Reassessing the career of Óláfr Tryggvason in the Insular world

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Despite his short reign over Norway (995–1000), Óláfr Tryggvason looms large both in medieval sources and in contemporary scholarship. This article focuses on his career in the Insular world (that is, Britain, Ireland and the associated islands), as presented in the twelfth-century synoptic histories (*Historia Norwegiae*, Theodoricus monachus, and *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*) and in the late twelfth- and thirteenth-century sagas, particularly Oddr Snorrason's saga and Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*.[1] It has long been noted that the depiction of Óláfr Tryggvason in these sources is as 'a crossbreed between a Christian martyr and a Germanic folk hero' (Lönnroth 1975, 36). This combination presented a literary challenge for his biographers as is recognised by recent work on these texts, particularly Oddr's semi-hagiographical biography (Phelpstead 2012; Grønlie 2017, x, 39–78, 76; Haki Antonsson 2017, 2, 64–82). These works have not, though, dealt with the Insular sections pertaining to Óláfr at any great length. It is illuminating to look at these particular sections of the synoptics and sagas as they have the potential to be corroborated by other historical sources, both written and archaeological, from the Insular world. Óláfr's presence in the Insular world, or at least in England, is indeed apparently corroborated by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which records an Anlaf. In particular, his likely involvement in the Battle of Maldon in 991 is generally accepted (ASC A 991; see Whitelock's discussion *EHD*, 234, n. 1; Roach 2016, 121). He was certainly in England in 994. The Scandinavian and Icelandic accounts also relate that Óláfr raided extensively abroad before he returned to Norway to claim the throne. They presumably drew on the skaldic poem *Óláfsdrápa* by Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, which lists the future king's campaigns against various groups of people.

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This article will examine the three main, comparatively lengthy episodes in the prose sources concerning Óláfr which are set in the Insular world: his baptism in the Scilly Isles, his marriage to Gyða and his activities in the earldom of Orkney. An up-to-date interdisciplinary approach to these episodes will include information about the late-tenth-century Insular world that may not be well-known to scholars of Scandinavian and Icelandic history and literature. While there is a kernel of historical plausibility in all of three of these episodes, it will be argued that the extant narratives elaborate these kernels due to a combination of literary, political and hagiographical concerns. Therefore, in addition to exploring historical evidence which may corroborate or refute these accounts of Óláfr, this article will consider the literary dimension and narrative function of these Insular episodes. It is suggested that these Insular sections also serve as preparatory material for the account of Óláfr's kingship of Norway, with his deeds confirming his personal qualities.

The King and the Hermit: Baptism(s)

Given Óláfr Tryggvason's Christian reputation for having converted Norway and many other lands, it is no surprise that his own personal conversion to Christianity is an important point in the narratives. The earliest version is from *Historia Norwegiae*,[2] which relates that after his harrying of many countries Óláfr found a godly hermit *penes Britanniam* 'at the edge of Britain' (*HN*, 92), who correctly identifies the king, despite an attempt at subterfuge, and predicts his taking of the Norwegian throne. Theodoricus relates that while in England Óláfr visited *quendam heremitam* 'a certain hermit' (Theodoricus, 26, ch 15) who foretold his life and death. In addition to this Theodoricus separately relates that Óláfr went on from there *in Sullingas insulas, quæ adjacent Britanniæ majori, ibique*

[2] The three synoptic histories (*Historia Norwegiae*, Theodoricus monachus's *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium*, *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*) are inter-related and all date to the latter half of the twelfth century. It is believed that *Historia Norwegiae* is the earliest, dating from *c*.1150–75, followed by Theodoricus' composition in *c*.1180 and *Ágrip* in *c*.1190 (Ekrem and Mortensen 2003, 8, 11, 16).

baptizatus est cum omnibus suis a viro venerabili Bernardo abbate 'to the Scilly Isles, which lie next to Greater Britain, and there he was baptised with all his men by a venerable man, the abbot Bernard' (Theodoricus, 14, ch. 7). Oddr's saga, which was first written in Latin around 1190 and translated into Norse not long after (Grønlie 2017, 39),[3] follows this latter version but the abbot in his, otherwise fuller, account is unnamed. Oddr does specify the Scilly Isles, described as *skamt frá Írlandi* 'a short distance from Ireland' (Oddr, 166, ch. 14), and explicitly refers to baptism.[4] *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum*, the only synoptic history in Old Norse, sets the hermit episode rather vaguely *í einum stað í Englandi* 'in a certain place in England'(*Ágrip*, 28, ch 19), but follows *Historia Norwegiae* in having the hermit recognise the king, despite him sending one of his men in his place, and predicting his future Christian kingship. All of this, in turn, is followed in the thirteenth-century *Heimskringla*, but, there unlike in *Ágrip*, baptism and the Scilly Isles are explicitly mentioned.[5]

The fact that this episode appears in so many narratives may indicate that the story was appreciated and prized (Bergan 2009, 53), but these accounts apparently disagree with other sources for Óláfr's baptism. Adam of Bremen in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, written between 1073 and 1076, indicates that there are several traditions already in his time. The version he prefers is that Óláfr was baptised by ecclesiastical personnel associated with Hamburg-Bremen. He discusses Odinkar the Elder and the Younger, bishops of Ribe, then refers to *aliis qui adhuc supervixerant a diebus Adaldagi* 'others who yet survived from the days of Adaldag' (Adam, II.36,

[3] For more a more detailed account see Ólafur Halldórsson 2006, particularly clxxxiii–clxxiv, clxxxiii on the authorship and lxxxiv on its sources and lxxxvi onwards for the saga's affinity with other texts, particularly the synoptics. Andersson prefers a date for the saga closer to 1180 (2012, 64–5).

[4] The locating of the Scilly Isles near Ireland might derive from Pliny's *Natural History* which described several islands, included *Silumnus* which presumably refers to Scilly, as lying *inter Hiberniam ac Britanniam* ('between Ireland and Britain') (Rackham 1947, 198 (Pliny, *Natural History*, IV.103)). Ólafur Halldórsson suggests that Oddr may have taken *Syllingar* to refer to the Skellig Islands, which are indeed off the southwest coast of Ireland, since there was a monastery on Skellig Michael (2006, c).

[5] These two versions are integrated in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* which describes Óláfr's meeting with the hermit and subsequent baptism at a nearby monastery on the islands (Ólafur Halldórsson 1958, 161–5 (chs. 78–79)). For the dating, manuscript transmission and reception of Oddr's saga, *Heimskringla* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, see Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 2005, 15–120 and 225–67.

