

Introduction: Royal Power Reconsidered

References to the deeds and lives of the past monarchs and their commemorations are ubiquitous in the earliest extant Scandinavian literary sources. Their authors found relating to the narratives of royal power and the identification with the bygone kings and queens essential for the legendary and historical stories of national and personal origins, and for the ways of formulating and expressing the political and cultural significance of their own work. In the wealth of the material offered by Old Norse and Icelandic literature, we may find numerous examples of the texts either abounding in such connotations or drawing directly upon royal histories. Although the originals of the lists of kings (*konungatal*) did not survive beyond the early medieval era, they provided later medieval authors with fundamental inspiration especially for the kings' sagas (*konungasögur*). Similarly, the vividness with which the past rulers were remembered is attested by the poems like *Ynglingatal* and *Haleygjatal* originating in the tenth century. Both of them legitimize the power and aspirations of subsequent monarchs by referring to the heritage and legacy left by the previous generations of kings. Their charisma and achievements contributed to their mythical and historical status as rulers, which, in turn, determined the development of what may be called the ideology of royal power. Understood as a set of features considered decisive for prosperous and memorable kingship, such ideology was advocated and praised by the skaldic poets and saga authors who emphasised the importance of royal bravery and generosity, the mercilessness that kings should display towards their enemies and the graciousness they should show to their followers. Likewise, the unfailing luck in war and the ability to surpass others in various skills were deemed important not only to impress one's royal retinue and subjects, but, predominantly, also to legitimize royal claims.

As attested in historical writings as well as by archaeological finds, recipients of royal power, in accordance with the long tradition dating back at least to the Roman era, attempted at centralizing their control which required both undertaking adequate actions and employing adequate means of propaganda. In these respects, the ambitious Scandinavian elites were eager to emulate their continental counterparts. Such modes of thinking could be seen as early as in the Merovingian era. Later, in the Viking Age, they underwent a gradual

conceptualisation into a set of virtues and skills that an ideal monarch was expected to possess and exhibit. The royal ideology manifested itself not only in the already mentioned displays of bravery and generosity, but also in other methods important to legitimize royal undertakings, such as in the contacts with the sphere of the divine, in law-giving, and in its execution, to list but a few.

The Christianisation of Scandinavia understandably affected the ideological expression of the royal power. A model Christian monarch was henceforth expected to imbue his deeds and decisions with the aura of religious belief and practice. The royal generosity, previously reserved for the king's retinue and followers, began to embrace the Church and its institutions, while the royal charisma and wisdom were supposed to demonstrate piety and operate in full compliance with what was assumed to be God's will. In medieval Scandinavia the figuration of an exemplary monarch found its fullest expression in the characters of the two Norwegian missionary kings, Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, who, with the particular emphasis on the saintly status of the latter, evolved into royal ideals to be followed.

The history of medieval Scandinavia provides numerous instances of the manifestation of the royal ideology which invite and enable modern historiographical studies on the various phenomena related to its rise and development. The current state of research, although too vast to be satisfactorily recapitulated here, includes enquiries into the relationship between power and religion (both pagan and Christian), analyses of the relation between the mythicization of royal power and identity-formation, discussions of royal legitimacy, and of the commemorations of royal deeds.

With the present volume we intend to contribute to the ongoing examinations of this crucially important subject. The papers it consists of resulted from a seminar entitled "Aspects of Royal Power in the Medieval North" which was held at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland, in February 2016. The volume has drawn together an international group of scholars representing various disciplines (history, literary studies, legal, and religious studies), who approach the problem of royal power from the specific angles pertaining to their subject areas, and who investigate a number of individual issues and cases related to it.

Anne Irene Riisøy (University College of South-Eastern Norway), in her article entitled "Conversion, *Things*, and Viking Kings," discusses the role of regional things in the missionary enterprises of three Norwegian kings, Hákon góði, Óláfr Tryggvason, and Óláfr Haraldsson, basing her analysis on both the kings' sagas, and on older analogues, predominantly on the account of Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*. Jakub Morawiec (University of Silesia in Katowice), in the article titled "Sveinn Haraldsson – The Captured King of Denmark," discusses the motif of Sveinn's capture and of the consequent ransom paid by his subjects, which is present in a series of Scandinavian and continental sources. Even if it is impossible to determine whether the motif in question holds any portion of the

