

The Category of Affinity (*Mágsemð*) in the Old Norse Model of Family Relations*

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I intend to discuss the meaning of the term *mágr* / *mágar* (often translated as 'relative by marriage') and the limits of this notion. I note at once that I have no intention of discussing here the etymology of terms for family relations in the Germanic languages. Primarily, I will be concerned with how a number of quite different relations between people were recognized in terms of affinity and were adjusted to familial categories in Scandinavia during the eleventh through thirteenth centuries.

Kinship relations were not merely important for Scandinavians of that epoch; it would be more exact to say that there were no relations outside of kinship. Perhaps there is some exaggeration in this assertion, but it should be emphasized that all relations between people were seen through the prism of kin. Any connection between two relatives is conditioned by the term of affinity which describes it. One might say that these designations help to establish the order of interpersonal relations. A kinship system may determine, or even create, some very complex connections by choosing some very exact or very general term of affinity to describe the relationship between any given pair of individuals.

It is becoming a scholarly commonplace that, in narrative genres where genealogy figures prominently, the family connections of a personage largely determine his fate and personal characteristics. As a rule, the saga usually tells us first that he is 'the son of X', 'the grandson of Y', and 'the great-grandson of Z'. For modern readers, these characteristics are of minor importance in comparison with the man's personality and his deeds. However, from the viewpoint of the kin-conscious saga-writer the most important information is the description of family connections, for these connections predetermine the person's character, deeds, and, to some extent, his name. Thus, if the family connections of the personage have been characterized, then almost all has been said about him and, in some sense, the mention of the referent's name is equivalent to a periphrastic description of his family connections.

This model is most strongly manifested in poetic language, where periphrastic description becomes canonical as one of the accepted designations of the referent. The designation of a person by his blood- or non-blood relations to others is the one sphere where phenomena of poetic language are blended with those of ordinary usage. In fact, here we can argue from numerous skaldic and Eddaic instances of kenning formation using terms of affinity, as well as from Snorri's description of this kind of kenning formation: *Enn eru þau heiti, er menn láta ganga fyrir ngfn manna; þat kǫllum vér viðkenningar eða sannkenningar eða fornngfn. Þat eru viðkenningar, at nefna annan hlut réttu nafni ok kalla þann, er hann vill nefna, eiganda eða svá, at kalla hann þess, er hann nefndi, fǫður eða afa; ái er enn þriði. Heitir ok sonr ok arfi, arfuni, barn, jóð ok mǫgr, erfingi; heitir ok bróðir, blóði, barmi, hlýri, lifri; heitir ok niðr, nefi, áttungr.*

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konr, kundr, frændi, kynstafr, niðjungr, ættstúðill, ættbarmr, kynkvísl, ættbogi, arfkvæmi, afspringr, hǫfuðbaðmr, ofskǫpt. Heita ok mágar, sífjungar, hleyta-menn... (SnE. 65 (67), 144).

One example of *viðkenning* formation according to Snorri's model is the type of Thor-kenning, widespread in skaldic poetry, like *Ulls mágr. Mágr*, as has already been mentioned, indicates relation by marriage. It is, however, well known that Thor and Ullr were not married to two sisters and were not father-in-law and son-in-law to each other. Thor is known to be the husband of the goddess Sif, Ull's mother, but he was not Ull's father. In other words, Thor was Ull's stepfather. In other kennings these relations were reflected in a more familiar form: in skaldic poetry Thor could be called 'Sif's friend' *Sifjar rúni* or 'Ull's stepfather' *Ullar gulli*. Conversely, Snorri recommends that Ullr be called 'Thor's stepson' *stjúp Þórs, stjúpsonr Þórs* (SnE., 31, 84).