97), who was archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen until his death in 988. It is presumably these 'others' who are referred to in the following statement: *A quibus traditur Olaph Trucconis filius, qui tunc Nortmannis imperavit, baptizatus ex ea gente primus fuisse christianus* 'according to tradition they baptised Olaph, son of Trucco, who then ruled the Northmen [Norwegians], from which people he was the first Christian' (II.36, 97). Óláfr cannot have been the first Norwegian to be Christian, which may undermine the rest of this account. Adam has an ulterior political motive and consistently exaggerates the role of the archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen and the bishops who were under its authority, leading him to downplay other influences on the conversion of Scandinavia. Adam's portrayal of Óláfr Tryggvason is markedly negative, however, even questioning his Christian status, claiming that he was interested in divination and committed suicide (II.40, 100–01). This decreases the likelihood that Adam wished to give the credit for his conversion erroneously to Hamburg-Bremen; if that were his intention he might also have furnished the vague account with more specifics, particularly the name of the converter. Adam notes in the preceding sentence that the missionaries travelled to Norway and Sweden and converted people there, which suggests that he believes Óláfr's baptism to have taken place in Norway. Being baptised only during his reign rather goes against the saga tradition of Óláfr's Christian efforts before he gains the throne. However, the following sentence in Adam's *Gesta*, although not present in the oldest group of manuscripts, adds that Óláfr *suscepit christianitatem* 'took up Christianity' (II.36, 97) when he was in England and that he was *primus in patriam revexit* 'first to bring it back to his country' (II.36, 97). The latter part of this statement is, once more, clearly inaccurate. This embracing of the faith in England is not specified to have included baptism so was still compatible with the attribution to Hamburg-Bremen missionaries. However, Adam does admit that there are alternative traditions: noting vaguely that others relate that bishops and priests from England went abroad for missionary work and they *Olaph baptizatum et ceteros* 'baptised Olaph and others' (II.37, 98).

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that Anlaf and Swegen, that is Óláfr Tryggvason and the Danish king Sveinn tjúguskegg 'Forkbeard', attacked London in 994 (*ASC* C, 87; *ASC* E, 61). They were offered tribute by the king and his councillors. We also have the text of the treaty made between Æthelred and the Viking leaders, known as II Æthelred (Liebermann 1903, 220–24). As part of this settlement, the Chronicle relates that Ælfheah, archbishop of Canterbury, had Óláfr brought to Andover. The choice of Óláfr rather than Sveinn might have been based on the fact that the latter was already Christian. King Æthelred personally *his onfeng æt bisceopes handa* 'received him at the bishop's hands' (*ASC* C, 87; ASC E, 62 (994)). It has usually been assumed that this means that Æthelred acted as Óláfr's sponsor or godfather for his baptism (Swanton 1998, 128, n. 5). Dorothy Whitelock, though, translated this phrase as 'stood sponsor to him at confirmation' (1979, 236) rather than 'at baptism'; in her assumption that Óláfr was confirmed not baptised, she was presumably influenced by the accounts of a pre-existing baptism. Levi Roach states this reasoning plainly in opting for confirmation (2016, 176). It is also conceivable that a not particularly pious Scandinavian might end up being baptised more than once if it suited his own ends.[6]

Why do the Scandinavian and Icelandic accounts present a different version of events, in which Óláfr's baptism is at the hands of a nameless hermit rather than the king of England? In this context it is worth noting that the person standing as sponsor, or godfather, over the person being

[6] Indeed, Notker the Stammerer's description in the late ninth-century *Gesta Karoli Magni* of a mass baptism at the court of Louis the Pious in the 800s suggests that this did occur. When the Franks run out of the traditional white baptismal robes, one of the older Northmen reacts indignantly to being presented with a less fine tunic refashioned from old clothes: "*Iam vities hic lotus sum et optimis candidissimisque vestibus indutus; et ecce talis saccus non milites sed subulcos addecet. Et nisi nuditatem erubescerem, meis privatus nec a te datis contectus, amictum tuum cum Christo tuo tibi relinquerem*" "Now I have been bathed twenty times before, and then I was clothed in the finest and whitest vestments; but look, such sack-cloth befits a swineherd not a soldier. If it weren't for fear of being embarrassed by my nakedness, since you have robbed me of my clothes and not given me new ones, I'd leave you your garment along with your Christ" (Haefele 1959, 90 (book 2, ch. 19)). Paul Kershaw comments that to the Northmen the white clothes 'had no symbolic value, nor had the baptismal rite itself, beyond providing the Vikings with an easy means of acquiring a new wardrobe' (2002, 196). While Notker's story 'may be apocryphal', as Ian Wood notes (1987, 50), those who accepted baptism as part of Frankish diplomacy did not necessarily follow Christianity when they returned home.

baptised is usually thought to be of higher social or political standing, as seen, for example, with Louis the Pious and Harald klak and with Alfred and Guthrum. Instead, Óláfr's biographers chose to place the focus on Óláfr himself, rather than attributing his conversion to another ruler who might be seen as superior. While according to his own saga the poet Gunnlaugr ormstunga composed a poem for Æthelred (*Borgfirðinga sǫgur*, 70–74 (ch. 7)), the English king is just one of many leaders the Icelander visits and versifies as he tours various courts and receives gifts. Similarly, Egill Skallagrímsson's service under Athelstan brings him renown for his military prowess, but his status, like that of Gunnlaugr, as an Icelandic warrior-poet, rather than a would-be king of Norway, winning fame abroad through patronage changes the power dynamics. Even then it has been argued that during the gift-giving episode (*Egils saga*, 143–47 (ch. 55)) the 'exact symmetry in the way the two men are presented' establishes Egill and Athelstan 'as equals' (Fjalldal 2005, 80). Such an equivalence could not be wrought with Æthelred as Óláfr's godfather. Moreover, an unspecified location or somewhere as remote as the Scilly Isles perhaps diminishes the potential threat posed by the place that could claim responsibility for Óláfr's baptism. Although it contains the hermit episode, *Ágrip* does not attribute Óláfr's baptism to the hermit, but only has him prophesy that after recovering from his wounds gained in a battle Óláfr will *skírn taka* 'receive baptism' (*Ágrip*, 30 (ch 19)). *Ágrip*'s relative silence on Óláfr's baptism might be due to the author having heard that Óláfr had been baptised in England but not wanting to draw attention to it. Once more, the suggestion of political subordination may have been the crucial factor in the vagueness of this account.[7]

Commented [CE1]: Should this be the editors instead so (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938)?

