórarinn might thus be regarded as the closest there is to a Danish dynastic poet, just as Sigvatr occupies a comparable position for Óláfr and Magnús. His only real competitor for this distinction is Óttarr svartí. Like Þórarinn, Óttarr composed for two generations of *Knyttlingar* (in his case Sveinn Haraldsson and his son Knútr, rather than Knútr and his son Sveinn), but unlike Þórarinn he also composed for other monarchs, most notably Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway and Óláfr Eiríksson of Sweden. Þórarinn, however, is recorded as composing for no other patrons than Knútr and Sveinn (and with not one but two poems for the former), and while this is no doubt something of a trick of the evidence, it seems nevertheless significant that Old West Norse tradition did not even preserve memories of his service to other rulers.¹² Furthermore, the centrality of Þórarinn can be gauged by the assignments Knútr gave him: not only was he selected to accompany Sveinn and Ælfifu to Norway in 1030, but he also appears to have accompanied Knútr himself on his Norway expedition of 1028. This fact is recorded in saga-prose,¹³ but is also inherently likely from the detail included in the itinerary-based *Tögdrápa* itself, the poem which commemorates the undertaking. A further indication of the value Knútr placed on Þórarinn's service might be the

⁸For *Skáldatal* see Sveinbjörn Egilsson et al (eds), *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 3 vols in 4 (Copenhagen, 1848-87), III 251-86, at 283.

⁹Sveinbjörn Egilsson et al (ed.), *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, III 282-83.

¹⁰See Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3 vols, Íslenzk Fornrit 26-28 (Reykjavík, 1941-51), III 16.

¹¹See for example Mary Malcolm, 'Þórarinn loftunga', in Phillip Pulsiano (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York, 1993), 667.

¹²Snorri states of Þórarinn that he *hafði verið mjök með konungum eða þórum höfðingjum* (*Heimskringla*, II 307; 'he had spent much time with kings and other chieftains'), but he does not offer any names and Þórarinn features in *Skáldatal* only in the lists for Knútr and Sveinn. Perhaps not surprisingly, of the kings' sagas it is *Knyttlinga saga* which preserves the fullest anecdote about Þórarinn (see Bjarni Guðnason (ed.), *Danakomunga Sögur*, 124-25).

¹³Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, II 310.

astonishingly large sum with which he rewarded him for his *Hgfuðlausn* (fifty silver marks),¹⁴ while the targeting of a distinctively Anglo-Danish audience may be indicated by the unusually simple style and verse-form which Þórarinn employs in all three of his extant poems.¹⁵

The obvious parallel for Þórarinn's service to Cnut and Sveinn is Sigvatr Þórðarson's service to Óláfr and his son Magnús, and one consequence of Sigvatr's privileged status is that he is able to deliver the *Bersöglisvísur*, a plain-speaking 'advice to princes' composition by one in a long-established position of intimacy and esteem. Although the critical tendency is to think of the *Bersöglisvísur* as the epitome of this particular tradition of skaldic discourse, it is noteworthy that *Glælognskviða*, with which it shares obvious affinities, is in fact the earlier poem by some five or six years. It is therefore perhaps Þórarinn who deserves the credit for establishing this genre of skaldic composition, and what we see in the 1030s is a pair of experienced poets successively offering guidance to two young rulers of Norway – Þórarinn to the Anglo-Danish Sveinn, and Sigvatr to the Norwegian Magnús. *Glælognskviða* and the *Bersöglisvísur* therefore grant us a sense of the urgent education of princes required in the fragile, faction-torn politics of post-Óláfr Norway.

II Content

Let us turn, then, to what *Glælognskviða* actually says. The title itself is cryptic, with a probable literal meaning of 'The Lay of Sea-Calm'.¹⁶ Although it is quite possible that we are now lacking a number of stanzas at the beginning, the most striking feature of the poem as it is preserved is that it is not dominantly about Sveinn at all, but rather is about Óláfr. The impetus to recognise Óláfr Haraldsson as a saint began almost immediately after his death at Stiklarstaðir, and in August 1031 his relics were translated to a proper shrine in St Clement's church, Trondheim. *Glælognskviða* appears to date from after the translation, but before open rebellion against Danish rule broke out in the Trondheim region in spring 1034 (at which point the local magnates summoned Magnús back to Norway). It is, of course, in no way coincidental that the rapid genesis of the cult of Óláfr, the *rex perpetuus Norvegiae*, should take place during a period of foreign rule in Norway; and it is clear that the emerging cult was soon acting as a focus for both popular dissatisfaction and political manoeuvring by the aristocracy. However, in noting that the genesis of Óláfr's cult occurs during a period of foreign rule, one should not jump to any simple conclusions as to the relationship between these two factors. What Þórarinn's poem appears to be doing is urging Sveinn to support the cult of Óláfr for his own (and Danish) purposes, and not to allow the cult to become an incendiary focus for anti-Danish feelings. The poet therefore recognises – even celebrates – the evidences for Óláfr's sanctity, and unlike Ælfgrífr in later saga accounts of this period,