Broadly speaking, there are other examples in the sagas where stepfather and stepson are both called *mágr*. Moreover, these relations are completely symmetrical: not only is the stepfather his stepson's *mágr*, but the stepson can also be called the *mágr* of his stepfather. It should be noted that as a rule these usages pertain to adults of legal age, not to the relation between an adult and a child. Thus, the connection indicated by the term *mágr* is genuinely symmetrical. For example, in a number of sagas Sigurðr the Swine (*Sýr*), the king of Hringaríki, who married Ásta Guðbrandsdóttir after the death of Haraldr *grenski*, is called the *mágr* of Saint Ólaf: *þá tók inn helgi Óláfr við Nóregis ríki... Hann var enn fyrsta vetr lengstom með Sigurði magi sínom á Upplöndom* (Ágrip 24, 26), compare also: (ÓHLeg. 22, 23, 24, 24, 27, 27; SÓH 58, 63). There are cases when the term *mágr* refers to a stepson, as in the story of how Sveinn Forkbeard sends ambassadors to Ólaf the Swede, his *mágr*: *Snimma vm varit sendi Sveinn konvngv menn i Sviðioð a fynd Olafs Sviakonvngs mags sins* (Codex Frisianus, 158). It should be noted that Ólaf's mother, Sigríðr the Imperious (*Stórráða*), was married to the king of the Danes after the death of her husband, Eiríkr the Victorious, the father of Ólaf the Swede. Thus, Ólaf undoubtedly was Sveinn Forkbeard's stepson.

Thus, *mágr* rather regularly signifies 'stepfather' or 'stepson'. Strictly speaking, such a connection may be defined precisely as a relation acquired through marriage, because it emerges when the mother of one participant in the relationship marries the other participant. It is characterized this way in the Icelandic code of law, where among close relations by marriage (*ná mágar*) not only the husband of the daughter or sister but also the stepfather (mother's husband) is mentioned (*Grágás* I: 1 25, 47; 35, 62; 89, 158, 113, 201); cf. (*Grágás* I: 1 89, 160). Such a classification, however, is completely alien to many kinship systems outside of the Scandinavian world (that of Russian in particular).

Among Scandinavians, non-blood relationship of any kind between men may be designated as *mágr*, and it is evidently opposed to blood relationship. It is significant that, within the *mágr* category, the positions of the participants are only weakly differentiated. For the stepson / stepfather relationship, which does not take the central place in this category, there are the special terms *stjúpfaðir*, *stjúpsonr* and

*stjúpr*¹. As for such important relations as 'daughter's husband' (son-in-law), 'wife's father' (father-in-law), and 'wife's brother' (brother-in-law), there are actually no special terms for them. They are expressed by the general term *mágr*, or, in legal texts, by descriptive, periphrastic constructions like 'wife's father'.

Thus the Old Norse category of affinity (non-blood relation) is distinctly opposed to the category of blood relations; it is relatively homogeneous, and in logical order includes all family connections that a man can acquire by his own marriage or the marriage of his relatives.

Let us now consider the kennings we cited at the beginning of this paper from the viewpoint just set forth. We may recall that Thor in skaldic poetry could be designated by the kennings 'Ull's *mágr*' or 'Sif's husband', while Ullr, according to Snorri, may be called 'Sif's son', without Ull's father or his blood relations being mentioned at all. From my perspective, in a certain sense they should not be mentioned. This assumption, strange at first sight, is supported by the inner form of the name *Sif* which means literally 'relative, kinswoman'. The plural form of this word, as a rule, refers not to blood relations but to relatives by marriage, i.e., *sifjar* or *sifjungr* may and often does signify the category of affinity *mágr*, *mágar* (cf. the abovementioned *viðkenning* definition in the 'Younger Edda': *heita ok mágar, sifjungar...*). However, as extant texts show, the notions *sifjar* and *mágar* are close but not completely identical.

It should be noted first of all that the word *sif* is of the feminine gender and in the singular it is used only as the name of the goddess. Thus, *Sif*, whose place and function in the pantheon of gods is not very well known, may be regarded as a personified notion of non-blood relations, relations through a woman, relation by marriage, and affinity by agreement. Thus it becomes clearer why her son is not a blood relative to any of the gods of his sex. Ullr is the son of the Relative by Marriage, and he remains in the position of the eternal Relative by Marriage, a stepson, having no father. The masculine term *mágr* complements the feminine term *sif* in the mythological plot.

