



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

**Hugvísindasvið**

# **Biblical Allusions in *Sverris saga***

**Ritgerð til MA-prófs í Medieval Icelandic Studies**

**David Bond West**

**Október 2012**

**Háskóli Íslands**  
**Hugvísindasvið**  
**Medieval Icelandic Studies**

# **Biblical Allusions in *Sverris saga***

**Ritgerð til MA-prófs í Medieval Icelandic Studies**

**David Bond West**  
**Kt.: 150988-4629**

**Leiðbeinandi: Torfi Tulinius**  
**Október 2012**

## CONTENTS

Abstract .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
Introduction .....	1
1. Providential History .....	3
Christology .....	4
David .....	6
Ecclesiastical History .....	7
Rome .....	8
Other Nations, Other Types .....	10
The “Saga Style” and European Historiography .....	10
2. David and <i>Sverris saga</i> .....	12
Davidic Imagery .....	13
Grýla .....	17
3. Literature Review .....	20
Frederik Charpentier Ljungquist .....	20
Sverre Bagge .....	21
Aaron Gurevich .....	24
Ármann Jakobsson .....	27
4. Church and Kingdom .....	32
Óláfr Helgi .....	34
Typological versus Ecclesiastical Authority .....	36
Sverrir’s Dreams .....	40

5. Another Interpretation.....	47
Conclusion .....	61
Bibliography .....	62

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of *Sverris saga* and the biblical allusions it contains. It is demonstrated that Christian exegetical practices, especially typology, are among the most important keys to understanding the personality and politics of the saga's titular character, Sverrir Sigurðarson, king of Norway, who seeks to compare himself to David, king of Israel. After an outline of the exegetical approaches to be implemented, followed by a review of past scholarship on the saga, these approaches are used to examine the saga's portrayal of Sverrir as a divinely appointed ruler. As a conclusion it is argued that the same principles can be used just as effectively to create a negative depiction of Sverrir, showing that typology is an important tool for exploring the depth and complexity of the controversial king.

Í ritgerðinni er farið í saumana á Biblíutilvísunum í *Sverris sögu*. Sýnt er fram á að kristinn túlkunarhefð, einkum svokölluð týpólógía, gegni lykilhlutverki í að skilja persónuleika og stjórn málahegðun söguhetjunnar, Sverris Sigurðarsonar, Noregskonungs, en hann leitast við að bera sig saman við Davíð Ísraelskonung. Fyrst er túlkunarhefðinni lýst, einkum þeim þáttum hennar sem sjá má merki um í *Sverris sögu*, en eftir það er farið yfir rannsóknarsögu hennar. Á þeim grundvelli er stuðst við Biblíutúlkun til að skoða hvernig Sverri er lýst sem konungi af Guðs náð. Í lokin er því haldið fram að sömu aðferðum mætti beita á alveg jafn skilvirkan hátt til að skapa neikvæða mynd af Sverrir. Þar með er sýnt að týpólógískar túlkunaraðferðir eru mikilvægt tæki til að kanna hina djúpu og margslungnu mynd sem dregin er upp af þessum umdeilda konungi.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have happened without a lot of help. I want to thank the Fulbright Commission, Iceland for making it financially tenable for me to study here, and to Belinda Theriault and Sandra Berg Cepero for helping me to get settled in Reykjavík. Many thanks also to Stofnun Árna Magnússonar for allowing me access to the materials necessary to complete this thesis. I owe an especially great debt of gratitude to Torfi Tulinius and Haraldur Bernharðsson, the directors of the Medieval Icelandic Studies program, whose program has provided an outstanding introduction to Medieval scholarship. I want to thank Torfi further for also advising this thesis and, therefore, making it possible.

## INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will examine the influences of biblical narrative on the composition of *Sverris saga*, with special emphasis on the story of King David, as found in the biblical books of Samuel. My analysis of the saga and biblical texts, as well as their relationship to one another, will be based on the Augustinian exegetical practices common in medieval historiography, particularly the use of biblical typology.

The first to compare Sverrir to David was Sverrir himself; much of the saga's Davidic material appears in his reports of fantastical, premonitory dreams, as well as in his well-crafted speeches. The first Davidic reference comes in one of Sverrir's dreams, in which he is anointed with oil by the prophet Samuel, who also anointed David. Later, in a speech to his troops, Sverrir compares his struggle to take the throne from King Magnús Erlingsson and David's lengthy struggle against King Saul. Lastly, in his most overt attempt to emulate David, he names his castle Síon, after David's fortress at Mount Zion. In all of this, Sverrir is an unusual typological hero, for unlike most he is not only aware of his resemblance to sacral figures, but goes out of his way to advance his typological image among the Norwegian people.

Later scholars have discussed Sverrir's attempts to emulate David in their examinations of Sverrir's personality, as well as the saga's portrayal of Sverrir's unique form of individualism. Others have discussed the importance of Davidic imagery for Sverrir's claims to the throne and its influence on his rhetoric, as well as his kingship ideology. Fewer have discussed the biblical influences on the depiction of certain events in the saga's narrative.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the ways in which all of these elements work together to reveal the complexity and controversy of Sverrir as he is presented in the saga. A careful examination of the typological values of king, Church, and nation, and of their functions in the grand narrative of world history will provide the proper foundation for understanding Sverrir's relationship to his country, as well as his importance in the context of Norwegian history. Within that context, we will see how Sverrir's use of the many-faceted David character, as well as other biblical figures, helps create a complex presentation of his personality and becomes the platform for the rhetoric he uses to argue the case for his legitimacy as king, as well as for his supremacy over the church. Lastly,

we will investigate the consistency between these claims of Sverrir's, based on his own typological interpretation of the events in his life, and the actual saga narrative to gain a fuller appreciation of controversial nature of Norway's usurper king.

## CHAPTER 1

### Providential History

Providential history is an integral part of Christian theology that appears in Christian writings as early as St. Paul's letters and the four gospels. It is often referred to as Augustinian history because while it is used earlier as a method of biblical interpretation, it is given a thorough treatment as an over-arching theory for all history, sacred and profane, by St. Augustine of Hippo. Augustine is aware of the limitations of historical records, their biases and their misunderstandings, and of the fact that most of human history does not find its way into writing at all, and for these reasons no reliable unifying theory of history is empirically discernable.<sup>1</sup> Augustine's solution, or rather, the Church's solution as expressed by Augustine, for understanding history is to evaluate it as a drama in which the central plot, expressed in the Scriptures, is the story of God's relationship with his people. While this is not immediately evident to the more secular readership, Augustine argues that the Holy Spirit allows the Christian to discern these patterns in all of history, even within the writings of the "profane" historians.

The more tangible element of this explanation would be that Christians, well-versed in the stories of the Old and New Testaments, would be able to identify similarities between biblical narrative and non-biblical history and interpret them as thematic ties. Thus extra-biblical history is seen as a continuation of the same ongoing divine narrative that was begun in Genesis and reached its pinnacle in the Gospels, and biblical narrative is therefore the interpretive key to understanding the entire drama of world history.

For Augustine and many other early Christian theologians, this drama had three crucial turning points: the first was the creation of the world and the fall of Adam, the second was the reconciliation of man to God through Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection, and the third was Christ's second coming and the judgment of man. Between these events, history was divided into different ages. The reckoning of the ages varied from one theologian to the next. Some writers like Jerome and Orosius carefully divided time according to the ruling empires they believed were represented by the layers of a great statue seen in one of the prophecies in the book of Daniel, ending with Rome as the

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Markus "History," in *Augustine through the ages; an Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 432-434.

final age.<sup>2</sup> But Augustine took a simpler approach, dividing the world into six ages between significant turning points in Jewish history. The first age stretched from Adam to Noah, the second from Noah to Abraham, the third from Abraham to David, the fourth from David to the Babylonian exile, the fifth from the exile to the birth of Christ, and the sixth from Christ's first coming to his second coming.<sup>3</sup> This six-age division remained common into the middle ages, and is found in Isidore of Seville's *Mysticorum expositiones sacramentorum*, Bede's *Hexameron* and *De temporum ratione*, as well as in the writings of Hrabanus Maurus and Remigius of Auxerre, and the Old Norse *Veraldar Saga*, though it cannot be determined conclusively whether or not all of these authors were familiar with Augustine's writings.<sup>4</sup>

### *Christology*

One of the most important tools for understanding this drama was typological interpretation, and its two key players, the type and the antitype. The root of the word type, *τύπος*, is the Greek word for the impression a seal leaves in wax.<sup>5</sup> A residue of this meaning is evidenced in the modern English verb, "typing", the act by which the keys of the typewriter leaves their impressions upon the page. Thus the premise behind typology is that certain historical motifs or characters, called types, that bear thematic resemblance to especially significant motifs or characters of another, often later, period, called antitypes, can be interpreted as bearing a sort of providential impression of that entity. This lends an extra air of importance to the antitypical figure, for it implies that some sort of providential force has worked through history to foreshadow the antitype, much as the climactic action of a drama might be foreshadowed in earlier acts. If the antitype is deemed significant enough within the historical narrative, then it elevates the type or types

---

<sup>2</sup> Fear, A.T, introduction to *Orosius: Seven Books of History Against the Pagans Translated*, by Orosius (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 18.