¹⁴Þórarinn comments in his later *Tögdrápa*: *Gjöld hefst marka / malmðyns fyr hlyn / framfimm tögum i forvist borit* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Skjaldeðigtning*, IB 298; 'I have certainly carried away a payment of fifty marks before the tree of the noise of weapons [=warrior]'). For discussion see Bjarne Fidjestøl, "'Have you heard a poem worth more?'" A note on the economic background of early skaldic praise-poetry', in his *Selected Papers*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, The Viking Collection 9 (Odense, 1997), 117-32, at 118-19 and 121-22.

¹⁵All that survives of Þórarinn's *Hgfuðlausn* is the two-line *stef* or refrain, so one cannot be certain of the poem's main verse-form. *Tögdrápa* however has given its name to the metre in which it is composed (*töglag* or *tögdrápuþag*), while *Glælognskviða* is in *kviðuháttur*: on these metres see E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford, 1976), xxxiii-xxxvi, and Srorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (Oxford, 1991), 84-85. Þórarinn's verse also contains a large number of loanwords from Old English: see Dietrich Hofmann, *Nordisch-Englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana 14 (Copenhagen, 1955), 94-97 (§§98-104), and Staffan Hellberg, 'Kring tilkomsten av *Glælognskviða*', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 99 (1984), 14-48, at 32-39.

¹⁶On the poem's title see Magerøy (ed.), *Glælognskviða*, 38-39, and Rainford, 'Óláfr Haraldsson, king and saint of Norway', 84-85.

does not attempt to discredit or suppress these miraculous signs.¹⁷ Instead, he argues (especially in the concluding stanzas) that Sveinn himself should be conspicuous in his devotion to Óláfr: articulating what may be the first expression of the idea of Óláfr's perpetual kingship, Þórarinn suggests that the gift of Norway is within the power of Óláfr to grant to Sveinn, and that in publicly acknowledging that his authority derives from such a source Sveinn might be able to position and present himself as the legitimate successor to Óláfr rather than as a foreign occupier. The implication is that the control of Óláfr's cult could be a powerful political tool, and handled skilfully it might function as a means of reconciliation between Danish rulers and Norwegian subjects. At the very least, culting Óláfr might serve to defuse anti-Danish hostility, and take away a possible focus for anti-Danish resentment. As Jessica Rainford states therefore: 'The concluding request for prayer arises not from a disinterested regard for the audience's moral and spiritual welfare, but from concern about the political salvation of one person'.¹⁸

There are, of course, many parallels to this proposed political utilisation of a saint's cult, especially where that saint has died violently in conflict with the ruling power; and the phenomenon has received a good deal of attention in the study of Anglo-Saxon and later medieval England. The political nature of the cult of royal saints in the Anglo-Saxon period, especially murdered or martyred ones, has been clearly established by scholars such as Thacker, Rollason and Ridyard.¹⁹ Indeed, so clearly has the principle been established that, in Anglo-Saxon studies at least, it seems that the necessary corrective may be the reminder that, in genesis and support, saints' cult may have been popular as well as political;²⁰ in the study of Óláfr, though, it may be that the emphasis on the popular is in danger of over-shadowing the political. Looking at the later Middle Ages in England, Simon Walker discusses the political uses made of the cults of five saints: Simon de Montfort, Thomas of Lancaster, Edward II, Archbishop Scrope of York, and Henry VI. Alluding to an influential article by J.C. Russell,²¹ Walker contends:²²