It may be that the name of the goddess *Sif* constitutes a peculiar point of confluence between language and myth, the point where they intersect. An element of language gives birth to the mythological plot, and it is the relative sparseness of this plot that allows it to follow its linguistic nature. In other words, there is nothing in this plot except an embodied explanation of the meanings contained in the word. There is a goddess that can be a wife and have a son, but her name itself is such, that her son is not a son but a non-blood relative for her husband. It may be that precisely this representation of the goddess *Sif* is the most archaic.

Thus Ullr's role in the family system is that of *mágr*, and his family relations with other gods are only non-blood relationships. It should be noted that the term *mágr* generally indicates family relations (but only non-blood relations) between men, i.e.,

¹ The term *gulli*, which occurs, as far as I know, only once in the work of skald Eilífr Goðrúnarson, stands apart from the latter. In the song of praise devoted to Thor, there is the kenning *gulli Ullar* (*Skj.* 1, 143), which, proceeding from the etymology (Vries 1977, 182) and standard kennings of Thor 'Ull's *mágr*', is translated by specialists in skaldic poetry as 'Ull's stepfather' (*Lexicon poeticum*, 208; Meissner 1921, 253).

family relations between men acquired through women. As we have already seen, the scope of these connections is wider than the typical one for modern men.

The unifying power of this category is exhibited not only in the case of some mythological personages. It may be said that the mythological and everyday perceptions of the word *mágr* are more or less symmetrical. In other words, the language arranges the mythological and everyday-life spaces of non-blood family relations in a similar fashion. I have already mentioned the usage of *mágr* in the sagas. This word also appears in inscriptions executed in the Younger Futhark. Here, the impossibility of differentiating the relations designated by this term is clearly exhibited. As a rule, given the laconic and formulaic character of the text, it would have been impossible for even medieval (to say nothing of modern) readers to determine what exactly the non-blood family relations were between the *mágr* mentioned in those inscriptions: *ketil setti stein þena ebtir fin mak sin (Norges innskrifter 4, 6 № 272); ... ri(st)l s(t)lnþinsi iftir... ma[k] s(i)n (Norges innskrifter 3, 196 № 237); cf. also Danmarks runeindskrifter, № 289, 69, 324. Apparently, those who ordered these inscriptions were not at all embarrassed by this fact. For them the word *mágr* carried all the necessary and sufficient information about their relations to the deceased.*

Returning to the theme of stepson / stepfather, we should note that we have one runic text that allows us to assume that the *mágr* mentioned in it was the stepfather of the man who ordered the inscription. I am speaking of a Danish inscription from Gunderup from the Viking Age: (A) : tuki : raispi : stini : þalsi : auk : karpi : kub(i) [:] þausi : aftaba : mak : sin : þaikn : kuþan : auk : (B) : tufu : muþur : slna : þau : llika : baþi : i : þaum : hauki : |abi : uni : tuka : flAR : slns : aft : slk (*Danmarks runeindskrifter*, 180 № 143)².

The specific character of the Scandinavian notion *mágr* is not, however, limited to stepfather / stepson connections; the category appears to be much wider. First, the relationship of *mágar* often required only an engagement or agreement to marry, rather than a marriage. This point is significant, inasmuch as the connections implied by the application of *mágr* to two free adult men were, in general, contractual relations. Such relations exist insofar as they are in the interest of the participants. That is why many conflicts in the family sagas are based on situations where the *mágr*-relations cease to be in the interest of some individual.

Moreover, a contractual agreement and, hence, *mágr*-relations could exist not only on the basis of the legal marriage: the relatives of a woman who was, with their consent, made someone's concubine were also considered *mágar*. As we know, this practice was most widely accepted in Iceland in the Age of Sturlungs. It was precisely at that time and in this way of acquiring *mágar* that the 'contractual side' of the category in question was most fully manifested. A girl could be given as a concubine for the sake of making an alliance and her position could be as unstable as the alliance itself. If the situation changed, she could return to her parents and marry some other man. In any case, her children did not have full family rights. The institution of

² 'Toki raised this stone and made this memorial sign in honour of his *mágr* (= stepfather?); Abbe (Ebbe) kind man and his mother Tofa. Both lie in this barrow. Abbe (Ebbe) left his property to Toki after his death.'

concubinage was, hence, an institution of non-blood relations that was never convertible to a blood kinship relation.