truth and reliability, Morawiec claims that it may reflect the energetic propagandist activity directed towards the king of Denmark and undertaken at the time of his rebellion against his father. Łukasz Neubauer (University of Technology in Koszalin), in his article titled “Between History and Propaganda: Examining the Royal and Military Attributes of Knútr inn ríki in *Liðsmannaflakkr*,” analyses how the anonymous author of the poem compares both the young king of England and Denmark and Jarl Þorkell the Tall as military leaders. Although the skald’s intention was to underline Knútr’s abilities, especially when compared to a much more experienced jarl, his vision of the royal prowess and bravery may be found reliable. Bjørn Bandlien (University College of South-Eastern Norway) discusses the ideological programme associated with a series of coins of Óláfr Haraldsson, minted ca. 1024 by an English moneyer, featuring the figure of a bird on their reverses. There are only three preserved examples of the series and it seems that their economic value was limited as their emission was mainly dictated by ideological means, related closely to the prestige of the monarch and to his tendency to follow foreign, chiefly Anglo-Saxon, patterns of royal ideology. Erin Michelle Goeres (University College London), in “The Dangers of Generosity. Money, Power and Politics in *Vestrfararvísur* and *Kálfsflakkr*,” basing on two eleventh-century poems dedicated to Óláfr Haraldsson and Kálfr Árnason respectively, discusses the issue of royal generosity which may be interpreted as either a reward for the king’s followers or a means of buying off and neutralizing his enemies. Rafał Boryśławski (University of Silesia in Katowice), in “*Hlaefdige* and *Hlaford*. Gendered Power and Images of Continuity in *Encomium Emmae Reginae*,” discusses the depiction of Emma as queen in the contexts of the continuity of power and of the division of gender-oriented roles contributing towards the mystical representation of the royal rule. Marion Poilvez (University of Iceland), in the article titled “A Wolf among Wolves. Kings, Outlaws, and Discourse in the Icelandic Sagas” analyses the antagonistic, one could say, relation between a monarch and an outlaw. The former symbolizes justice and law, the latter breaks the law and remains excluded from the society. Icelandic sagas, however, provide instances of much closer relations of both sides that one could imagine. In his article entitled “Ideals of Christian Kingship. The Implications of *Elucidarius*, *Konungs skuggsiá*, and *Eiríks saga víðförla*,” Arngrímur Vídalín (University of Iceland) analyses the subject matter of three narratives: *Elucidarius*, the Norwegian version of the *Speculum regale* and *Eiríks saga víðförla*. All of them focus on various aspects of Christian kingship, strengthened by the postulate of royal education in order to gain knowledge of the world as God’s creation. Finally, Leszek P. Ślupecki (University of Rzeszów), whose article titled “A Crown on a King’s Head: Royal Titles and Royal Sovereignty in the Tenth- and Eleventh-Century Poland and Scandinavia” closes the volume, discusses the differences in the way Scandinavian and Central European (Polish, Bohemian, and Hungarian)

rulers were depicted in historical sources. Nordic rulers are consequently styled as kings despite the lack of the rite of blessing and coronation. This could be explained as resulting from the adherence to their local, rooted in pagan times, royal tradition, which developed independently from the Carolingian system of hierarchy, that influenced the representation of the rulership in Central Europe.

The seminar which lay behind the creation of the present volume was made possible due to a fruitful and ongoing cooperation between the University of Silesia in Katowice and several partner institutions in Scandinavia, mainly the University of Iceland, the University of Oslo, and the University College of South-Eastern Norway. The cooperation, including the exchange of both the academic staff and the students, was financed by the EEA grants and provided numerous, both professional and personal, benefits and opportunities for all the parties involved. The volume we hereby present is, on the one hand, one of the results of this cooperation, on the other, it is a significant commitment and assurance to maintain and expand the professional relationships in the future, many of which, we are happy to say, have already also transformed into lasting friendships.

Several people contributed to making the contacts between the scholars in this collection possible, and, we dare say, to the success of the collaboration which ensued from them. Among these people, we would like to distinguish and honour Professor Ásdís Egilsdóttir from the University of Iceland, to whom we wish to dedicate this volume in recognition of her friendship and as a token of our gratitude. Her invaluable advice and expertise, her positive approach, support and commitment have been and still are crucial for the establishment and for further development of the cooperation that brought the authors of this volume together.

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