[O]ne of the principal points to be made about the cults of these political saints [is] that there is only a limited sense in which their veneration can be said to constitute a 'canonisation of opposition to the Crown'. That there was an element, more or less central, of political protest and defiance in the genesis of these cults seems, with the possible exception of Edward II, to be undeniable. But in four of the five cases considered above, this oppositional statement came to be overlaid, and largely neutralised, by a degree of royal protection and encouragement that sought to harness the devotion these saints aroused in the interests of the crown ... As a result, to confine discussion of the phenomenon of 'political' saints in later medieval England to the extent to which they represented and encouraged a spirit of resistance to the claims of the crown is to ignore half the question that needs to be answered; which is, the degree to which these same saints contributed to the

¹⁷See for example Anne Heinrichs et al (eds), *Olafs Saga hins Helga: Die "Legendarische Saga" über Olaf den Heiligen* (Heidelberg, 1982), 206, and Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, II 403-5.

¹⁸Rainford, 'Óláfr Haraldsson, king and saint of Norway', 86.

¹⁹See Alan Thacker, 'Kings, Saints and Monasteries in Pre-Viking Mercia', *Midland History* 10 (1985), 1-25; D.W. Rollason, 'The cults of murdered royal saints in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1983), 1-22, and *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989); and Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th series 9 (Cambridge, 1988).

²⁰See Catherine Cubitt, 'Sites and sanctity: revisiting the cult of murdered and martyred Anglo-Saxon royal saints', *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000), 53-83.

²¹J.C. Russell, 'The Canonization of Opposition to the Crown in Angevin England', in C.H. Taylor (ed.), *Hastings Anniversary Essays* (New York, 1929), 279-90.

²²Simon Walker, 'Political Saints in Later Medieval England', in R.H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard (eds), *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society* (Stroud, 1995), 77-106, at 86; see also John M. Theilmann, 'Political Canonization and Political Symbolism in Medieval England', *Journal of British Studies* 29 (1990), 241-66.

simultaneous, and generally more successful, enhancement of the spiritual status and claims of the English monarchy.

Walker's reading of the English evidence supplies a very suggestive gloss to the project urged upon Sveinn in *Glælognskviða*. But unlike in later medieval England, the Anglo-Danish monarchy in Norway was not, in the end, able to 'overlay' and thereby 'neutralise' the oppositional piety that was centred on the saint.

The most pertinent parallels to Sveinn's culting of Óláfr, though, must be those involving Sveinn's father himself. As is well known, one of Knútr's strategies in the establishment of his rule in England was to patronise the cults of English saints, especially politically-charged cults involving royal saints and/or those who had been martyred at the hands of Scandinavians. Falling within these categories would be his patronage of the cults of Edith, Edmund, and Ælfheah,²³ and with regard to the first of these Susan Ridyard has commented that Knútr appears as 'almost more West Saxon than the West Saxons'.²⁴ Þórarinn, one might say, is urging Sveinn to be almost more Norwegian than the Norwegians. As for the models that Knútr himself may have been following (as Sveinn was later to follow Knútr's model), the most pertinent would be Æthelred's recent patronage of the cult of his murdered half-brother Edward – from whose death Æthelred himself was the main beneficiary, as it led to his succession to the throne.²⁵ As Ridyard states, with regard to Knútr's patronage of West Saxon saints:²⁶ 'Veneration of such a saint was a statement of respect for and of legitimate succession to that dynasty; it was also an unambiguous statement that the new ruler was now monarch of all he surveyed.' To engage in the patronage of such saints was to enter a political fray, since opposing factions were often at work, equally vigorously. Knútr seems to have been well aware that political opposition to him might be expressed religiously, through saints'²⁷ so, for example, he acted to defuse any London-based, anti-Danish resentment that may have crystallised around the cult of Ælfheah by wresting control of the cult, even in a literally physical manner (by translating the archbishop's remains from London to Canterbury). What one can observe in a case like Ælfheah's is a situation in which two competing factions were each trying to control a cult for their own political purposes. The parallel with Norway in the early 1030s need hardly be laboured, and it might even be that Sveinn's culting of Óláfr represents an attempt to introduce for the first time into Norway certain techniques in the elevation and political manipulation of the cults of royal saints, since the Anglo-Danish establishment possessed an experience and know-how in this area which the recently-converted Norwegians possibly lacked; Walker suggests that political cults represent 'an especially English phenomenon'.²⁸

One may doubt whether Sveinn actually needed to be told the things that Þórarinn says. *Glælognskviða* operates within an 'advice to princes' tradition, and it is in the nature of that tradition often to restate what is already familiar and accepted, rather than to introduce radically new propositions; that is, there is an element of fiction in the dramatic framework of

²³ See Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, 168, M.K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London, 1993), 140-46, and Alexander R. Rumble, 'Textual Appendix: *Translatio Sancti Ælfgi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi et martyris* (BHL 2519): Osbern's account of the translation of St Ælfheah's relics from London to Canterbury, 8-11 June 1023', in Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut*, 282-315.