On the other hand, *mágr*-relations sometimes appeared without any agreement but, nevertheless, became an integral part of a person's family connections. It should be emphasized once more that the term *mágr* united, as opposed to differentiating, all family connections acquired through a woman, including, in particular, connections that had never been sanctioned by a treaty. The 'semantic capaciousness' of the word *mágr* allowed for a play on the word based on the manipulation of what might be called its reputable and disreputable meanings. Let us clarify this point.

In the kings' sagas, at least three individuals are given the nickname *konungs mágr*. The first is the husband of Sverrir's daughter (the son-in-law of the king) Einarr *Konung's mágr* who was also known as *Einar prestir* ('Priest'). A second is Grégórius Andrésson, the son-in-law of King Hákon Hákonarsson, who lived in the thirteenth century. However, we are most interested in the third case: the noble Norwegian *bóndi* Árni from Stóðreim.

Árni married Ingriðr, the widow of the famous Norwegian king Haraldr Gilli who had been killed by conspirators while in the arms of his concubine. Ingriðr was of the Swedish royal family, the granddaughter of king Ingi Steinkellsson the Old. In her wedlock with king Haraldr Gilli she gave birth to a son named *Ingi* in honour of his maternal great grandfather. Ingi was the only legitimate offspring of his father, and so he naturally inherited the title of king after his father's death. His mother's new husband, Árni of Stóðreim, was given the nickname *konungs mágr* (*Hkr.* 3, 371). This title may have emphasized Árni's connection with Ingi, to whom he was a stepfather.

As for Árni *konungs mágr*, a different, or additional, interpretation of his nickname is possible. Family connections acquired by men through women in the Old Icelandic sagas could be understood not only pragmatically but also ironically. First, as already noted, someone could become the *mágr* of another man without desiring to be or knowing that it had happened. This term could designate not only a man who got legally married to someone's kinswoman but also one who had sexual relations with her without the sanction of her family and clan. In these cases the point is not the affinity acquired by marriage but the ironic understanding of the actual situation. It is interesting that in all the examples of this kind the *mágr*-relations are not contractual, as they usually are. This is rather a rare case when affinity is actually considered equivalent to blood family relations because it is obligatory, regardless of the person's being unaware of it. To put it simply, a man may be someone's father or brother without knowing it, and his unawareness does not cancel the fact. In the same fashion, sexual connection with a woman makes a man the *mágr* of her blood relatives, even if they do not yet know about it.

Furthermore, the ironic idea of affinity through a woman and undeclared *mágr*-relations could be used with good effect and carried through to the logical end. Two men could be called *mágar* if they married or formed a sexual connection with one and the same woman. In other words, Árni of Stóðreim could be called *konungs mágr* not only because he was the stepfather of Ingi the Cripple but also because of his marriage to the widow of the king Haraldr Gilli. Such mocking characterizations of men who have had the same kind of connection with the same woman are even reflected in juridical sources. Here is one example of this sort of unusual and rare irony in Old-

Norwegian law. It concerns the right of a free man or an emancipated slave to murder a man who has been caught in the bed of his kinswoman, whether daughter, niece, or sister, etc. This right was given to men in all Scandinavian countries, but only *Borgartingslovens Kristenret* tells what a slave should do in such a situation: *Nv a þræll vigh vm kono sina ok dottor sina. Ef han tækr man i hia henni, þa skal han ganga til brundz ok taka span fullt vatz ok slætta a þau ok biðia hæilan sofua magh sin (Borgartingslovens Kristenret 15, 66).*