<sup>3</sup> Markus, 432

<sup>4</sup> James W. Marchand "The Allegories in the Old Norse *Veraldar Saga*," in *Michigan Germanic Studies* 1, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 111-112.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine Brown Tkacs "Typology," in *Augustine through the ages; an Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 856.

to a higher level of importance as well.

Typology had played a significant role in the development of both Jewish and Roman historiography, but was refined with the development of Christian historiography into the thread that wove the Old and New Testaments together, for early Christian theologians held that all people and events in the Old Testament prefigured events in either the life of Christ, depicted in the New Testament, or in the life of the Christian. This is an understandable conclusion to reach, given that the resurrected Christ, in St. Luke's gospel, is said to have revealed to his apostles how all things in the Old Testament concerned himself.<sup>6</sup> The first examples of this framework of interpretation occur within the New Testament itself, perhaps most notably when St. Paul describes Adam, the first human being, as being a type of Christ, who ushered sin into the world much as Christ would later usher it out.<sup>7</sup> Also noteworthy are Abraham's faith counting for righteousness, much as the Christian's faith does the same, and the deluge in Genesis prefiguring Christian baptism, to name but two.<sup>8</sup> So effective and influential was this use of typology that it earned its own name: Christology.

Within the early Church's first few centuries, Christological interpretations were given to nearly all of the Old Testament's stories.<sup>9</sup> Many Old Testament leaders were given Christological significance, as their leadership roles were seen as prefigurations of Christ's leadership role within the Church. This concept is summed up well by Eusebius's theory of Christ's three-fold office, in which he demonstrates that the three types of leadership seen in Old Testament Israel, prophet, priest, and king, are offices all filled by the resurrected Christ within the context of the Church.<sup>10</sup> Thus, like an Old Testament prophet such as Moses, Joshua, or Samuel, Christ speaks to the people of God on God's

---

<sup>6</sup> Luke 24

<sup>7</sup> Gerd Wolfgang Weber, "Intellegere historiam: Typological perspectives of Nordic pre-history (in Snorri, Saxo, Widukind and others)," in *Tradition og historieskrivning. Kilderne til Nordens ældste historie (Acta Jutlandica LXIII:2. Humanistisk Serie 61)*, ed. Hastrup, Kirsten, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (Aarhus: 1987) 95–141.

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 3; I Peter 3

<sup>9</sup> Erich Auerbach, "Typological Symbolism in Medieval Literature," in *Yale French Studies, No. 9, Symbol and Symbolism*, (1952), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Lake, Kirsopp, John Earnest, Leonard Oulton, and Hugh Jackson Lawlor (London: W. Heinemann, 1926), 1.3.8.

behalf. Like the members of the Levitical priesthood who offered sacrifices to atone for the sins of the Israelites, so Christ, himself a sacrifice, offers atonement on behalf of the Church. And just as the kings of the Davidic dynasty rule over Israel, Christ rules as monarch over the Church. In each of these, the Old Testament type of Christ's office is temporary and filled by a mortal man, but is a prefiguration of Christ's eternal rule over the Church, prefigured by the nation of Israel. Thus, for example, Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and through the Red Sea was seen as foreshadowing of Christ leading the Church out of the bondage of sin through baptism.

### *David*

David is one of the Old Testament's most significant characters both as a type of Christ and as a pivotal figure in Israel's literal history. He is born into a critical time in which God's chosen people are transitioning from a tribal society led by chief-like prophets such as Moses, Joshua, or Samuel, into a royal monarchy. Of course, David is not Israel's first king - this distinction goes to Saul. But Saul's is an ineffectual kingship, fraught with desperate errors, disobedience to divine commands, and violent temper tantrums. In his commentary on the books of Samuel, Robert Alter has observed that one of the defining characteristics of Saul's reign is his constant inability to obtain answers from the Lord, giving the reader a sense of both his inability to communicate with the higher power to whom he is responsible and his loss of divine favor.<sup>11</sup> David, in contrast, retains the Lord's blessing throughout most of his life, and it is his descendants, not Saul's, who become the dynastic rulers of Israel. In addition to having an impressive military career, David goes on to consolidate the Israelite tribes, as well as some gentile peoples, into the kingdom of Israel, and establishes the nation's capital at one of its first fortified settlements on Mount Zion. So significant was the change in society that comes with David that Augustine identifies his reign as turning point from the third to the fourth age of the world.

His significance grows in the New Testament, specifically in the genealogies of the synoptic gospels, in which he ranks among those of Christ's ancestors whom St. Matthew

---

<sup>11</sup> Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of I and II Samuel*, (London: W.W. Norton & Company, inc., 1999), 56.

and St. Luke deemed noteworthy.<sup>12</sup> That Jesus hails from the house and line of David and is born in Bethlehem, David's hometown, is significant for establishing the authors' implication that Jesus's kingship is both a heavenly monarchy and the legitimate continuation of the earthly Israelite monarchy as part of the Davidic dynasty, thus king of heaven and earth.

As a typological forbear of Jesus, David exhibits no shortage of qualities that might be considered Christ-like. When Samuel and the reader are first introduced to David, he works as a shepherd. In addition to the multitude of sheep and shepherd metaphors Jesus uses throughout the gospels, his own introduction within biblical narrative is pastoral, for shepherds attend his birth in a stable.<sup>13</sup> During his career as a shepherd, David claims to have killed a lion, an animal that the author of I Peter later uses as a metaphor for sin or the Devil, a monster that Christ conquers.<sup>14</sup> David's renowned slaying of the giant, Goliath, in defense of the Israelite army likewise prefigures Christ's defeat of sin in defense of the Church. David's restoration of Solomon's crippled son, Mephibosheth, to his title and property, while not as impressive as Christ's healing of a crippled man, shows a similar care for those with physical ailments.

### *Ecclesiastical History*

While the Christological interpretation of biblical figures such as David, Moses, Abraham, and others, made sense of much of the Old Testament, as Church history wore on into the second century without the much anticipated return of Christ, the matter of how to interpret the history of the Church inevitably arose, for though the world had entered the era after Christ's ascension, the age of the Church still constituted a part of the great narrative that was Christian history. Augustine postulated that though there was a tangible change in the quality of history after Christ's incarnation, the Ecclesiastical era would provide new types, much as the Old Testament had before it.<sup>15</sup> Christian Scriptures

---

<sup>12</sup> Both St. Matthew and St. Luke skip generations mentioned in the Old Testament, thus those they do mention most likely have literary or historiographical significance to their understanding of Christ's life.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 2

<sup>14</sup> I Peter 5

<sup>15</sup> Tkacs, 856

would seem to support this thesis, for St. Paul often speaks of the importance of Christians growing more Christ-like, implying that the Christian becomes more of a type of Christ throughout his or her sanctification.<sup>16</sup>

Also important for creating the framework for the providential vision of history was the story of the Church, not only through the stories of the individual Christians or saints, but also as its own entity. That the nation of Israel, as depicted in the Old Testament, was a type of the Christian Church was fairly well established early on in Christian historiography.<sup>17</sup> This conclusion was consistent with the belief that Old Testament figures in leadership roles were types of Christ, who now led the Church much as Moses, Joshua, or David led Israel. Also significant was St. Paul's description of the Church as being the "bride" of Christ, a metaphor that allowed various female characters from the Old Testament to be seen as types of the Church as well, and furthered the typological relationship between the Church and Israel, the latter of which is explicitly described as a sort of feminine entity in later parts of the Old Testament, in which it is described memorably as both a widow and as a harlot.<sup>18</sup>

### *Rome*

Prior to Rome's adoption of Christianity as a state religion, the Church, unlike its typological predecessor, Israel, and despite the sometimes nation-like imagery used to describe it, did not exist as a recognizable politically entity. Even after the Church's Romanization, Augustine famously described Christians as being citizens of the City of God, as distinct from earthly political bodies, which he labeled the City of Man, a concept that is perhaps an outgrowth of St. Paul's admonishment to early Christians that their citizenship was not in this world but in heaven.<sup>19</sup> The complexities of the relationship between the two cities are detailed in what is perhaps Augustine's best-known tome, *De*

---

For reasons unclear to me, this is still called *prefiguring*, even though it concerns types who come after Christ.