²⁴ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, 195.

²⁵ Lawson, *Cnut*, 141; see further Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready': A Study in their Use as Historical Evidence*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 3rd Series 13 (Cambridge, 1980), 169-71.

²⁶ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, 240.

²⁷ Lawson, *Cnut*, 140.

²⁸ Walker, 'Political Saints in Later Medieval England', 80; see also Rollason, 'The cults of murdered royal saints', 14-15.

the genre. That Sveinn was already favourably disposed towards the cult of Óláfr is proved by the fact of the saint's translation in August 1031. This cannot have occurred without the active participation of the ruling powers; certainly it is impossible to read the translation as an expression of anti-Danish feeling, as it could hardly have been allowed to take place if that was its intended import.²⁹ As Knútr's translation of Ælfheah showed, the Anglo-Danish dynasty knew very well how to manipulate the movement of relics for their own benefit, and the translation of Óláfr's remains into St Clement's church may have been a way of tightening their grip on the physical control of the cult. The translation of Óláfr in 1031, and the composition of *Glælognskviða* in (probably) 1032 indicate that the promotion of the cult by the Danish rulers of Norway was both immediate and thorough; in other words, it looks like a centrally agreed policy, and suggests strongly that the early promotion of Óláfr's cult took place because of the Danish occupiers of Norway rather than in spite of them.

In the culting of Óláfr, then, was it really a case of 'like father, like son'? Just how thoroughly Sveinn (and his advisors) learnt from his father's example in this respect (as he did in terms of the patronage of poets) it is not now possible to say; and whatever he did, it failed to prevent a Norwegian reaction against Danish rule. Sveinn, it must be said, has come to receive something of a bad press in Old Norse history. For one thing, unlike the other two sons of Knútr, he became known by a metronymic and not a patronymic. Although the one stanza on Sveinn in the late twelfth-century *Nóregs-konungatal* styles him as both *sonr Alffifu* and *Knúts sonr*,³⁰ nonetheless the tendency in the kings' sagas is to bill him as Sveinn Álfifuson rather than Sveinn Knútsson. The association between Sveinn and Ælfifu in the government of Norway was established very early indeed: Ælfifu is named alongside Sveinn in Sigvatr's *lausavísa* 28 and Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's *Magnússflokkur*.³¹ This tendency continues in later saga-prose, where the *Álfifu öld* ('age of Ælfifu') becomes an infamous period in Norwegian history,³² and the portrayal of Ælfifu becomes increasingly stereotyped, taking on many of the stock characteristics of the evil queen. Sigvatr's *lausavísa* depicts the young men of famine-hit Norway being driven to eat bark, like billy-goats, but Þórarinn's *Glælognskviða* seeks to counter this by arguing that the now-sainted Óláfr is able to mediate *ár ok friðr* ('prosperity and peace') to all men, including Sveinn.³³ As saga prose confirms, however, this counsel was in vain. Sveinn's connection with skaldic verse and his political patronage of saints suggest him to have been in certain respects his father's son, but later saga prose, to his lasting detraction, tars him instead as being the child of his mother.

III Confirmation

Outside of *Glælognskviða* and the translation of Óláfr's relics, and not counting the late anecdote with which this paper began, are there any other indications that Knútr and his dynasty purposefully supported the cult of Óláfr? The best evidence is the speed with which the cult was successfully established in late Anglo-Saxon England. All the versions of the

²⁹For Snorri's account of the translation see *Heimskringla*, II 403-5: he concludes that Óláfr's sanctity was declared according to *byskups atkvæði ok konungs samþykki ok dómr alls herjar* ('the pronouncement of the bishop [Grímkel] and the agreement of the king [Sveinn] and the judgement of all the people').

³⁰Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Skjaldedigtning*, IB 581.