It cannot, thus, be excluded that the nickname *konungs mágr* originally had a mocking character, and in everybody's opinion Árne was *mágr* not only to Ingi the Cripple but also to Árne's own wife's first husband, King Haraldr Gilli. The possibility of making a pun on this term, the possibility of irony or some other wordplay, in our opinion, is due to the fact that the category *mágr* is internally homogenous and, at the same time, fits almost any relation that men can acquire through women. As already noted, not only is the *mágr*-category reciprocal (i.e., 'father-in-law', 'brother-in-law', 'son-in-law' are not specially differentiated within the category) but the indicated connections that derive from this homogeneity are two-sided. If X is *mágr* to Y, then Y, respectively, is *mágr* to X; while if X is father-in-law to Y, in this family relation model, this connection is not symmetrical and Y is X's son-in-law. In fact, while the model of blood relations implies, first of all, a rigid hierarchy of generations, it is completely absent in the affinity model of the Scandinavians. If we proceed from what the language suggests, adult men come into *mágr*-relations on equal terms, regardless of superiority in age or belonging to a younger or older generation.

It is clear that such undifferentiating terminology of affinity may bring about certain difficulties in the description of family connections, these difficulties existing not only for the reader — our contemporary — but also for 'the detached onlooker' of the ancient epoch. In particular, we have only controversial and fragmentary data on royal succession to the Swedish throne in the eleventh century and of the family connections between the kings who occupied it. Part of this controversy is evidently caused by the fact that Old Norse nomenclature for relations by marriage was not transparent to Western European chroniclers.

For example, it can be safely asserted that after Óláfr the Swede (or *Skotkonungr*), the Swedish rulers were first his legitimate son Önundr-Jakob, and later his illegitimate son Emundr. Thereafter, however, follows a rather obscure period of Swedish history. Apparently, after Emundr, a man called *Steinkell* ascended the Swedish throne. It would seem very important, from the perspective of dynastic continuity, to know what kind of family relation connected Steinkell with the preceding king, and whether his heirs were of the family of Eiríkr the Victorious and Ólaf the Swede, but the sources give conflicting information. The data for this period of Swedish history are obtained mainly from *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* and from *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* by Adam of Bremen. Naturally, much depends on the designations of blood relations and relations by affinity in these texts.

In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, the dynastic situation after the death of Emundr Ólafsson is described as follows: Steinkell, being a noble man and, as the saga tells us, a jarl of Sweden, came to the throne having married the daughter of Emundr, the preceding king (*Hervarar saga* 16, 70). In another recension of the saga, where Steinkell's story is largely similar to the standard version, he is married to the daughter

of Önundr-Jakob, not of Emundr. In addition, there is a Swedish genealogy of the fourteenth century in which Steinkell is considered to be the husband of Ólaf Skotkonung's sister (Bolin 1931, 198).

In any case, Steinkell was *mágr* to the three preceding kings, though in these texts the term *mágr* is not applied to him. It should be noted that *Hervarar saga* and the Swedish list of kings were recorded much later, not earlier than the fourteenth century. Most likely, it was the expression *mágr* or *konungs mágr* applied to Steinkell that reached the composers of these records. As we shall see, this supposition is confirmed by Adam of Bremen's text.

We can expect that Adam's account to be more reliable, but it is rather enigmatic. Speaking of the death of Emundr the Old, Adam informs us that Steinkell, or *Stinkel*, as he was then called, succeeded him. And Adam, who wrote in about the seventh decade of the eleventh century, notes that Steinkell was *nepos* or *privignus* to the preceding king: *Legatis igitur tali modo a Sueonibus repulses fertur quidam, nepos an privignus Regis ignoro, prosecutus esse cum laerimis, suppliciter se commendans orationibus eorum. Nomen ei Stinkel* (Adam, Lib. III 15, 156–157). A little later Adam mentions Steinkell once more, still calling him the *nepos* of the preceding king: *Eodem tempore mortuus est rex Sueonum Emund, post quem levatur in regnum nepos eius Stinkel, de quo supra diximus* (Adam, Lib. III 16, 158).