<sup>16</sup> I Corinthians 11

<sup>17</sup> Tkacs, 856

<sup>18</sup> The widow metaphor appears in the first chapter of Lamentations. The entire plot of the book of Hosea concerns the Harlot metaphor.

<sup>19</sup> Marcus Dods, trans., *City of God*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). ; Philippians 3

*Civitate Dei*, or *City of God*, in which he argues that the Christian's citizenship in the City of God makes him or her a more ideal citizen in the City of Man, and while in this case the earthly city on his mind is Rome, his characterization of the City of God is one of an eternal city unbound by the rise and fall of mortal civilizations, much as the biblical Israel survives throughout the Old Testament in spite of its conquest by greater civilizations and periodic destruction.

But while this image of a politically ambiguous and enduring Church was a suitable antitype for the Israel of the Old Testament, authors well before Augustine had already begun to depict it with more concrete attributes, especially in the wake of Constantine's endorsement of the Christian faith and eventual conversion. It was already generally agreed that Rome's crucial role in the Church's early history must be providential, especially when Roman history was also taken into consideration, for Christ, at times known by the epithet, "Prince of Peace", was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus, who, when he became the sole ruler of the empire, began what was called the *pax romana*, an era of Roman peace, which could hardly be mere coincidence. In addition to viewing Augustus's worldly peace as a type of Christ's spiritual peace, Eusebius, a Church historian and biographer of Constantine, emphasized the importance of this worldly peace in allowing the Christian faith to spread throughout the Mediterranean, a fact that indicated the Roman Empire's divine appointment.<sup>20</sup> Rome's special favor with the Lord was made manifest under Constantine, for now Rome's political peace and Christianity's spiritual peace were brought together in the form of a Christian empire. Eusebius's accounts of Constantine in both his biography of the emperor and his *Historia Ecclesiastica* are tailored to fit this occasion; the emperor embodies the typological characteristics of both the Roman founding heroes (Aeneas, Romulus, Camillus, Augustus), and the Old Testament prophets (Moses, Joshua, etc.), making him the embodiment of the tie between Rome and the Christian Church.<sup>21</sup> This tie remained an important part of Christian historiography long after the fall of the Western Empire and well into the Middle Ages, giving Christendom a recognizable geographical center.

---

<sup>20</sup> *Demonstratio Evangelica* iii.7.32 cited in Wallace-Hadrill, D.S. *Eusebius of Caesarea* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960), 174.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

### *Other Nations, Other Types*

With ecclesiastical and Roman history now virtually inextricable from one another, the grand narrative of world history as it took place after Christ's incarnation was essentially focused on Rome, fittingly, as Rome developed into the political center of the Catholic Church. As other European nations converted to Catholicism, their histories had to be figured into the overall narrative of the world's history by finding meaningful ties to the main Judeo-Roman narrative of Christian history.

In most cases, this is accomplished by understanding the individual nation as being a type of the contiguous combination of Israel and Rome, allowing it too to benefit from Old Testament imagery used for God's people. This is demonstrated aptly in Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, which recounts the Roman withdrawal and Saxon invasion of Britain. In it, the author likens himself to the biblical prophet Jeremiah and his nation to Judah; both men denounce the sins of their countries, both countries remain unrepentant, and both are destroyed.<sup>22</sup> Icelandic authors drew a fuller typology for their homeland. In "Intellegere Historiam", Gerd Wolfgang Weber argues that because Iceland's history mirrors world history, the heroes of the *Íslendingasögur* functioned as Iceland's Old Testament heroes, for they embodied many Christian virtues even though most of them lived before their country's conversion to Christianity.<sup>23</sup> The conversion figured in Icelandic history, as well as in the histories of other European countries, as a type of Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension all in one, for it divides the nation's prefigured Old Testament from its Christian era, which prefigured the New Testament. In *Sverris saga*, Norway too mirrors the Judeo-Roman core of world history and, accordingly, uses some thematic imagery from both Old Testament Israel and Rome.

### *The "Saga Style" and European Historiography*

Some scholars, Sverre Bagge among them, have argued that one of the key differences between the "saga style" of historiography and the more mainstream

---

<sup>22</sup> Gildas. *De Excidio Brittanniae; or, the Ruin of Britain*, trans. Hugh Williams (Lampeter: Llanerch, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Weber, "Intellegere Historiam", 97

continental style of historiography was their authors' differing understandings of the purpose of history. The saga writers, he argues, saw history chiefly as entertaining and instructive. Their aims – evident in their writing styles – were to describe events in accurate detail, with some attention to the causation of events, but not to the degree of discerning an over-arching theory of history. This contrasts sharply to the aim of European Christian historiography, which is, as he describes, to discern the will of God in all of history's events.<sup>24</sup>

This is a fair analysis, but lacks the nuance necessary to evaluate two entire *corpi* of literature, especially two that periodically influence each other. Many Scandinavians received their educations from ecclesiastical institutions on the continent and were, therefore, almost certainly familiar with European Christian historiographical and theological texts. Some Norse texts of a more religious nature, such as *Veraldar saga* and *Gyðinga saga*, are translations or adaptations of religious Latin histories, showing that such ecclesiastical writing traditions did carry some weight in Norse literary culture, and it is not unreasonable to assume that they also exerted some influence on other forms of writing. Therefore, while they may not provide explicit spiritual interpretations of the events they describe, the dialogue and actions of the characters within the narratives can suggest that their authors saw spiritual significance in the stories they depicted. This less perspicuous manner of revealing biblical significance, however, depends more heavily on the readers' interpretation, which may vary according to their education levels and understandings of intertextuality.

---

<sup>24</sup> Sverre Bagge, *From Gang Leader to Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga & Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, ed. Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, (Odense: Odense University Press, 1996), 64.

## CHAPTER 2

David and *Sverris saga*

*Sverris saga* is one of the earliest of the Norwegian Kings' Sagas (*konungaǫsgur*), and tells the story of rise to power and reign of King Sverrir Sigurðarson. Whereas most sagas were composed long after the deaths of their protagonists, *Sverris saga* is unique in that Sverrir himself had a hand in the composition of at least the first part of it, and scholarly consensus holds that the rest was finished by about 1230, not three decades after Sverrir's death in 1202.<sup>25</sup> It survives today in twenty-four different manuscripts, as well as in multiple fragments.<sup>26</sup> The best known of these is AM 327 4to, which Arni Magnusson regarded as the most reliable, or "optimus," of the saga's redactions and is the most relied upon for editions. The other three most consulted are AM 47 fol., also called *Eirspennill*, Gl. Kgl. Sml. 1005 fol., or *Flateyjarbók*, and AM 81 a fol., or *Skálholtsbók*.<sup>27</sup>

Sverrir is raised in the Faroe Islands in the house of Unás Kambari, whom he believes to be his father, and undergoes training to become a priest until his mother, Gunnhildr, returns from a pilgrimage to Rome where she has confessed to the pope that Unás is not Sverrir's real father. As part of her penance, she must inform Sverrir of the identity of his real father who, as it turns out, is the late King Sigurðr of Norway. Motivated by the belief that his birthright requires from him a different style of life as well as by miraculous dreams that suggest that God has appointed him to assume the throne, Sverrir sets out for Norway where he eventually gathers an army of *Birkibeinar* and begins a campaign to usurp the crown from King Magnús Erlingsson and his father, Jarl Erlingr *skakki*. Once victorious, his reign is fraught with political struggles, the most noteworthy of which is against the Church, a conflict that ultimately leads to his excommunication and a papal interdict being placed on all of Norway.