³¹Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Skjaldedigtning*, IB 253, 332-33.

³²The phrase is found in *Fagrskinna*, and forms a parallel to Sigvatr's *Alffivu ævi* ('age of Ælfifu') in his *lausavísa* 28: see Bjarni Einarsson (ed.), *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögun. Fagrskinna-Nóregs konunga tal*, Íslenzk Fornrit 29 (Reykjavík, 1985), 202.

³³For a discussion of this phrase see Lars Lönnroth, 'Dómaldi's death and the myth of sacral kingship', in John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (eds), *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, The Viking Collection 3 (Odense, 1986), 73-93, at 83-86, and Rainford, 'Óláfr Haraldsson, king and saint of Norway', 104-8.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle active in the early eleventh century record the death of Óláfr in 1030, but MS C adds an acknowledgement of his sanctity. The complete entry for 1030 is as follows:³⁴

Her wæs Olaf cing ofslagen on Norwegon of his agenum foice 7 wæs syððan halig; 7 þæs geres ær ðam forferde Hacun se dohtiga eorl on sæ.

MS C of the *Chronicle* is traditionally thought to derive from Abingdon monastery in the mid-eleventh century,³⁵ and the house had particular links with Scandinavia on account of Abbot Rodulf, who had earlier spent time in both Norway and Iceland.³⁶ MS C is also the only version of the *Chronicle* to record the death of Hákon, and this again suggests a particular interest in Norwegian affairs; the approbatory epithet *dohtiga* ('brave') may also indicate a broadly pro-Knútr position.

We can confidently come closer to Knútr and his dynasty by considering the ecclesiastical evidence of church dedications and liturgical commemoration. In a classic paper Bruce Dickins provided a gazetteer of the cult of Óláfr in the British Isles, listing dedications and other forms of commemoration.³⁷ Inevitably, on account of the lack of sources, relatively few of the churches dedicated to Óláfr are recorded before 1066, let alone in the reign of Knútr; most are first recorded in the late eleventh or twelfth centuries. However, it may well be that many of these dedications arose through the patronage of landed Scandinavians in the decades after Óláfr's fall – in other words, through the patronage of Cnut's earls and other followers, those whom he had endowed with estates following his conquest.³⁸ This is especially likely to be the case for dedications in more southerly, 'non-Scandinavian' parts of England. It is inconceivable that such churches, and such commemorations, proceeded without the support of local magnates – Knútr's new men of the mid-eleventh century.³⁹ In other words, in the reign of Knútr and his sons the cult of Óláfr in England seems have been patronised by the regional elite and therefore, one assumes, by the central government; certainly it is unlikely to have been a focus for anti-establishment grievances as it was (partly) in the Norway of the early 1030s. In a few places, there is a glimpse of evidence that supports this suggested connection between the cult of Óláfr and Knútr's followers. For example, Dickins records that Óláfr is included in a kalendar from Abbotsbury abbey, Dorset, and notes that it is suggestive that the abbey of Abbotsbury was founded by Úrk or Orc, one of Knútr's housecarls.⁴⁰ Similarly, no fewer than four churches in London, and possibly as many as six, were dedicated to Óláfr,⁴¹ and it is tempting to connect this with other evidence for Scandinavian church dedications in London which arose from the stationing and settlement

³⁴Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe (ed.), *MS C, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition 5* (Cambridge, 2001), 105 ('In this year King Óláfr was killed in Norway by his own people, and was afterwards holy. And before that in this year the brave Earl Hákon perished at sea.').

³⁵Though see now O'Brien O'Keefe (ed.), *MS C*, lxxiv-xcii.

³⁶See Timothy Graham, 'A Runic Entry in an Anglo-Saxon Manuscript from Abingdon and the Scandinavian Career of Abbot Rodulf (1051-2)', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 40 (1996), 16-24.

³⁷Bruce Dickins, 'The Cult of S. Olave in the British Isles', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 12 (1937-45), 53-80.

³⁸See Lawson, *Cnut*, 163-89, Simon Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', in Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut*, 43-88, and Gillian Fellows-Jensen, 'Danish place-names and personal names in England: the influence of Cnut?', in Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut*, 125-40.

³⁹See Charles Insley, 'Where Did All The Charters Go? Anglo-Saxon Charters and the New Politics of the Eleventh Century', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 24 (2002), 109-27, esp. 122-27.