What Scandinavian designations of family relations could be expressed by these Latin terms? The Latin word *nepos* could mean, as we know, quite a number of younger blood relatives: 'great-grandson', 'grandson', 'nephew', and, finally, 'descendant' in general. The derivation of the term 'stepson' (*privignus*) in Adam's description is more or less clear from the points already made in the present article: it reflects the word *mágr* as used by his Scandinavian informants. This is evident if one remembers that, in different redactions of the saga, Steinkell is called the husband of king Emundr's daughter or of Önundr-Jakob's daughter, and in the genealogical list he figures as the husband of their aunt, the sister of Ólaf the Swedish. In other words, Steinkell's connections with each of the kings fit the category of *mágr*.

Judging by the vague construction with *an* in the Latin text, Adam's informants were not fully informed on the subject and, therefore, probably did not use the narrow and concrete terms *stjúpsonr* or *stjúpr*, as the use of either of these words would have excluded any vagueness and the supposition about blood relationship would have been impossible. In general, medieval learned tradition tended to select a certain single meaning in the vast semantic field covered by *mágr*, making this term more definite and limited in meaning than it really was. In cases of intercultural contacts and translations from one language to another, the extensiveness and the lack of differentiation of the *mágr*-category were alien to the translator. Here, the translator applies a kind of synecdoche, naming a part instead of the whole and indicating a more narrowly defined family connection included in the category of *mágr*. However, this concerns not only translations from one language to another. For example, Snorri in the 'Younger Edda' sometimes uses the term *mágr* in the broad meaning used in the sagas (*SnE.* 41, 108) and sometimes finds it necessary to specify and limit the meaning. In particular, citing the skaldic example where Thor is named Ull's *mágr*, he tells his audience to call Thor 'Ull's stepfather' (*stjúpfaðir Ullar*) (*SnE.*, 80).

Adam of Bremen translates *mágr* as 'stepson', though perhaps another narrow meaning within the *mágr* category was intended. The appearance of the word *nepos* may have a double explanation. First, this could be an additional, explanatory translation of the word *mágr*. In other words, Adam knew that its meaning was not only *privignus* 'stepson', but included other names of family relations; he did not know exactly which ones. In this case, he unintentionally replaced the vague characterization of affinity contained in this word with the similarly vague, indefinite characterization of blood relation of the junior to the senior contained in the Latin word *nepos*. If it is so, Adam, in spite of his ignorance of some facts, exhibits great linguistic and cultural sensitivity. Inasmuch as the words *nepos* and *mágr* are in some sense antonyms, they are on the same plane and effectively neutralize each other. *Mágr* indicates relations of affinity in the widest sense and ignores the hierarchy of age and generations, while *nepos* suggests the broadest sort of hierarchical age-based blood relationship between men.

It may be that the construction *nepos an privignus* appears in the text for some other reason. It could be caused by a still greater inexactitude in the data given by the Scandinavian informant of Adam of Bremen. Perhaps he knew only that Emundr Ólafsson and Steinkell were connected by some sort of family relationship. Not knowing exactly what this relationship was, he pointed to the two distinct varieties of family connections — blood relations and affinity. In this case he could use two words corresponding to these two varieties: *frændi* and *mágr*. Adam gave a rather close translation of the first word and for the second one he chose one of its minor meanings, basing it on his understanding of the ways in which royal power was inherited.

However, it should be noted that, where the ruling kings are concerned, the 'secondary' significance of the term *mágr* is reflected in the saga-writer's understanding of history. In *Hervarar saga*, this approach to dynastic history is expressed very clearly: *...en eftir dauða Eymundar konungs tóku Sviar hann (Steinkell) til konungs. Þá gekk konungdómur ór langfeðgaætt í Svíþjóð inna fornu konunga (Hervarar saga 16, 70)*. In other words, the text denies the continuity between the dynasty founded by Steinkell and that of Eiríkr Victorious and Ólaf the Swede, i.e. the Ynglingar dynasty. It is precisely the text of this saga that indicates that Steinkell was married to Emund's daughter or, in the other recension, to the daughter of his brother, Önundr-Jakob. Thus, even though Steinkell is a relative of the Ynglingar by marriage and his children are their descendants through the female line, the saga does not acknowledge them as successors to the family of the ancient kings. This text manifests a general tendency, which appears rather early in the Scandinavian tradition, towards refusal to acknowledge the succession of power through women. As a rule, noble and influential people became non-blood relatives of the king. In *Hervarar saga* Steinkell is described as one such person: *Steinkell var fyrst jarl í Svíþjóð (Hervarar saga 16, 70)*. The children of these *mágar* were connected by blood relations with the royal family, but this connection gave them only insignificant advantages in terms of power.