---

<sup>25</sup> Sverre Bagge, 16

<sup>26</sup> Þorleifur Hauksson, *Sverris Saga* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska Fornritafélag, 2007), XXXVI.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* XXXVI

### *Davidic Imagery*

The resemblance between King Sverrir and King David is anchored in several references to David's story within the saga. The first and, perhaps, most memorable of these comes in the third of Sverrir's much discussed prophetic dreams. In his dream, Sverrir is praying in Mariukirkja, or Mary's Church, when he is visited by an old man with a white beard who tells him three times not to fear before he reveals to him that he is the biblical prophet, Samuel. He then tells Sverrir that he has been sent by God to anoint his hands with oil that they might have the strength to defeat opponents and rule many men.<sup>28</sup>

This episode is rife with religious imagery. Sverrir has the dream at the beginning of Lent, the holiest season on the liturgical calendar, shortly after the *Birkibeinar* compel him to become their candidate for the crown, giving him command of seventy men, a number of recurring significance in biblical narrative.<sup>29</sup> Within the dream, he worships at a church named for no ordinary saint, but for the Virgin Mary, and Samuel tells him not to fear three times, another number of recurring biblical significance. But Sverrir's anointing by Samuel is the part of the dream that has the most symbolic significance for the rest of the saga because Samuel also anointed David as king of Israel. This suggests in a very straightforward manner that Sverrir believes himself to be divinely appointed. When he awakes, Sverrir relates his dream to twelve men, the same as number of tribes of Israel, over which David ruled, as well as the number of Christ's apostles.

Davidic themes abound also in a speech Sverrir gives to his troops following the burial of his rival, King Magnus. Sverrir begins his speech by quoting the fifty-second Psalm, attributed to David: "*miserere mei deus quoniam conculavit me homo, tota die expugnans tribulavit me*", which he then translates and interprets for his followers.<sup>30</sup> On the one level, the circumstances described in the Psalm are applicable to Sverrir: both would-be kings are tried by their conflicts with their enemies, and no doubt both might have cried out for God's mercy. That Sverrir chooses to quote his biblical role-model

---

<sup>28</sup> *Sverris saga*, 17

<sup>29</sup> Seventy Israelites went into Egypt with Jacob (Genesis 46); seventy Israelite elders went to worship the Lord with Moses and Aaron (Exodus 24); the Babylonian exile lasted seventy years (Jeremiah 25). Other examples abound, but the number seems to be generally connected to the nation of Israel and, therefore, the Church.

<sup>30</sup> SvS., 152

further cements the intended parallel between them. But curiously, he interprets David's cry for deliverance as a prophecy (*spásaga*) that is fulfilled by his victory over Magnus, which would seem to suggest that Sverrir's victory over Magnus is not merely an act of God's mercy, but a long-delayed answer to David's prayer. It is interesting to note both that the Psalms are not generally understood as prophecies, and that very few post-biblical rulers' deeds are credited with being the fulfillments of prophecies, Constantine being perhaps the most noteworthy.

As the speech goes on, Sverrir explains that Magnus's divine punishment is in accordance with the punishment that God grants to all of the prideful, for, he explains, God cast Satan down from Heaven for trying to make himself equal to God, he cast Adam out of Eden for disobedience, and he cursed Pharaoh with ten plagues when he refused to release Moses and his followers from Egypt.<sup>31</sup> Though Sverrir does follow these examples with "*Ok þó at vér telim þá hefir æ svá fram farit í heiminum,*" suggesting that he could have picked any other examples, those examples that he did pick are revealing, for they paint Magnus as a typological successor to the villains of the Bible, just as Sverrir is the type of its heroes, especially David. Thus Saul, whom God afflicted with an unclean spirit (*óhreina anda*) as punishment for his rage, is the most significant entry in Sverrir's catalogue of the prideful, and he is mentioned last as if to emphasize the comparison.<sup>32</sup> Just as Saul, Israel's first king, fell from the Lord's favor and had to be replaced, so too did Magnus, and though Sverrir does not mention it himself, the reader will be quick to notice that Samuel is responsible for finding the replacements for both of them.

It would seem that in his relationship to Magnús, though, that Sverrir also takes a very crucial departure from the David/Saul formula by not only waging war against him, but furthermore by being willing to kill him. David famously refuses on two occasions to kill Saul, the first time when Saul is relieving himself in a cave, and the second when David sneaks into Saul's camp at night.<sup>33</sup> On both occasions, David refuses to kill Saul on the grounds that he dare not stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, a line of logic that he likely wants others to later apply to him. Here we might easily assume that Sverrir

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> I Samuel 24, 26

saw himself as the Lord's anointed, but did not seem to attribute the same honor to Magnús. But Johan Schreiner has come up with another, perhaps more suitable solution. He points out that in the retelling of the David story in *Konungs Skuggsjá*, when David's followers ask why he does not kill Saul, David answers that he will not dare to lay his hands on the Lord's anointed because it would be a sin to do so unless he is taking revenge on behalf of his kin.<sup>34</sup> This is a departure from the original biblical text, in which the fact that Saul is the Lord's anointed is reason enough to spare his life, and shows the extent to which the author of *Konungs Skuggsjá* interprets biblical narrative in terms of Norse culture, in which revenge played a very important role. Schreiner argues that this passage in *Konungs Skuggsjá* deliberately echoes *Sverris saga*, in which Sverrir lists all of his family members who have been put to death by Magnús and his followers.<sup>35</sup> Thus by the philosophy of *Konungs Skuggsjá*, Sverrir has legitimate reason for attacking the Lord's anointed that David did not.

That Sverrir wanted his subjects to view him as Norway's David is further made clear by his choice of name for his fortress at Niðarós: Síon.<sup>36</sup> In the Bible, Síon (or Zion in most English translations) is the name of a mountain near Jerusalem – as well as the fortress built upon it – which became David's stronghold. Following the David story, the name is used more generally as a metaphor or synonym for Jerusalem or, at times, for all of Israel, granting it the exegetical potential to be interpreted as a type prefiguring the antitype of the Church. This image is further extended in the latter part of the New Testament where the name is used for the eschatological kingdom of God, which is described as being a new heavenly version of the Old Testament's literal Israel brought about by the coming of Christ,<sup>37</sup> and taken by some theologians to be a future stage in the Church's spiritual growth.<sup>38</sup> That Sverrir should choose this name for his fortress is

---

<sup>34</sup> Oscar Brenner, trans, *Speculum Regale: Ein altnorwegischer Dialog* (München: Christian Kaiser: 1881), 189-190.

<sup>35</sup> Johan Schreiner, "Småstykker: Kong David i Sverres saga og Kongespeilet," in *Historisk Tidsskrift* 37, (Oslo, 1954), 23.

<sup>36</sup> SvS., 166

<sup>37</sup> Hebrews 12

<sup>38</sup> Traditional Christian theology suggests a sort of evolution in the social structure of God's people from the wandering Israelite tribes gathered around the Tabernacle, to the

suggestive not only of his relationship to David, but also of his relationship to that which David prefigures. His rulership over Norway marks the beginning of a new and divinely sanctioned era in Norway's history, much as David's did for Israel, and both prefigure the new era brought about by Christ's rule over the world.

The castle is mentioned by name on only one occasion, when it is besieged by Jón *kuflungr*, a rival claimant to the throne.<sup>39</sup> It is interesting that the castle is not named before this. Perhaps this was done for dramatic effect. Only when Sverrir's castle is about to be taken over by a usurper is its typologically weighty name revealed to the audience, as if to reveal at the height of the action in this episode just how much is at stake not just for Sverrir, but also for Norway. The era of Christian greatness that Sverrir has brought about for Norway, named for the kingdom of God because it prefigures it, is at risk of coming to an end at the hands of others who would take Sverrir's crown.