In *Historia Norwegiae*, *Ágrip* and *Heimskringla*, Óláfr is persuaded to accept Christianity partly by the fact that the hermit is not fooled by the assumed identity of one of Óláfr's retainers dressed as the king. This is based on Gregory the Great's story about the Gothic king Totila and St Benedict, who was not deceived by a splendidly dressed courtier (de Vogüé, 1979, 180–82 (*Dialogues* Book 2, ch. 14); Lönnroth 1963, 60–61, Jones 1968, 19; Ólafur Halldórsson 2006, xcv). Gregory's

[7] Haki Antonsson (2017, 72, 94) discusses Óláfr's preliminary baptism in Greece in Oddr's account.

Dialogues was known in medieval Scandinavia: it was first translated in the twelfth century in Norway and is preserved in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelandic manuscripts (Boyer 1973; Wolf 2001). Gregory relates that, after his encounter with Benedict, Totila travelled to Sicily, which Peter Sawyer suggested would explain Snorri's use of the Scilly Isles as a location (Sawyer 1987, 302). He was apparently unaware of the earlier references by Theodoricus and Oddr to Scilly. While the *Historia Norwegiae* version does not specifically refer to Scilly—only to a *parua insula* 'small island'(*HN*, 92)—it does identify the man Óláfr swaps clothes with as *armigerum suum* 'his armour-bearer' or 'his weapon-bearer', rather than a more generic *einn sinn þjónustumann* 'one of his retainers' in *Ágrip* (30 (ch. 19)). *Historia Norwegiae*'s description is closer to Totila's *spatarius* 'sword-bearer' in Gregory's original text (de Vogüé 1979, 180). This perhaps suggests that we can trace the original borrowing of the episode to *Historia Norwegiae* and as it was retold in other sources the precise role held by the king's man was less relevant in terms of Norse warrior society and to the narrative function of the episode. In addition to this inspiration, several stories which were earlier told about St Óláfr Haraldsson appear to have transferred to Óláfr Tryggvason (Lönnroth 1975, 35).[8] This baptismal episode was apparently one of these (Lönnroth 1963, 61; Turville-Petre 1953, 136–37). In the *Legendary Saga* (1982, 64) Óláfr Haraldsson meets an English hermit, also after initially sending one of his servants. The thirteenth-century *Legendary Saga*, though, is believed to be closely related to the twelfth-century *Oldest Saga* (see Lindow 2008, 103), which is from around the time of the composition of *Historia Norwegiae* (1150–1175). It is therefore unclear with which king this Gregorian-inspired anecdote was first associated. Regardless, these intertextual relations have significant implications for the reliability of this account of Óláfr Tryggvason's baptism.

It is possible that there is also an element of genuine historical tradition in the hermit story, since there is convincing archaeological evidence for a religious community on St. Helen's, Isles of

[8] At least one of these stories seems to have been transferred in the opposite direction, though: Ólafur Halldórsson (2006, cvi; 1984, 109 and 111–12) asserts that the landing at Mostr episode was first associated with Óláfr Tryggvason rather than Óláfr Haraldsson (*contra* Lönnroth 1963, 60).

Scilly. The island of St Helen's was originally named after Saint Lide or Elidius, who is believed to have lived there in the eighth century (Thomas 1985, 192). It is of course 'tempting to connect the hermit on St. Helen's with Óláfr Tryggvason's sojourn and meeting there (O'Neill 1964, 45), while Radford argues that the story 'probably contains a germ of truth, and, if the monk is correctly styled a hermit, he was probably one of those dwelling on St. Helens' (1964, 42). While precise dating is difficult, it seems that an early date coinciding with Óláfr's time in the Insular world cannot be corroborated archaeologically, as the earliest pottery is from the late eleventh century or *c*.1100 (O'Neill 1964, 43, 53, 59). Indeed, O'Neill concluded that 'the negative evidence' of the lack of earlier pottery, which is found in other Cornish sites, is 'so strong and consistent from all parts of the site that it must be considered as conclusive that the St. Helens hermitage was not founded until some time after the 10th century' (1964, 58). Thus, we cannot be certain that it was in existence during Óláfr Tryggvason's lifetime. It certainly was by the time that Oddr was writing, though, as there is twelfth-century corroboration of a religious community on the island from written sources. A grant of Henry I to Tavistock Abbey (Devon) from *c*.1120 included *omnes ecclesie de Sullye* 'all the churches of Scilly' (Oliver 1864, 73), while a later grant from Reginald, earl of Cornwall, presumably dating to the 1150s, specifically listed *insula Sancti Elidii* 'the island of St Elidius' (Oliver 1864, 74) amongst the possessions of Tavistock (for the dating of these grants see Thomas 1985, 200–01). Oddr rather curiously makes the hermit the head of a community of monks, thus combining the much older tradition of a single hermit with the actual situation in his own time of a larger confraternity. Theodoricus attributed Óláfr's baptism to *Bernardo abbate* 'abbot Bernard', rather than remembering the saint Elidius, while the other sources do not name the one responsible. In general there appears to have been some, but limited, Scandinavian activity in, and consequently knowledge of, the Scilly Isles.[9] As seen at the start of this section, the Scandinavian and Icelandic accounts of the baptism

[9] The Scilly Isles would have made a convenient navigational and stopping-off point for any Scandinavians in the area, as they did for sailors in later centuries (Gore 2015, 128, 144). The Scilly Isles account for a couple

seem vague and uncertain in their locating of the Scilly Isles, with Oddr describing them as being near Ireland. While a Scilly setting for Óláfr's baptism and conversion might therefore suggest an underlying layer of half-remembered historical fact, it might also have been a convenient location at the fringes of the Norse worldview. Charles Thomas asserts that the story 'contains no grain of truth in our setting' because the site at St Helen's was misidentified as 'an isolated hermitage' (1985, 233) and noting that there was no 'indigenous Scilly tradition' until the twentieth century (232).