⁴⁰Dickins, 'The Cult of S. Olave', 69. On Úrk/Orc see Florence E. Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, 2nd ed. (Stamford, 1989), 119-22, 425-27, 576, and Lawson, *Cnut*, 169-70.

⁴¹Dickins, 'The Cult of S. Olave', 64-68

there of Knútr's troops and followers.⁴² Among Knútr's mightier supporters, it should be noted that Earl Godwine and his family, who owed their advancement to Knútr,⁴³ were important patrons of St Olave's church in Exeter.⁴⁴

The well-documented example which confirms the hypothesis, and which will be discussed in the remainder of this paper, is the case of Earl Siward Digri of Northumbria. MS D of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* includes the following in its entry for 1055:⁴⁵ *On þisan gere forðerde Sylward eorl on Eoferwic, 7 he ligeð æt Galmaho on þam mynstre þe he sylf let timbrian 7 halgian von Godes 7/ Olafes naman.* Although it is the only version of the *Chronicle* to include the information about the dedication to Óláfr,⁴⁶ MS D is likely to be well-informed and trustworthy on this point: it is the most 'northerly' of the versions of the *Chronicle*, and may in fact have been put together under the influence of Ealdred, Bishop of Worcester 1046-62 and Archbishop of York 1061-69.⁴⁷

Earl Siward of Northumbria is a compelling if somewhat enigmatic figure, whose fame came to be far exceeded by that of his son Waltheof.⁴⁸ The date at which Siward gained the earldom of Northumbria is not known: his predecessor, Eiríkr Hákonarson of Hlaðir, is not recorded after 1023, and *Siward dux* first attests a charter in 1033. Siward thus attained the earlship under Knútr, and continued to hold it through the reigns of Knútr's sons, Haraldr and Hǫrða-Knútr: there can therefore be no doubt that he was an appointee and supporter of Knútr's dynasty, an establishment man and clearly dependable. Sir Frank Stenton famously – if rather dismissively – described Siward as 'a Danish warrior of a primitive type',⁴⁹ and to his contemporaries as well he seems to have been a striking, and conspicuously Scandinavian, figure: in Book I of the *Vita Aedwardi Regis* (probably composed 1065-66) he is introduced as *Siwardus, dux Northumbrorum, Dan<ic>a lingua 'Digara,' hoc est fortis*.⁵⁰ In later sources all sorts of legends accrued around the figure of Siward, and he has become a key figure in scholarly attempts to locate Scandinavian traditions in eleventh- and twelfth-century England.⁵¹ The *Gesta antecessorum* section of the *Vita Waldevi* (probably composed in the

⁴²See Pamela Nightingale, 'The Origin of the Court of Husting and Danish Influence on London's Development into a Capital City', *English Historical Review* 102 (1987), 559-78, at 566-69.

⁴³See Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', 70-74.

⁴⁴Dickins, 'The Cult of S. Olave', 56, 69; Robin Fleming, 'Rural Elites and Urban Communities in Late-Saxon England', *Past and Present* 141 (1993), 3-37, at 23. It is notable that one of the earliest textual witnesses to Óláfr's cult, the *Leofric Collectar* (which contains liturgical texts for Óláfr's day), also derives from mid-eleventh century Exeter: see E.S. Dewick (ed.), *The Leofric Collectar*, 2 vols, Henry Bradshaw Society 45, 56 (London, 1914-21), I 209-14.

⁴⁵G.P. Cubbin (ed.), *MS D, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition 6* (Cambridge, 1996), 74 ('In this year Earl Siward died in York, and he rests at Galama[n]ho in the church which he himself had built and consecrated in the name of God and Óláfr'). For the York context see D.W. Rollason, *Sources for York History to AD 1100*, The Archaeology of York I (York, 1998), 175; for the broader funerary context see Fleming, 'Rural Elites and Urban Communities', 25-28.

⁴⁶MS C states instead that the church was built *Gode to lofe 7 eallum his halgum* (O'Brien O'Keefe (ed.), *MS C*, 115) ('in praise of God and all his saints'); MS E does not mention the church at all (Charles Plummer and John Earle (eds), *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1892-99), I 185).

⁴⁷See Patrick Wormald, *How do we know so much about Anglo-Saxon Deerhurst?*, Deerhurst Lecture 1991 (Deerhurst, 1993), 9-17, and Cubbin (ed.), *MS D*, lxxviii-lxxx1.