In all of this, Sverrir has a curious amount of self-awareness. Many texts featuring type characters rely only on narrative events and sometimes the narrator's commentary to reveal the characters' typological characteristics. But Sverrir is fully aware of his resemblance to David and deliberately encourages it with his choice of rhetoric in the speech and castle name mentioned above. The fact that two of the three most prominent Davidic allusions in the saga are made by Sverrir himself reveals the complexity of the manner in which typology relates to Sverrir's personality. Here I must make clear that I mean Sverrir as the character within the saga, not the historical Sverrir, thus it seems best to follow Aaron Gurevich's lead<sup>40</sup> and not treat the Samuel dream as the aspiring king's fabrication. It is, after all, described by the narrator in third person, not just recounted by Sverrir, thus it serves as a more concrete attestation of Sverrir's divine anointing, while the other two references are the products of Sverrir's belief in this appointment and his efforts to convince others of its authenticity.

It is interesting to note that in spite of the prominent role that Davidic allusions play in the construction of Sverrir's identity, nowhere in the text is David mentioned by name. The parallels between the king of Israel and the king of Norway are drawn entirely

---

nation-state of Israel centered on the temple, to the Church as the City of God, to the new heavens and the new earth brought about at the end of time.

<sup>39</sup> *SvS.*, 166

<sup>40</sup> Discussed in more detail below.

through implication, albeit very strong implication. This is consistent with the more standard saga style, which generally seeks to describe events only in terms of cause and effect rather than including explicit exegesis. But it is also possible that the very complexity of David's personality could be a reason for the authors to want to keep Davidic references subtle. By allowing Sverrir and David to share Samuel as an anointing figure, a similar defeat over a previous ruler, the only aspect of the David story to receive their direct attention is his divinely appointed legitimacy. To the reader with a basic knowledge of the David story, the fact that both kings come from humble origins and have special talents for guerilla warfare will also be easily inferred, but will remain on a deeper layer of interpretation. All of these parallels reflect David's positive characteristics only. But if the authors had chosen to make the parallels explicit, the next level of interpretation may have led the reader to question whether any of Sverrir's characteristics might also mirror those less desirable in David. Israel's most famous king is, after all, an adulterer and a murderer, has a very flawed relationship with one of his sons, and retreats in battle on several occasions, none of which make him an appealing figure with whom to try to compare oneself for political rhetoric, and Sverrir is certainly already controversial enough.

### *Grýla*

One of the most prominent discussions in *Sverris saga* scholarship is over determining where the first part of the saga, called Grýla, ends and the second part – which is never named but will be referred to in this paper as meta-Grýla – begins. According to the saga's prologue, Grýla was penned by abbot Karl Jónsson under the supervision, or even possibly at the dictation, of King Sverrir himself, and it chronicles Sverrir's rise to power and early victories in battle, as well as foreshadows coming greater events.<sup>41</sup> This vague description of Grýla's contents does not, of course, help overmuch in determining Grýla's extent, as much of the saga is concerned with such matters. I will only briefly address the matter here. According to Sverre Bagge, before the beginning of the twentieth century, scholars generally believed that Grýla encompassed the first hundred chapters of the saga and ended following Sverrir's victory over Magnus

---

<sup>41</sup> SvS., 3-4

Erlingsson in 1184, a date which would correspond nicely with scholarly estimates of Grýla's composition date, usually placed between 1185 and 1188, and divide the saga roughly in half.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps coincidentally, this division would also create another parallel to the David story, for the first book of Samuel ends shortly after the death of Saul, the figure to whom Sverrir likens Magnus. This would allow us to view Grýla and meta-Grýla as corresponding roughly to the first and second books of Samuel. More recent estimates, however, suggest much earlier divisions. These include that proposed by Halvdan Koht and Gustav Storm, who argued that Grýla ends in ch. 39 following the death of Erlingr *skakki* in 1179, and that of Frederik Paasche, which argued for ch. 31 in 1178 which, as Bagge notes, is before any of Sverrir's great victories.<sup>43</sup> The last of these estimates is currently the most prevalently accepted.<sup>44</sup>

The location of the division between Grýla and meta-Grýla raises two questions with regard to this examination of the David references. The first is whether the two more substantial Davidic allusions are both the inclusions of Karl Jónsson. If Grýla ends after ch. 100, then both are the work of the same author, and it is reasonable to believe that both were included with the same rhetorical purpose. If, however, the end of Grýla comes at the end of either ch. 31 or 39, then this raises the question of just how faithfully Karl Jónsson's literary successor preserved the abbot's creative approach to Sverrir's life within his writings. Indeed some scholars have noted that the earlier chapters of the saga seem to have borrowed elements from medieval saints' lives, a feature they see missing from the later parts of the saga.<sup>45</sup> Certainly some degree of difference in authorial perspective would have been unavoidable, and no doubt a good deal of research could be done on the differences in the styles and motives of Grýla and meta-Grýla. But it also seems likely that the author of meta-Grýla would have attempted to keep his writings consistent with Grýla in order that the two portions of the saga achieved some unity.

In this paper I will usually treat the two halves of the saga as if they were a thematically unified whole. I will also usually treat the end of ch. 31 as the correct division between Grýla and meta-Grýla since this is the most prevalent view in scholarship

---

<sup>42</sup> Bagge, 15, 16

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 56

currently. But I will periodically entertain the other possibilities, as these could have interesting implications for the use of the biblical material.

### CHAPTER 3

#### Literature Review

#### *Frederik Charpentier Ljungquist*

Ljungquist's article examines the ways in which *Sverris saga* legitimates King Sverrir in light of the papal interdict he brought upon Norway along with his own excommunication.<sup>46</sup> Because of Sverrir's involvement in the creation of his saga, *Sverris saga* gives a unique look into the ideology used to justify Sverrir's claim to the throne. Ljungquist observes that past scholarship on Sverrir has placed his ideology into one of two categories. Some scholars recognize in Sverrir an old traditional model of Norse kingship in which the king legitimizes himself through victory in battle against other pretenders to the throne. Others see Sverrir as representative of a Christian model of a divinely justified king. Ljungquist argues that the saga makes frequent appeals to both.

Certainly Sverrir demonstrates the military victory necessary to represent Norse kingship, but while this would normally require some description of his personal skill in combat, the saga portrays him as being more of an inspiring leader and even a religious role model. In his conflict with the Church, Sverrir is depicted as the defender of the true faith in the face of an unjust and heretical Church. *Sverris saga* posits that Sverrir is, in fact, above the Church because he is its protector, and he is thus accountable only to God. The frequent appeals to religious themes lead Ljungquist to conclude that the more traditional elements of the Nordic warrior-king ideology of kingship *Sverris saga* are vestigial and help to portray what is essentially a Scandinavian variation on the more mainstream European Christian royal ideology. One of the most significant and least examined consequences of this, he observes, is the fact that this ideology places Sverrir squarely into the context of mankind's path to salvation and, thus, into Augustinian historiography. This conclusion has played a significant role in informing my own, as it is effectively where I begin.

---

<sup>46</sup> Frederik Charpentier Ljungqvist, "Kungaideologin i *Sverris Saga*," in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York; 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> August, 2006*, vol.2, ed. McKinnell, John, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 583-592.