Whatever its origins, the hermit episode extant in these sources serves to enchance Óláfr Tryggvason's reputation.[10] In *Historia Norwegiae* the hermit enjoins the retainer in the king's clothes *domino suo fideliter seruire* 'to serve his lord faithfully'(*HN*, 92); an equivalent is not present in the episode in Gregory's *Dialogues*, so it does not derive from this source material. In *Ágrip* this instruction to loyalty is heightened somewhat: the hermit declares *Eigi ertu konungr, en þat er ráð mitt attu sér trúr konungi þínum* 'You are not the king, and it is my counsel that you be loyal to your king' (*Ágrip*, 30 (ch. 19)). This might serve a Norwegian political message, emphasising that God expects people to obey their king. Additionally, the king's clothes-exchanging scheme allows him to establish the hermit's holiness, reflecting his own wisdom in setting the test. With his credibility verified, the hermit also prophesies Óláfr's obtaining the Norwegian throne and the greatness of his rule, including his achievements in conversion. This episode thus connects Óláfr's conversion to his kingship; the former becomes necessary for him to fulfil the latter. Indeed this link is made explicit

of the small number of extant Norse place names in the West Country (Agnes, Grimsby; Gore 2015, 127, 131). *Orkneyinga saga* (chs 79, 100) relates that the Orcadian Sveinn Ásleifarson was active in the Scilly Isles (*Orkneyinga saga*, 180–81, 272–74).

[10] In his account of the abbot, Oddr places more emphasis on the Christian instruction received by Óláfr (Oddr, 167–68 (ch. 14)), which still suggests that he will be a good Christian ruler but does contain the same emphasis on Óláfr cleverness and the loyalty expected from his retinue as *Ágrip*. It is also interesting that Oddr does not use the version of the scene that is indebted to Gregory's *Dialogues*, given that he knew the *Dialogues* well; since he was arguably promoting Óláfr as a saintly figure he perhaps did not want to equate him with a Gothic tyrant.

in *Ágrip*: *kom hann svá til trúar, því næst til Nóregs* ‘so he came to the faith, and next to Norway’ (*Ágrip*, 30 (ch. 19)).

A Hiberno-Scandinavian bride?

Oddr’s saga and *Heimskringla* relate the marriage of Óláfr Tryggvason to a woman named Gyða, said to be the sister of Óláfr Kvaran, that is Amlaíb Cuarán. Amlaíb was king of York on two separate occasions (941–44 and 949–52) and, more successfully, of Dublin from 945–47 and 952–980. When Dublin suffered a major military defeat at the battle of Tara in 980 he went into brief retirement on Iona. As previously noted, Óláfr Tryggvason was active in the Insular world in the early 990s and conceivably a little earlier. There is therefore a chronological disjuncture in the genealogy of this account (see Ólafur Halldórsson 2006, ci–ii): Amlaíb Cuarán’s father died in 927, so he seems unlikely to have had a daughter of marriageable age half a century later. It is more likely that Gyða was the daughter of Amlaíb Cuarán (who himself died at an old age in 981) and therefore the sister of Sigtryggr or Sitric silkiskegg ‘Silkenbeard’, the king of Dublin who died in 1036.

Since it does not feature in the synoptics from the latter half of the twelfth century, the earliest account of the marriage is that of Oddr Snorrason’s saga of Óláfr, from around 1190. In a scene set in England, Oddr describes Gyða as *systir Óláfs Skotakonungs, er kallaðr var kváran* ‘the sister of Óláfr, king of the Scots, who is called kvaran’ (Oddr, 179 (A; ch. 17)). This incorrect royal title might have been a case of the Norse translator not realizing that Latin *Scotti* referred to the Irish too (Ólafur Halldórsson 2006, c). It is possible, though, that it was the epithet rather than the location of the kingdom that was misattributed. Alex Woolf suggests that since here it seems that the text supplies Óláfr Kvaran as an explanation for ‘King of the Scots’ it could be that Gyða was instead the sister of

Amlaíb son of Ildulb who was a king of Alba when killed in 977 (pers. comm.).[11] A Scottish identification might be strengthened by the fact that in the same chapter Oddr gives Óláfr's rival for Gyða's hand as *Kappinn Alpin* 'the champion Alpin' (Oddr, 178 (ch. 17)), which would seem to be Alpín, a name peculiar to Alba. It might even have been mistakenly introduced by a scribe who had heard of Alpín, the father of Cináed, traditionally viewed as the founder of the Kingdom of Scots.[12] However, while this is true of one manuscript of the saga of the saga (the thirteenth-century AM 310 4to (A)), in the other (Stock. perg. 4to nr 18 (S), from *c*.1300) his name is given as *Alvini*. Since the action takes place in England, the text's editor, Ólafur Halldórsson, takes *Alvini* to be the Norse rendering of the Old English Ælfwine and suggests that the scribe of manuscript A misread a wynn as a 'p' (Oddr, 177 n. 2). In Norway wynn was used a great deal down to 1300 but it was lost later in Iceland (see Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, 2005, 256). A, which has Alpin, occasionally uses wynn, while S, which avoids wynn, has Alvini with a normal 'v': the exemplar perhaps normally used 'v' but only used wynn in the unfamiliar name Alvin(i), so S normalised it to its own usage of 'v', whereas A mistook it for 'p', possibly because it was a shape of wynn they were not accustomed to. Finnur Jónsson provided detailed arguments that both S and A were copied from the same Icelandic archetype, but with S being significantly condensed in the process (1932, viii–xix).[13] However, since the original translation is lost it is difficult to ascertain the extent of the abbreviation in S, as A has also been supplemented and expanded (Ólafur Halldórsson 2006, clxvi). While A has been viewed as closer to the original text, Ólafur Halldórsson argues that S may be more accurate because its scribe copied other texts with few amendations (2006, cxliv–cli, clii–clxx). The *Alpin* spelling in the A

[11] This applies to the A version of the text quoted above in AM 310 4to (A); the Stock. perg. 18 (S) version has *systir Óláfs Skotakonungs kvárans* (Oddr, 179 (ch. 15)). The S version is in general briefer than A. Ólafur Halldórsson summarises the existing scholarship on these two main manuscripts (2006, cxliii–cli), for instance that A has Norwegian features but that we cannot be certain if it was copied in Iceland or Norway, by an Icelander or Norwegian, and whether the exemplar manuscript was Icelandic or Norwegian (cxlviii).

[12] For the importance and later reputation of Cináed mac Alpín see Broun 2015, 107–09, 120, 130.