⁴⁸See Forrest S. Scott, 'Earl Waltheof of Northumbria', *Archaeologia Aeliana* 4th Series 30 (1952), 149-215, at 152-55, Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', 65-66, and Richard Fletcher, *Bloodfeud: Murder and Revenge in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 2002), 112, 131-33.

⁴⁹F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed., Oxford History of England II (Oxford, 1971), 417.

⁵⁰Frank Barlow (ed.), *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster*, 2nd ed., Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1992), 34-35 ('Siward, earl of the Northumbrians, called in the Danish tongue 'Digri', that is 'The Strong').

⁵¹See Axel Olrik, 'Siward Digri of Northumberland: A Viking-Saga of the Danes in England', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* 6 (1908-9), 212-37, C.E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (Edinburgh,

late twelfth century) relates that Siward's father was called Beorn *Beresune* and had bear's ears, and that Siward himself had a raven-banner called *Ravenlandeye*, defeated at least two dragons, and had an encounter with a mysterious figure who looks suspiciously like Óðinn.⁵²

But if he was not actually of ursine parentage, then Siward's real father is unknown; also unknown are the reasons why Knútr appointed Siward to the earldom of Northumbria in succession to Eiríkr Hákonarson. In the absence of evidence commentators are usually driven to ascribe Siward's rise to (unrecorded) service to Knútr in the conquest of England. However, the mysteries of Siward's parentage and his rise to prominence would both disappear if he were in fact a son of Earl Eiríkr Hákonarson (presumably a younger son to Hákon, Knútr's earl in Norway 1028-30). This is pure speculation, but a connection with the earls of Hlaðir and the Trondheim region would help to explain why Siward chose to dedicate his church to St Óláfr, and would serve as another link between Knútr's promotion of the cult in Norway and his promotion of the cult in England. As to when Siward dedicated his church, there is no way of knowing: as has been seen, Siward held the earldom of Northumbria from at least 1033 till 1055, and his endowment of the church in York could have occurred at any time within that period.

What of the church itself? The *Galmanho* region of York – that is, the area of Bootham and Marygate, just outside the city walls to the north-west – was known as Earlsburgh ('the earl's residence') in the eighteenth century, and all the indications are therefore that this part of the city was in some way the domain of the earls of Northumbria.⁵³ There is no reason to doubt that the church that Siward built lay on the site of the present parish church of St Olave's, though no eleventh-century fabric is extant and the site has never been excavated; for this reason I shall refer to it henceforth as St Olave's church. The odd position of the present tower, neither of equal width to the nave nor in the centre of it, may possibly indicate that it is on the site of the original tower; if so, the Anglo-Saxon chancel, where Siward would have been buried, would be near, or to the east of, the present font.⁵⁴ Was Siward's a new foundation, or was it a re-building (and re-dedication) of a pre-existing church? The only material indication that an earlier church may have existed is the fragmentary grave-cover found during excavations at the adjoining St Mary's Abbey. Lang dates this on stylistic grounds to the late ninth to tenth century, and suggests that it may have come from (what became) St Olave's church.⁵⁵ The author of the *Vita Edwardi*, who seems to have taken some interest in Siward, states: *sepultusque est in ea quam ipse a fundo construxerat in beati Olavi regis et martyris <honore> ecclesia*.⁵⁶ The use of a *fundo* need not imply a brand-new foundation, as opposed to the re-building of a pre-existing church: the

1939), 127-35, Judith Jesch, 'England and *Orkneyinga saga*', in Colleen E. Batey, Judith Jesch and Christopher D. Morris (eds), *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Eleventh Viking Congress, Thurso and Kirkwall, 22 August-1 September 1989* (Edinburgh, 1993), 222-39, at 226-28, Christine Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues* (Cambridge, 2000), 125-32, and Andy Orchard, 'The Literary Background to the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 11 (2001), 156-83, at 168-72.

⁵²For the text of the Siward section of the *Vita Waldevi* see Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England*, 267-70.

⁵³Richard Hall, *Viking Age York* (London, 1994), 54-55; Rollason, *Sources for York History*, 175.

⁵⁴Christopher Norton, pers. comm. For a floor-plan see *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York: Volume IV Outside the City Walls East of the Ouse*, Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (London, 1975), 26.