*Sverre Bagge*

In his book, *From Gang Leader to Lord's Anointed*, Sverre Bagge discusses the creation of literary identity in both *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. In it he argues that the two kings' sagas represent two critical points on a timeline of the development of saga literature's portrayals of the individual, combined with the development of the ideology of kingship in Norway. Like Ljungquist, he recognizes two models for kingship, the traditional Norse model and the European Christian model, the latter of which he calls the *rex iustus*. He argues that the traditional Nordic king establishes legitimacy largely through his talent as a warrior and a military leader, as well as his personal charisma; thus his winning personality is crucial to his ability to retain the royal office. The *rex iustus*, however, derives his power from his office, which is granted to him by God, thus his behavior must conform to that expected of a king and his individuality must remain elusive.<sup>47</sup> By Bagge's reckoning, Sverrir is the former, while his grandson, Hákon, is the latter.<sup>48</sup> The differences between their two sagas reflect the decline of the importance of individuality and the growth the importance of the state in creating the king's identity, that is to say, the evolution of Norway's kingship from being a mere "gang leader" to "the Lord's anointed," hence the title.<sup>49</sup>

In his discussion of Sverrir's claims to legitimacy, which includes the references to David, Bagge argues that it is not one of the goals of *Sverris saga* to emphasize what he calls Sverrir's "religious" qualities.<sup>50</sup> Instead, he insists that the most important of Sverrir's traits in the eyes of the saga authors are his prowess and innovation as a warrior and a military tactician, and that Sverrir's claims to legitimacy are not as much a product of his religiosity as they are of his bloodline.<sup>51</sup> Though he acknowledges the similarities between the earlier chapters of the saga and the hagiographical writings contemporary to it,<sup>52</sup> he also insists that arguments in favor of Sverrir's legitimacy due to divine vocation

---

<sup>47</sup> Bagge, 156

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 156

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 157

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 57

exist nowhere within the saga, and that “the dreams and other signs of God’s intervention must be understood as *evidence* of royal birth, not as a substitution for it.”<sup>53</sup>

His arguments are not entirely unreasonable, for there can be no doubt that the saga writers, and certainly Sverrir himself, saw Sverrir’s genealogy and his martial skill as very important. But his conclusion is problematic. This is due in part to his decision to interpret *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* as exemplary points in kingship ideology’s evolution, a theory that practically requires Sverrir to be the very epitome of the earlier kingship paradigm due to the early date of the saga’s composition. While I am in agreement with Bagge that the saga’s descriptions of Sverrir do not describe the “‘ideal royal character’ according to the tradition of European clerical historiography,”<sup>54</sup> this does not require that he fit so rigidly into the alternative mold. Indeed, to place him squarely in either category seems to require a substantial oversimplification of the saga’s rhetoric.

Bagge is quick to point out that, “the author [does not] generally apply the typological perspective of Sverrir’s speech over Magnús in his interpretation of events, but rather explains them in terms of human motives, and cause and effect,” arguing that this is clear evidence that themes of divine vocation were not among the author’s intentions.<sup>55</sup> In the first place, this disregards the fact that Sverrir’s dreams of Óláfr *helgi* and Samuel, the foundations of his claims of divine appointment, are not recounted by Sverrir, but are described by the narrator in third person. While we may suspect that the dreams were Sverrir’s invention, no such suspicion is reflected within the text itself. The Samuel dream in particular also does not imply that Sverrir’s right to rule is derived from his blood, for neither Samuel nor either of the biblical kings he anointed has any connection to the Norwegian royal house and, furthermore, neither of the biblical kings Samuel anoints is the son of a king. This indicates that the authors did perceive Sverrir as deriving some amount of legitimacy from divine appointment.

Secondly, this assumes that the authors would have made all of their thematic intentions explicit to the reader, which is never a safe assumption when studying literature. The author’s failure to include typological explanations for the events he describes in no

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 64

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

way indicates that he did not hope for the reader to find them, for the argument that Norse writers intended to describe events only in terms of cause and effect need not exclude the possibility that some of these writers saw other factors at work. In the prologue to her *Lais*, Marie de France tells her readers that ancient authors “wrote obscurely” in order that their audiences might interpret their meanings by “glossing the letter”.<sup>56</sup> This could be an appropriate way of describing the apparent aims of the authors of *Sverris saga*, but with one noteworthy difference: the inclusion of the Samuel dream and Sverrir’s speech comparing Magnus to Saul can hardly be called obscure.

The Samuel dream is the saga’s first point of comparison between Sverrir and David; both kings are anointed by the same biblical prophet. It is fairly easy to see how the events after this and before Magnús’s death can be interpreted as Davidic. Both aspiring kings have humble origins, David as the youngest son in his father’s house and a shepherd, Sverrir as a “little low man from the outer skerries,”<sup>57</sup> being trained for the priesthood. Sverrir’s original occupation mirrors David’s, for just as the shepherd’s duty is to look after sheep, so the priest’s duty is to look after the members of the Church, described metaphorically as sheep in John’s gospel.<sup>58</sup> Thus while both jobs superficially suggest lowliness, both are revealed through exegesis to be very important. Each of the seemingly unlikely candidates for king is anointed while another king is still on the throne, suggesting none too subtly that the ruling king in each story has fallen out of favor with the Lord. In their subsequent campaigns for power, both David and Sverrir use their charismatic personalities to gather forces to them and become successful yet unconventional military leaders with special talents for guerilla warfare.

These things considered, it seems to me that the religious elements of Sverrir’s life as expressed through the saga’s narrative structure are a far more vital part of the authors’ construction of the king’s personality than Bagge gives them credit for, though I do not believe that they contradict or supersede the importance of Sverrir’s military skill, personal charisma, or bloodline. It is merely more prudent not to try to view Sverrir as the paradigm of the traditional Norse kingship if that requires the neglect of what is clearly an

---

<sup>56</sup> Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner, (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1981), 1-3.

<sup>57</sup> *SvS.*, 153

<sup>58</sup> John 21

important part of the saga. It may be accurate to say that Sverrir is functionally more similar to this earlier form of royalty, but the narrative structure of the saga suggests that he and the authors are aiming to describe him as something much closer to the *rex iustus*. Accordingly, I am more persuaded by Ljungquist's argument that Sverrir displays a creative and politically expedient mixture of attributes from both.

It also seems best to analyze the saga's portrayal of Sverrir's kingship within the context of an Augustinian influenced historiography, in which the king and his subjects were seen as players within the divine drama of Christian history. Within this framework, Sverrir's attempts to compare himself to David would offer an explanation for both his military achievements and his claims of divine vocation, for David was both a successful military leader as well as chosen by God to replace Saul and rule Israel. If Sverrir's Davidic depiction is to be taken seriously, then his military skill should be seen not simply as an alternative argument for his legitimacy, but as further evidence of his divine appointment.

#### *Aaron Gurevich*

Like Bagge's book, Gurevich's article, "From Saga to Personality," focuses on the development of the portrayal of the individual in saga literature, and also like Bagge, his investigation of Sverrir's individuality is tied inextricably to Sverrir's claims of legitimacy. He notes, however, that part of the difficulty in studying the medieval personality in the modern fashion established by the French "*Annales* School" is that medieval Church authors seem simultaneously to present and conceal the individual's personality through their use of "devices canonized by a literary tradition of confession."<sup>59</sup> Another part of the problem is the tendency of modern scholarship to search for the individual personality from a teleological perspective, using a modern model of individuality to find those historical figures that can be defined as "precursors" of that individuality.<sup>60</sup> Scholars of Norwegian history have generally found Sverrir to be notoriously difficult to examine within the context of his own times. The uniqueness of

---

<sup>59</sup> Aaron Gurevich, "From Saga to Personality: Sverris Saga," in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1992), 77.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Sverrir's personality and circumstances have caused his reign to be interpreted variously as "forerunner of democracy", his support from the *Birkibeinar* to be seen as kind of "social revolution", and Sverrir himself to be likened to figures such as Cromwell, Napoleon, or Stalin.<sup>61</sup>

To be sure, Sverrir's position in medieval society was a unique one. Gurevich acknowledges that the aspiring king had more freedom in his behavior and decisions than others because he was an outsider without connections to any noble family, and thus was not required to follow the traditions and obligations expected of that class. This perhaps allowed him to retain more individuality than others.<sup>62</sup> Yet Gurevich also argues that there is "no need to understand personality in history in terms of its modern essence", and that it would be best to approach the saga keeping in mind that the time and place in which Sverrir lived afforded him a set of values and a worldview around which he would have built his identity.<sup>63</sup> In short, however unique he was, Sverrir should be understood as a product of his times.

Sverrir's first reason to lay claim to the throne comes from his alleged parentage. Such a claim is fairly standard in a medieval context. His second is his dream in which he fights for Óláfr *helgi*, which implies a "supernatural unity" with Norway's *rex perpetuus*.<sup>64</sup> The third is his resemblance to David. This, he posits, requires from Sverrir "a denial of his individuality and... the subjugation of that individuality to a model borrowed from the Old Testament".<sup>65</sup> Gurevich holds that during the Middle Ages individuals could not find "the necessary foundation of individuality" within themselves, but had to construct themselves instead from "pieces provided by the authorities".<sup>66</sup> Thus Sverrir creates his identity through both self-assertion and self-denial.