[13] A broadly similar assessment was made by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1936, 57–68).

version of Oddr is not followed by other sources. For example, in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla*, ch. 32: AM 39 and Fríssbók manuscripts have *Alvini*, Kringla has *Álfvini*, Jöfraskinna has *Alfini* (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Heimskringla)*, I 268, n. 1). The last two of these provide extra support for the case for its being a rendering of Old English Ælfwine. Finnur Jónsson argues that Snorri had access to a manuscript of Oddr's saga that was older than the A and S versions (1932, xxii), presumably meaning older than their exemplar. Another possibility for Gyða's identity is that she was in fact the sister of the Swedish king Óláfr Skötkonungr (r. *c*. 995–1022) and that Oddr misunderstood his epithet ('Tributary-King'), rendering Gyða instead as *systir Óláfs Skotakonungs* and thus relocated events to the Insular world.

Óláfr's winning of Gyða in *Heimskringla* is set in England, where it is claimed that she had been previously married to an English earl (Oddr having described her as a distinguished widow). *Heimskringla* correctly identifies Óláfr kváran *er konungr var á Írlandi í Dyflinni* 'who was king in Ireland in Dublin' (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Heimskringla*, 267 (ch. 32)) and it also seems to try to reconcile the geographical multiplicities by claiming that after their marriage Óláfr *dvalðisk á Englandi, en stundum á Írlandi* 'lived in England but sometimes in Ireland' (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Heimskringla*, 269 (ch. 32)). Gyða's father Amlaíb was active in England, specifically York, as previously mentioned, so he could have had a child there; he ceased to be king of York in 952 (Hall 1976, 18) so if she were conceived during this time Gyða would have been aged a at least forty at the time of her marriage, which presumably occurred in the 990s. Instead she might have been born later in Dublin. It is conceivable that the king of Dublin might then have sent his daughter from Dublin to England for a marriage alliance, although an Irish match might have been more obviously beneficial on a political level.

The historicity of this union has been little commented on by scholars. The claims of Oddr's biography of Óláfr, dating to the end of the twelfth century and so written at some remove from his lifetime, should be treated cautiously. Colmán Etchingham notes that the account was 'evidently

given credence' by Donnchadh Ó Corráin since he included Óláfr's marriage to Gyða in a genealogical table of 'later Viking rulers of Dublin', but that at the same time he stated that Amlaíb Cuarán 'has no direct connection with Norway' (Etchingham 2001, 186; Ó Corráin 1999, 339, 317). It is noteworthy that all this was happening before Óláfr was actually king of Norway. In Oddr the marriage episode is followed by an account of the Jómsvíkingar at the Battle of Hjǫrungavágr, which occurred *c.*986 (A, ch. 18) with Óláfr not gaining the Norwegian throne until a while later (A, ch. 23); similarly in *Heimskringla* the winning of Gyða is followed by the death of Haraldr Gormsson, king of Denmark. This would put the marriage episode in the early 980s. Even if this claimed union had any veracity, therefore, it did not amount to a formal alliance or important political connection between Dublin and Norway.

Benjamin Hudson (2005, 84) claims that Óláfr took up residence in Dublin with Gyða during the early part of Sitric silkiskegg's reign. He argues that this explains the numismatic evidence from Dublin, since Dublin coinage copied Anglo-Saxon coins from the mint at Watchet, in the region of which Óláfr was active in the 990s. Hudson does not specify which piece of evidence points to the latter. Watchet was attacked in 988 (*ASC* 988 CDE), before we have clear evidence of Óláfr's presence in the Insular world. The 994 entry about the treaty refers to Óláfr and Sveinn having raided quite extensively, in Essex, Kent, Sussex and Hampshire, but Watchet is located on the Somerset coast. Watchet was also attacked a few years after the minting of the Dublin coinage began (*ASC* 998 CDE), an event usually dated *c.*995 but which Hudson (84) dates to 994, in the year of the treaty with Æthelred. Rather, Watchet's location on the opposite side of the Irish Sea simply made it a natural place for Dublin to trade with; the Hiberno-Scandinavian town had increasing economic ties to Bristol, not so far away from Watchet. This background of long-term economic links is more relevant for the imitative coinage than the fleeting attacks of the Viking army. While dies from Watchet were indeed used in Dublin, this was certainly not unique: dies from London, York, Worcester and Chester have all been identified (Blackburn 2008, 124). The English influence on the Dublin coinage,

moreover, continued long after Óláfr's death. There was near simultaneous minting across Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, Sweden) and in Dublin, which is usually attributed to the sudden availability of coined silver from Anglo-Saxon geld payments and to developing ideas of Christian kingship (Williams 2011, 351; Williams 2007).[14] These royal coinages all imitated Anglo-Saxon coins but named their own kings. Thus, the establishment of a mint at Dublin had a wider context than the supposed appearance of a specific political actor, and can therefore not be used as evidence to corroborate the presence of Óláfr Tryggvason in the town.

Hudson (85) connects the new Dublin mint to the merchants associated with Óláfr who are mentioned in the treaty with Æthelred, arguing that Óláfr had no other territories under his control. If this was the case, one would have thought that the coinage would have been minted in Óláfr's name rather than in Sitric's. Hudson's assertion that the 'treaty specifically refers to merchants associated with Olaf' (85) does not bear up under closer examination of the text. For one thing, other Viking leaders were involved in the treaty. Instead of merchants being ascribed to a territorial origin, there could simply have been merchants with the fleet. Some trade must have been needed to support these forces, unless they were able to loot everything they needed. Presumably such trade was conducted by Óláfr's men, not by merchant specialists. Given the blurred boundary between trading and raiding, perhaps Viking forces were sometimes able to claim that they were merely traders. The reference in the treaty to merchants which Hudson seizes upon is also quite vague: *ælc ceapscip frið hæbbe, ðe binnan muðan cuman, ðeh hit unfriðscyp sy, gyf hit undrifen bið* 'Each merchant ship which enters a river-mouth is to have peace, even if it is a ship without peace [i.e. not part of the truce], as long as it has not been driven ashore' (Liebermann 1903, 222, clause 2). The last clause could refer to being shipwrecked by the weather (as the Latin version of the treaty in *Quadripartitus* suggests, see Liebermann 1903, 222) or to being deliberately run aground by pursuers; Ryan Lavelle (2015, 132) prefers the latter, suggesting that this clause deals with the capture of crews. Thus, this clause does

[14] For the contemporary Anglo-Scandinavian imitative coinage of York see Woods 2015, 369.

not seem to have primarily mercantile concerns as one would expect if Óláfr were indeed representing the interests of such an economic powerhouse as Dublin, owing to his supposed marital ties with the ruling house.