⁵⁵James Lang, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture: Volume III York and Eastern Yorkshire* (Oxford, 1991), 111 (illustrations 361-64); see also Hall, *Viking Age York*, 54-55.

⁵⁶Barlow (ed.), *The Life of King Edward*, 48-49 ('he was buried in the church he had built from its foundations in honour of St Olave, king and martyr').

mid-eleventh century was, after all, a great period for the re-building of churches by local magnates.

The current status of St Olave's simply as a parish church is misleading in terms of its historical significance, and it should be stressed that Siward's foundation was an important one - in fact, it was the most important ecclesiastical site in York after the Minster itself, and at times a potential threat to the Minster.⁵⁷ Sometime in the early 1080s the Norman landowner Count Alan of Brittany offered St Olave's church to Abbot Stephen of Lastingham and his Benedictine monks, and the monks accordingly moved to York. In 1088 William Rufus gave them a larger piece of land to the south-east of St Olave's, and it was at this point, when new buildings were constructed on the new site, that the dedication was changed from St Óláfr to St Mary (hence St Mary's Abbey).⁵⁸ Although its status was somewhat disputed, the original Anglo-Saxon church, on Marygate on the north-west side of the abbey precinct, retained its older dedication, and became a chapel of the abbey, metamorphosing in due course into the parish church of St Olave.⁵⁹ It is not known whether Siward's remains were translated to the new abbey buildings, or whether they remained in his own foundation. On the one hand, the translation of Ealdred, the last Anglo-Saxon archbishop of York, from the Anglo-Saxon cathedral to the new Norman one may indicate a desire for continuity with the Anglo-Saxon (or Anglo-Scandinavian) past in the York of the 1080s.⁶⁰ On the other hand, the change of dedication at the abbey, from Óláfr to Mary, may indicate that the Minster's desire for continuity was not shared by the neighbouring Benedictine monks. The only textual source is the *Vita Waldevi*, which states that Siward's banner *Ravenlandeye* was given to the people of York who placed it *in ecclesia sanctae Mariae veteris* ('in the ancient church of St Mary'), and that he himself *in claustrum beatae Mariae sepultus est* ('is buried in the *claustrum* [= 'monastery?'] of St Mary');⁶¹ however, it is unclear whether there is a distinction being drawn here between the *ecclesia* and the *claustrum*, and whether the *Vita*'s assertion indicates knowledge of a translation, and/or ignorance of the earlier dedication to Óláfr.

In conclusion one can therefore say that Earl Siward's dedication does more than simply reflect the earl's 'Scandinavian sentiments';⁶² nor does it simply demonstrate 'the rapidity with which the cult of the saint made progress, even among his mortal enemies the Danes'.⁶³ Much more than this, the earl's dedication shows how Knútr's political

⁵⁷See Christopher Norton, *Archbishop Thomas of Bayeux and the Norman Cathedral at York*, Borthwick Paper 100 (York, 2001), 6-8.

⁵⁸Christopher Wilson and Janet Burton, *St Mary's Abbey York* (York, 1988), 2-3, Christopher Norton, 'The Buildings of St Mary's Abbey, York and their Destruction', *The Antiquaries Journal* 74 (1994), 256-88, at 280-82, and Rollason, *Sources for York History*, 201-3.

⁵⁹See *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York: Volume IV*, 25-29.

⁶⁰See Norton, *Archbishop Thomas of Bayeux*, 26.

⁶¹Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England*, 270.

⁶²Rollason, *Sources for York History*, 175.

⁶³Dickins, 'The Cult of S. Olave', 78.

establishment was actively engaged in the promotion of the cult of St Óláfr. Þórarinn's *Glælognskviða* and Siward's dedication reveal the same sorts of objectives and practices which are observable in Knútr's earlier patronage of English saints such as Ælfheah. One might hesitate to suggest that the early success of Óláfr's cult was primarily dependent on the support of Knútr and his dynasty, though it is surely significant that Óláfr's translation in 1031 occurred under Sveinn's rule; but at the very least one can see how the Anglo-Danish dynasty attempted to take control of the cult and make it serve their own interests. To view the early cult of Óláfr predominantly as a focus for anti-Danish hostility, or for popular piety, is to miss the drama of contesting patronage that was played out in the time of Knútr and his sons.