The son of a daughter or sister of the ruler could come to power as a result of political struggle, but he had no more right to power than any other noble and influential man in the country. A descendant through the female line inherited only the

rights of his father's family. For the royal family of his mother, in spite of the blood relation, he remained, in some sense, like his father, a non-blood relative. Certainly, he could not succeed to power under any circumstances as long as the preceding king had living sons or brothers. It is typical that in this case the rights of the heir through the female line are inferior to the rights of an illegitimate son (Uspenskij 2004, 63–81). It is thus not coincidental that if a man connected with the royal family only through women comes into power then we always see the start of a new dynasty. Still, in a struggle for power, the claimant to the throne could by all means underline his royal family connections. This was the case, for example, with the Danish king Sven Estridsen, and this is how the saga interprets the situation of the Swedish king Steinkell and his descendants.

Thus, from the point of view of the saga, *mágr* Steinkell is the husband of the king's daughter and, hence, his children do not continue the dynasty. By the fourteenth century, when the saga was recorded, Steinkell's descendants had left the political arena, and the recorder of the text had no reasons to present them as originating from the legendary Ynglingar. As for Adam of Bremen, who characterized Steinkell as Emund's stepson or blood relation, he, apparently, defined the term *mágr* in such a way as to suggest that Steinkell's family largely succeed the Ynglingar, and in any case were not contrasted with them. It is difficult to say whether this suggestion of links between the dynasties reflected a deliberate attempt to 'antiquate' Steinkell's dynasty. Let us recall that Adam was a younger contemporary of this king and, perhaps, it was important for Adam's Scandinavian informant (Sven Estridsen?) to demonstrate the natural order of continuity of royal power in Sweden. Such continuity, in the absence of obvious heirs, could be connected by Adam with indirect but blood relations (*nepos*) or, in the Latin language tradition, with adoption (*privignus*).

In fact, we are unable to say anything about the connection between Steinkell and Emundr except that they were *mágar*, though this term is not applied to them in any source available to us. The extant data regarding Steinkell, though very laconic, allow us to see how this connection is interpreted from two different perspectives. Adam of Bremen, the author of *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, and the composer of *Hervarar saga* come across the vast and undifferentiated semantic field of the term *mágr*. They have different approaches to its decoding and face difficulties of different kinds. Adam deals with linguistic-cultural differences in designations of family connections and the understanding of dynastic succession, while the composer of the saga faces an aspect of kinship memory that is short-lived because it is not firmly fixed in language.

Thus it is not only the difference between the Scandinavian and European systems of family relations that matters. In my view, we can see here a special and at the same time classic example of the effect of language on reality. Indeed, the existence of the unifying language-construct *mágr*, which can designate any family connection between men formed through women, seems to allow one to give an exact definition of this connection in descriptive terms. Within one or two generations, it was easy for several men to define themselves as *mágar*, because everyone knew that one of them was married to the daughter of another, or they were married to two sisters, or one of them was the stepson of the other. However, when the individuals were separated by a great distance in space or in time, their family connection was

often remembered only as far as it was directly encoded in language. Apparently, in the oral language tradition some evidence remained of the fact that Steinkell had been *mágr* to Emundr, the last representative of the ancient Swedish royal dynasty. Different sources, using this evidence may in different ways narrow and concretize the meaning of this term, unintentionally creating new historical plots.

One should bear in mind that affinity is a rather temporary category: in the next generation it is converted into a blood relationship. In other words, the son of one's son-in-law becomes one's own grandson. The category of affinity thus always has a double character. In some cases, affinity is considered equal or almost equal to a blood relationship. In other cases it is opposed to it. *Mágr*-relations are one of the main ways of mastering the world, of a peculiar external expansion of the individual who draws apart the frames of his own family, frames of blood relations, acting, so to speak, by means of family connections.

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