In a sense, I find myself in agreement with Gurevich in his observation that the medieval individual had to delineate himself with a sacral pattern in order to assert his individuality, inasmuch as I acknowledge the author's use of typology. But I believe that

---

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 85

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 85

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 79

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 84

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 86, 84

this requires more qualification, especially in Sverrir's case. For while Sverrir's efforts to identify himself with David are evident in dream and speech, more caution is required in saying the same of his campaign against Magnús in spite of its obvious resemblance to David's struggle against Saul. Claiming to be anointed by Samuel, comparing one's enemy to Saul, and naming one's castle Sión are all relatively easy to accomplish when compared to modeling the circumstances of one's military campaign to fit that of a typological role model. Sverrir's alliance with the *Birkibeinar* and his use of unconventional tactics seem more likely to be opportunistic choices on Sverrir's part, or just necessitated by the fact that the *Birkibeinar* threatened to kill him if he did not lead them. This raises a question of the proverbial "chicken and egg" variety: did the historical Sverrir initially seek to imitate David in the hope of appearing as, or even becoming, a figure of typological significance, or did he realize on later reflection – when dictating the contents of his own saga, perhaps – that in some ways he already resembled him?

To speculate possible answers to this question requires a return to the matter of Augustinian history. Because this approach to history is a theory devised to make sense of the entirety of history and is an important part of the medieval Christian cosmology, it seems too simple so say that Sverrir and other figures merely imitated sacral figures to create their typological identities. Sverrir, after all, believes he is chosen by God to rule over Norway. Within the context of a cosmology that holds that God created all of mankind and is omnipotent, for God to have chosen Sverrir to rule suggests that he also created him with that vocation in mind. Sverrir would not merely be aligning himself with David, but his actions would reflect David's through whatever providential machinations that are expressed in historical writings as typology. Thus Sverrir's resemblance to a sacral king figure such as David would be better understood as a revelation of his divine appointment through history's narrative than it would be a matter of his intention to imitate David. Indeed, if we think of the best-known types in Christian historiography, those in the Old Testament, none would logically have sought to act in imitation of their New Testament antitypes for obvious chronological reasons. Though post-biblical types would not be so lacking in their knowledge of the New Testament's antitypes, they could not be so easily regarded as types in the same sense if their similarities to the antitypes were only the products of deliberate imitation. Sverrir's Davidic parallels should, within

the context of the saga, be seen not as the subversion of his personality to a biblical model, but as a personality that is biblical by providential design and, therefore, not only fit but intended to rule. Thus Sverrir could have seen the parallel between the David and Saul struggle and his own struggle with Magnus and interpreted them as his own justification, then ensured that the saga portrayed them accordingly.

This does not, however, render Gurevich's argument irrelevant, for while this view of Sverrir would be fitting within a sacral reading of history and by extension the saga, it brings more questions to the table. In the cases of Old Testament figures who had no knowledge that they prefigured New Testament antitypes, their roles as types were explained by Christian exegesis long after their deaths. Perhaps the same could even be said for earlier Christian saints and martyrs. But if learned medieval Christians who were well versed in theology, as the historical Sverrir and Karl Jónsson were, really did view history through an Augustinian lens and perceive the lives of important historical figures as mirroring those of biblical figures through providential design, or at least were aware that such figures' lives were given such interpretations by historians, then it is not unreasonable to wonder if they might have deliberately imitated sacral figures with the hope that later theologians and historians would recognize the typological patterns in their actions and interpret them accordingly in their writings. This creates an interesting ambiguity regarding both the Sverrir of historical fact and the Sverrir of the saga. The historical Sverrir's involvement in the composition of *Grýla*, which features the Samuel dream, suggests that he really did hope that history would remember him as Norway's David. This rhetorical aim is reflected by Sverrir as a character in the saga as well, for, as mentioned before, the references to David made in meta-*Grýla* are made by Sverrir himself and not by the narrator. This leaves us with the question of whether Sverrir, in both factual and fictional incarnations, saw his own resemblance to David as a sign of his divine appointment, or whether his imitation of David was a deliberate political maneuver to help him justify his rise to power to later generations.

#### *Ármann Jakobsson*

Ármann Jakobsson, in his article, "Sinn eiginn smiður", gives *Sverris saga* a comprehensive reading focusing on Sverrir's efforts to construct his identity as a sort of

myth or folktale strongly influenced by medieval interpretations of the Bible. Writers like Augustine and Bede customarily interpreted the Bible on four separate but interwoven layers: the superficial, the allegorical, the moral, and the divine.<sup>67</sup> Ármann argues that *Sverris saga*, especially with regard to the identity of its protagonist, also has four levels of interpretation, and that these are inspired by the four exegetical levels, as it is not unlikely that such knowledge reached the Faroese priesthood. He holds that *Sverris saga* retains the superficial, the moral, and the divine levels from traditional biblical interpretation, but he expands the allegorical level to include folkloristic elements. Each of these layers expresses elements of Sverrir's individuality and, more importantly, presents arguments for his legitimacy.

The superficial level is the saga's basic storyline, in which Sverrir, the lowly man from the outer skerries, seeks to claim his hereditary right to his father's kingdom. This level deals largely with the political and social elements of Sverrir's claims to legitimacy, and therefore with the matter of hereditary legitimacy. Sverrir's parentage remains in question throughout the saga, a fact that Magnús and Erlingr capitalize on by referring to him as "prestr", suggesting that his claim is false and that he really is nothing more than a priest. In contrast, Magnús is the grandson of popular king, Sigurðr Jórsalafari, on his mother's side. But if Sverrir's claims to be the son of Sigurðr *munni* are true, then his claim is superior to Magnús's, for Magnús is only the son of a jarl. This is why Sverrir works so hard to convince his followers of his alleged parentage, stressing Norway's need to have a king who is a king's son, and even claiming that his war against Magnús is an act of revenge for his father and brothers, none of whom he ever actually met.<sup>68</sup>

Ármann is interested in Sverrir's notorious claim that he has taken the place of the king, the archbishop, and the jarl. It is a concept that is introduced early in the saga and to set the stage for the conflict between Sverrir and Magnús and his company, and it functions on at least two levels. On the allegorical level, it forges a typological link between Sverrir and the Christian God, for both are triune in one way or another. This lends a greater measure of allegorical credibility to Sverrir's kingship that, in turn, gives it

---

<sup>67</sup> Ármann Jakobsson, "Sinn eigin smíður: Ævintýrið um Sverri konung," *Skírnir* 179 (2005), 134.

<sup>68</sup> Ármann, 115

more political worth as well. Sverrir arrives in Norway to challenge King Magnús, who is supported by Jarl Erlingr and Archbishop Eysteinn, that is to say each of the offices that he soon claims for himself divided amongst three men all working for the same cause. That Sverrir is all three of these shows that he is more competent than Magnús and insinuates that Magnús is only one third of the ideal king. Indeed, by Ármann's reckoning, Sverrir goes so far as to portray Magnús as childish, as if even as an adult his reign is plagued with all of the problems that befall toddler kings, which is why he requires so much assistance from his father to rule the kingdom. Erlingr, however, suffers the opposite problem: he is old. But Sverrir is shown to have both the maturity of age and the energy of youth necessary to rule.<sup>69</sup>

Ármann divides *Sverris saga*'s allegorical levels into folkloristic and biblical sublevels. On the folkloristic sublevel, he observes that Sverrir's struggle to obtain his royal birthright follows the wicked stepmother motif from many fairytales, a parallel first noted by Karl Jónsson in the saga's narration.<sup>70</sup> Ármann pays particular attention to an episode in the first chapter in which a young Sverrir flees Brynjolfr, the king's bailiff in the Faroes, for striking a man, and hides from him in an oven, which is a fairytale motif.<sup>71</sup> He also draws attention to the hardships that the saga says Sverrir goes through to take hold of the state, which he argues resemble the struggles that fairytale heroes must face in order to win the hand of a princess or take the throne.<sup>72</sup> These, in turn, also resemble Christ's temptation in the wilderness, creating a tie between the folkloristic and the biblical sublevels.