Hudson also contends that Óláfr's presence in Dublin 'explains the silence of the Irish records' about Amlaíb's sons and the rulership of Dublin (2005, 85). However, while the Irish annals can be rather laconic, one suspects that the longterm residence of an important Scandinavian military commander would in fact have been commented on, especially if, as Hudson claims, this 'powerful Viking leader was an effective deterrent to Irish raids' (2005, 85). His argument from silence rests on several assumptions. Hudson also points to the chronological coincidence that Óláfr's return to Norway was at around the time of his supposed brother-in-law Sitric's expulsion from Dublin in 995 by Ímar, king of Waterford (Stokes 1933, 349), who perhaps installed his own son Ragnall as king of Dublin. We cannot be sure of the precise details of the chronology of events in Dublin relative to Óláfr's activities in the Insular world and return to Norway. Moreover, what we can reconstruct of Dublin's rulership in this period suggests Irish influence, rather than a more unlikely Norwegian presence, in this period. Ragnall appears to have angered Máel Sechnaill II mac Domnaill, king of the Uí Néill and the most powerful king in Ireland, leading to Sitric's restoration; indeed, Sitric's original gaining of the throne is also likely to have been due to the backing of Máel Sechnaill, whom Howard Clarke describes as 'the king-maker' (2015, 257). Hudson's speculative reconstruction is therefore not particularly in keeping with this picture of Dublin's political situation, and does not strengthen the case for Óláfr having a relationship with Gyða in Dublin.

Oddr relates that *Þau Óláfr ok Gyða áttu son er Tryggvi hét hét* 'Óláfr and Gyða had a son, who was called Tryggvi' (Oddr, 181 (S; ch. 15)).[15] Tryggvi Óláfsson is known from other sources owing to his attempt to take the Norwegian throne. Tryggvi led a fleet from the west to Norway *c*.

[15] Manuscript A also notes that Tryggvi fought Sveinn Álfifuson.

1033, where he challenged Knútr and Ælfgifu of Northampton's son Sveinn, who had been set up as king by his father after the death of Óláfr Haraldsson (*Óláfs saga helga (Heimskringla)*, 411–14 (ch. 248)). The extant sources unfortunately give us little information on Tryggvi. He was defeated in battle by Sveinn and his challenge was therefore ultimately unsuccessful. The main source is *Heimskringla*, which relates that *Hann kallaðisk sonr Óláfs Tryggvasonar ok Gyða ensku*) 'He called himself the son of Óláfr Tryggvason and the English Gyða' (*Óláfs saga helga (Heimskringla)*, 411 (ch. 248)). Incidentally, the description of Gyða as 'English' is interesting given the earlier discussion of the marriage's setting but her Irish origins. There is also one surviving stanza of *Tryggvaflokkr*, which is attributed to Sigvatr Þórðarson in one manuscript (see Jesch 2012). In addition, *Morkinskinna* takes Tryggvi's existence (and his lineage) for granted, referring to him in a *þáttr* used to demonstrate the justice of Haraldr harðráði 'Harsh-Ruler' (Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson 2011, 288–89 (ch. 49)).[16] The story of Gyða might have been significant to provide the background for these episodes. Perhaps it was a retrospective way to justify the claims of Tryggvi, who appeared in Norway from the Insular world, to be the son of Óláfr.

In the saga accounts, Óláfr's relations with women contribute to his portrayal as 'the great romantic hero' (Lönnroth 1975, 39). Before Gyða he was married to another foreign princess, Geira of Wendland, whose death (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*(*Heimskringla*), ch. 29)) leads Óláfr to undertake further expeditions abroad, including into the Insular world. It has been suggested that the story of Óláfr and Geira was modelled on that of Dido and Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid* (Andersson 2003, 15; Grønlie 2017, 48). This increases the case for other episodes in Oddr's sagas reflecting literary influence rather than a basis in fact. While Gyða's death is not explicitly mentioned, she too conveniently disappears from the saga narrative, making room for other spousal and narrative possibilities: in Oddr's saga (A) Óláfr wins her hand in chapter 17, but is free by chapter 33 when he

[16] Andersson and Gade (2000, 255, 443) discuss this *þáttr* in the context of the retinue stories it accompanies at this point in *Morkinskinna*.

is refused by Sigríðr in stórráða and in chapter 46 he marries Þyri, sister of Sveinn *tjúguskegg*. An Irish love affair is not unique to Óláfr Tryggvason among kings the sagas: some of the Norse prose sources, namely *Fagrskinna* and *Morkinskinna*, portray the later Norwegian king Magnús berfœttr 'Barelegs' falling in love with an Irish woman, even reciting a verse about it just before his death. The historicity of Magnús's presence in Ireland is much more secure than Óláfr's, as he was killed there in 1103. Perhaps Magnús berfœttr's later exploits in Ireland, both military and romantic, might have influenced the attribution of Gyða to Ireland. The origin of Óláfr's bride in royalty from Ireland would have been seen as more prestigious than her being a non-royal English noblewoman in the style of Ælfgifu of Northampton, with whom Knútr was united.

In the chapter before Óláfr's winning of Gyða, Oddr had Óláfr gain the extraordinary dog Vígi in Ireland, which adds to the literary and fantastical feel of Óláfr's wanderings in the Insular world. A farmer asks for the return of his cows from a larger herd which the raiding Óláfr has rounded up; the farmer's cows, which are marked, are separated from the herd by the farmer's dog, which Óláfr purchases from him. Hudson (2005, 85) uses this episode to back up his argument that Óláfr raided around his base of Dublin, even claiming that it has a 'factual basis' because Irish cows really were marked or branded and they used dogs. Of course, neither of these pastoral practices is unique to Ireland. On the other hand, Jones (1968, 20) suggested that the dog is reminiscent of a motif from a folk tale. Phelpstead (2012, 33–34) includes later chapters involving Vígi, which detail his 'unusual abilities' and his learning of Óláfr's death by understanding human speech, among his list of implausible or fantastic episodes in Oddr's saga, noting that these are 'recounted matter-of-factly' (34). So too are the other episodes under discussion in this article.

In addition to reinforcing Óláfr's image as a romantic hero, the marriage episode has other literary effects. Eleanor Heans-Głogowska discusses the narrative role of Gyða in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* within the text's broader themes, but her comments are also applicable to the episode as contained in other texts. She notes (2014, 31) that Gyða's choice of Óláfr as her husband

just by looking at him suggests that he was born to kingship. This echoes the earlier correct identification of the king, based on his inherent qualities and physical stature, by the hermit in the Scilly Isles. Additionally, Óláfr's restoration of Gyða's lands prefigures his own reclamation of his inheritance in Norway (2014, 37). Thus, this episode demonstrates Óláfr's suitability to be the king of Norway in several different ways.

Converting Orkney

Óláfr Tryggvason is said to have dramatically demonstrated his control over the earldom of Orkney as he was on his way to take the throne of Norway. Theodoricus monachus, in roughly 1180, is the first to claim that Ólafr had coerced Jarl Sigurðr Hlǫðvisson of Orkney into accepting the Christian faith and being baptised (*c*.995), partly by seizing his son (Theodoricus, 16–17). This claim is repeated in Oddr's saga, *Heimskringla* (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (Heimskringal)*, 292–93 (ch. 47)) and *Orkneyinga saga* (*Orkneyinga saga*, 26 (ch. 12)).

Although *Orkneyinga saga* labels this as the moment at which *urðu ok kristnar allar Orkneyjar* 'all the Orkney islands also became Christian' (*Orkneyinga saga* 26 (ch. 12)), it has been suggested that subsets of the Orcadian population would have been Christian before this event, possibly owing to Pictish influence (Marwick 1951, 111–12). Sigurðr's mother was said to be Irish and would therefore have been from a Christian background. Sigurðr also married the daughter of a Scottish king; this union might have necessitated at least nominal acceptance of Christianity. It seems fairly likely that these Christian women would have brought their own priests with them to the jarl's residence (Crawford 2013, 127). Moreover, the use of grave goods in furnished burials, a traditionally pagan practice, had declined in Scotland in general and in the earldom of Orkney specifically around 950 (see Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998, 113–54; Owen and Dalland, 1999; Norstein 2014, esp. 18). There is an additional reason to be wary of the way the conversion of Orkney is presented in the sagas. Rosalind Bonté (2015, 107–08) argues that the Icelandic redactor of *Orkneyinga saga* contrasts

the free and willing conversion of Iceland, which was made in accordance with its legal system and became an integral aspect of its cultural memory, with the forced conversion of Orkney. For Sigurðr, 'baptism seemed a better choice than death — but then, so do most things' things' (Bonté 2015, 107). Discussing a different episode associated with Óláfr Tryggvason, Siân Grønlie (2017, 57) notes the parallel in offering heathens the choice of death or conversion with legends about Charlemagne and Saracens in both the continental *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* and Norse translation *Karlamagnús saga*.[17] Thus, contemporary Icelandic political concerns, alongside literary resonances, may well have coloured this account of Óláfr converting Orkney.

In the saga account the king takes the earl's son, named Hvelpr or Hundi, as a hostage to Norway to ensure his loyalty. Sigurðr's son is also baptised under the name Hlǫdvir. This was also the name of the boy's grandfather; at first glance it would seem odd for someone to be given the baptismal name of a pagan ancestor, but Hlǫðvir is the Old Norse form of Hlodovicus, Latin for Louis, and so is entirely appropriate for a Christian. Regardless of religion, rulers did often name their sons after their own fathers (as an original given name, rather than a baptismal name) and indeed this would seem more appropriate than for a jarl's son to be named Hvelpr or Hundi. *Orkneyinga saga* relates that this son son *lifði . . . skamma stund* 'lived for a short time' *(Orkneyinga saga*, 27 (ch. 12)), and relates that after his death Sigurðr refused to pay homage to King Óláfr. Such a loss of leverage could well have been fatal to any direct overlordship that Óláfr had managed to exert. It is possible that Sigurðr relapsed to paganism at the same time (Crawford 2013, 127). Indeed, Sigurðr's Christian standing is doubtful (Crawford 2005, 90). The convenient death of the jarl's son may well be an attempt to provide an explanation for the lack of evidence for Sigurðr's acceptance of Norwegian overlordship and of Christianity. In Theodoricus and Oddr's earlier versions of the Orcadian

[17] In Oddr's saga, which Grønlie is discussing, Óláfr offers a man named Hróaldr the choice of death or conversion in a scene set in Norway (ch. 33/39, 236) but in Oddr's Orkney episode Jarl Sigurðr's own life is not threatened, but that of his son instead, to encourage conversion.

conversion, the life of Sigurðr's son is threatened, rather than him simply being taken to Norway as a guarantee after Sigurðr agrees to conversion: in the latter he threatens to *af hǫggva hǫfuð sveinsins fyrir augum honum ef hann neitaði trúnni* 'strike off the boy's head before his eyes, if he refused the religion' (Oddr, 211–12 (ch 21)). This has perhaps been toned down in *Heimskringla* and *Orkneyinga saga* so that Óláfr threatens the life of the jarl himself rather than a child.[18] Forced conversion is still deemed appropriate, though, and, in *Heimskringla*'s case, is also in keeping with Óláfr's activities during his rule of Norway.

The conversion of Orkney is one of many conversions attributed to the missionary king Óláfr. For example *Historia Norwegiae* declares *ut infra quinquennium omnes tributarios, id est Hatlendenses, Orchadenses, Fereyingenses ac Tilenses, fide preclaros, spe gaudentes, caritate feruentes redderet Christo* 'that within five years he made all the tributary lands, that is, the Shetland islands, the Orkney islands, the Faeroes and Iceland, remarkable in their faithfulness, rejoicing in their hope and glowing in their love for Christ' (*HN*, 94 (ch. 17)). *Historia Norwegiae* does not provide details of these listed conversions. Perhaps the need was felt to provide a long and impressive list of converted territories to bolster Óláfr's reputation, but fuller stories were later needed to account for the actual circumstances of these conversions.

The saga account of Orkney's forced conversion suggests that the king of Norway was able to exert power over the jarl personally, and it might be seen to demonstrate that he had power over the region more generally. As already discussed in the case of Æthelred and Óláfr, the person accepting baptism usually was in an inferior position to their sponsor, which would reinforce the jarl of Orkney's subordinate status. According to Crawford, 'we do not have to believe that it all took

[18] Sigurðr's son being removed to Norway is reminiscent of Magnús berfœttr's seizing of the jarls Páll and Erlendr at the end of the eleventh century and sending them to Norway where they both died (*Orkneyinga saga*, 101 (ch. 42)). Theodoricus's account of the conversion episode differs from the others in naming Sigurðr's son as *Thorfin* or Þorfinnr, who lived to succeed his father as jarl, rather than Hvelpr or Hundi (Theodoricus, 17).

place exactly as described. But there is no reason to doubt that such an incident did take place, and that it was part of the process of the Norwegian king's assertion of his authority over the earl' (2013, 126). It is worth questioning, though, whether Óláfr would have been in a position to assert such authority in reality. *Historia Norwegiae* implies that Óláfr's conversion of the North Atlantic islands occurred during his reign, by introducing the information after he has gained the kingship of Norway and by referring to the length of his reign (*HN*, 94 (ch. 17)). Oddr states that a year into Óláfr's reign he sailed to England and after returning to Norway, he then set off for Orkney where he brought about the earldom's conversion (Oddr, 210–11 (chs 21–26)). Theodoricus, though, places it as a stepping stone on Óláfr's main journey from the Insular world to Norway to claim the throne. This order of events is followed by *Heimskringla* and by *Orkneyinga saga*. However, if Óláfr stopped in Orkney on his way to Norway from the Insular world, which is conceivable on a purely logistical basis, he was not yet king of Norway. Additionally, Óláfr was not succeeding a close relative to this position, although his father is said to have been a regional petty king, so his assumption of the title of king of Norway would by no means have been taken for granted at this point.[19] Once he became king of Norway, it is difficult to believe that Óláfr would have had time to make an expedition to Orkney to exert his overlordship of the jarls, given the brevity of his reign and his need as an outsider who had been much abroad to prioritise the consolidation of his rule of Norway.

It seems impossible to decide the truth behind the supposed forced conversion of Orkney or when it took place. It is certainly an oversimplification of the more complex religious situation in the Northern Isles; generally, the conversion of a polity was the result of longer-term processes rather than a single event. In practical terms a journey from the Insular world to Norway going via the

[19] It is also worth noting that at this time 'Norway' was mostly the west coast of the modern country, so Óláfr, whose father was said to be a king of Viken (the southeastern area usually dominated by the Danes), was thus truly an outsider with no political basis in that realm. Óláfr's claimed descent from Haraldr hárfagri 'Fairhair', the supposed founder of a united Norway, is not accepted by modern historians (as is also the case for the same claim made about Óláfr Haraldsson's lineage), but seen as a later fabrication (Krag 1989; 2008, 648; Bagge 2001, 68–69).

Northern Isles makes sense and may have been the case in reality. Snorri might have opted for this sequence of events in *Heimskringla* (when there was an alternative tradition available in *Historia Norwegiae* and, particularly, Oddr's saga) because it seemed a simpler, more rational schema than the to-ing and fro-ing in Oddr's version. More importantly, this choice also suited the narrative arc of Óláfr's career so that the Orkney episode does not interfere with the presentation of his time as king but instead slots in neatly among his other exploits abroad. The literary effect of the episode is thus heightened: it provides Óláfr with the chance to assert control over part of the Norse world, perhaps as a preparatory trial for the bigger challenge, and greater prize, of taking Norway and of converting it.

Conclusions

This article raises awareness of the challenges faced when trying to extract a historical personage from a legendary figure. I would argue that because we have corroboration from non-Norse sources for Óláfr's presence in the Insular world, we have been too ready to take the specifics of his activity there, as depicted in the Norse sources, for granted. Scholars have identified literary models for several other episodes in Oddr's saga in particular, which have been discussed in this article: Virgil's *Aeneid*, the romances of Charlemagne and Gregory's Dialogues. Thus, when examining other episodes in the Scandinavian and Icelandic sources, it is important to consider that literary elaboration may have outweighed a genuine basis in historical fact in the extant versions of these episodes, even when a specific model cannot be identified. Admittedly, Óláfr Tryggvason was baptised or confirmed in England, someone claiming to be his son did come out of the Insular Viking zone, and he could well have visited Orkney on his way to Norway or at a later point. But the way in which these episodes are conveyed presents a larger-than-life figure, in both heroic and Christian terms.

From a literary perspective, these three episodes form important parts of the prequel to Óláfr's main career, which began in earnest when he achieved kingship. Certainly, a military leader could

gain wealth and followers abroad which enabled him to take the throne; this feat would later be repeated by two other Norwegian kings, Óláfr Haraldsson and Haraldr harðráði. But alongside the realities of Óláfr's time abroad we must also recognise the narrative needs faced by his biographers: since he was not succeeding his father as king of Norway, it was necessary to furnish him with a heroic back-story outside Norway. Discussing Oddr's saga, Phelpstead observes that 'many (though admittedly not all) of the potentially "fantastic" elements [are] located outside Scandinavia' (2012, 41). While the Insular world may not seem as exotic as the eastern travels of some saga heroes, it still provided more scope for elaboration and fabrication than a mainland Scandinavian setting.

The circumstances of Óláfr's baptism in the synoptics and sagas avoid his being subordinate to a foreign ruler, and instead he is the one to subordinate another ruler into accepting baptism. *Ágrip* in particular uses the episode of Óláfr's baptism to demonstrate the respect he ought to receive from his followers and—by directly linking his Christianity to his kingship—his worthiness for the throne. Theodoricus, Oddr and *Heimskringla* clearly portray Óláfr demonstrating his might and his Christian credentials through his actions in the earldom of Orkney. Oddr and *Heimskringla* also allow Óláfr to play the role of the romantic hero, winning the hand of a foreign princess in single combat.

Óláfr's adventures in the Insular world may be being used by these writers to suggest that he was ideally suited to become the first truly Christian king of Norway. The three episodes discussed here prefigure different aspects of Óláfr's 'suitability' to be king of Norway: his Christian baptism or confirmation; his ability to father a son who would (albeit unsuccessfully) attempt to succeed him and fight for Norway's independence from Anglo-Danish rule; his practice of compulsory conversion, of which the writers doubtless approved, and supposed extension of control over other parts of the Norse world. These episodes all demonstrate his readiness to be king, and the sources are therefore influenced in their presentation of them by the retrospective knowledge that he would in fact become king.

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