On the biblical sublevel, he addresses Sverrir's speech comparing Magnús to the sinfully proud figures of the Bible, especially Saul. According to Ármann, this speech should suggest the story of David and Goliath to the reader, with Magnús and Erlingr representing Goliath. This, he says, shows the fluidity between the use of biblical and folkloristic sources, for the story of David and Goliath is effectively a biblical fairytale.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Ármann, 122-123

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 134, 135; *SvS.*, 12

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 118

<sup>72</sup> Ármann p.120

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 118

This argument demands only a minor criticism. Ármann and Sverre Bagge both write of David's fight with Goliath as if it were the event in David's story that Sverrir intends to reference in his speech.<sup>74</sup> But Sverrir quite clearly compares Magnús to Saul and never mentions Goliath, and his drawn out military campaign against Magnús bears a much closer resemblance to David's lengthy struggle with Saul than it does to his quick defeat of Goliath.<sup>75</sup> Yet the theme of an unlikely hero's victory over a superior foe is certainly common in all three stories, thus it would be reasonable to tie David's victory over Goliath to his struggle against Saul. Indeed, biblical scholar, Robert Alter, suggests that the former is meant to be a prelude to the latter, noting that Saul, like Goliath, is described as being taller than all other men in Israel.<sup>76</sup> If indeed Karl Jónsson and Sverrir read the story of David and Goliath in this way, then Ármann's argument has merit, and the story of David and Goliath would serve as a bridge between folklore and biblical narrative. But some qualification is needed to explain how the saga reader might be expected to think of Goliath when Sverrir is speaking of Saul, given that the conflict between David and Saul, like *Sverris saga*, has many more levels of interpretation than can be adequately summarized by the "underdog" theme.

On the moral level, Sverrir is presented as a man of great integrity and righteousness, which Ármann argues is seen most clearly in his attitude toward alcohol. The chief danger of alcohol, as is expressed on Sverrir's deathbed, is its detrimental effect on the consumer's sense of reason, which is one of the most necessary faculties for a king to have.<sup>77</sup> That Sverrir abstains from alcohol and encourages moderation on the part of his followers is symbolic of the king's self-control and wisdom.<sup>78</sup> In this he stands in contrast to Magnús who, it is told, was "fond of drinking bouts and the society of women," again suggesting that Sverrir is the better qualified for the throne.<sup>79</sup> Sverrir's speech warning against the ills of excessive drinking following the drunken riots that erupt in Bergen is

---

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 119; Bagge, 65

<sup>75</sup> *SvS.*, 153

<sup>76</sup> Alter, 103

<sup>77</sup> *SvS.*, 280

<sup>78</sup> Ármann, 124

<sup>79</sup> *SvS.*, 151

also proof that he possesses not only a great amount of self-control and reason, but also the ability to inspire others to develop their own self-control and wisdom.<sup>80</sup>

The divine level of interpretation reveals Sverrir's status as the Lord's anointed, that he is providentially selected by God to be a great Christian monarch, and it is made most clear in the dreams. The dream that Sverrir's mother has shortly before he is born, discussed more thoroughly below, symbolizes in no uncertain terms that Sverrir is destined to become a king. Sverrir's dreams of Óláfr helgi and Samuel create typological links between Sverrir and past rulers, putting them in many ways on the allegorical level, but the final meaning of their symbolic elements is that Sverrir must become king.

In addition to his interpretation of the saga, Ármann also examines what the saga writers really say regarding Sverrir's paternity. At the end of the *Flateyjarbók* redaction of *Sverris saga* there is paragraph in which the author discusses the similarities and differences between Sverrir and his supposed father, Sigurðr munn. Ármann observes that the similarities between the two kings are rather vague and general, while their differences are, in fact very specific and significant.<sup>81</sup> Though it is true, as the saga writer points out, that personalities can vary widely within a family and the substantial differences between Sverrir and Sigurðr do not necessarily indicate that Sverrir's paternity claims were false, Ármann argues that this comparison is meant to be read as proof that Sverrir was, in fact a pretender, albeit more talented, persistent, and successful than others.<sup>82</sup> It is Sverrir's fairytale struggle against stepmother-like adversity that ultimately says most clearly that he deserves the throne.

---

<sup>80</sup> SvS., 158

<sup>81</sup> Ármann, 130

<sup>82</sup> Ármann, 131

## CHAPTER 4

### Church and Kingdom

In September of 1122, the Papacy gained one of its most significant victories in the ongoing Investiture Controversy when Henry V, the Holy Roman Emperor, and Pope Calixtus II agreed to the terms of the Concordat of Worms.<sup>83</sup> The result was that the Emperor formally acknowledged that it was the right of the Church, not of the nobility, to appoint bishops, though the Church granted the nobility some say in the decision.<sup>84</sup> The Investiture controversy was far from over. Later nobles, Holy Roman Emperors among them, would continue to try to appoint their own bishops, and some would even try to appoint their own popes. But the Concordat of Worms represented a great step forward for the Church in ending investiture by the nobility and ending much of the civil strife that the controversy had caused.

Sverrir's reign, which included the expulsion of Bishop Eiríkr, an attempt to tax coffers and appoint priests in privately owned chapels, driving a papal legate out of Norway, and the coercion of multiple bishops, especially Nikolas, ran directly counter to the Church's advances represented by the Concordat of Worms. That he ousted Magnús, whose reign the Church endorsed, did little to help his standing in ecclesiastical eyes. His support from the *Birkibeinar* put him in direct conflict against the *Baglar*, who were by definition the supporters of the Church.<sup>85</sup> The problem was made no better by the fact that the Byzantine Emperor, Alexios Angelus, requested support from Sverrir, suggesting that he recognize him as a legitimate ruler, or by the fact that Sverrir received support in the form of mercenaries from King John "Lackland" of England, who was already problematic to the Church.<sup>86</sup> If foreign rulers recognized Sverrir as a credible ruler, then his actions would be much harder for the Church to repudiate. Furthermore, the Byzantine Emperor's recognition of Sverrir more than hinted that the Eastern Orthodox Church also recognized Sverrir, and while the threat of Norway joining the other Church could not

---

<sup>83</sup> Ernest F. Henderson, trans., "The Concordat of Worms," in *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1910), 408-409.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Bagall*, singular, meaning "crosier" or "bishop's staff".

<sup>86</sup> *SvS.*, 192 & 271

have been especially great, Sverrir's association with an ecclesiastical rival must have been somewhat alarming nonetheless.

It is odd that a king who sought to appear as pious as Sverrir did would be so antagonistic to the Church, as it would seem to undermine his image. But instead, it becomes a matter of asserting himself as morally superior to the Church, which in his mind gives him the right to oppose it. In the saga, his accusations of corruption in the clergy and his claim that he is the Lord's anointed are especially useful tools for maintaining his image of piety.

Again David proves to be a useful figure for Sverrir to emulate. Among the less discussed aspects of David's career that may pertain to Sverrir is the Israelite king's relationship to his nation's priesthood. Following Ljungquist's definition, the *rex iustus* is given divine right to rule and is, therefore, subject to God alone and not the Church, and as defender of the Church, furthermore, has authority over it. In several instances in the books of Samuel it seems that this is just the sort of relationship that David has with the priesthood. While the long struggle between David and Saul still rages, Saul attempts to punish the priests of Nod, led by Ahimelech, for their alleged affiliation with David, and executes them. But one son of Ahimelech, Abiathar, escapes and flees to David for refuge.<sup>87</sup> David takes him in and vows to protect him. Abiathar serves David throughout the rest of his campaign against Saul and later, once David becomes king over all of Israel, he is one of the four men David appoints to be priest in an episode that demonstrates the crown's authority over the priesthood.<sup>88</sup> Following David's death, Abiathar supports Adonijah's claim to the throne in contradistinction to David's support of Solomon. Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, sees that David has his way. Just as he was appointed by a king, Abiathar's fate is to be deposed by a king.<sup>89</sup> Such is the fate of those priests who oppose the rule of the Lord's anointed.

The moral of this story is clear: members of the clergy owe their lives and their loyalties to their king and defender, especially when the ruler in question is the Lord's anointed as David, Solomon, and Sverrir are, and because the Lord's anointed is

---

<sup>87</sup> I Samuel 22

<sup>88</sup> II Samuel 8

<sup>89</sup> I Kings 2

responsible directly to God, he has it in his power to defrock the priests. Though this aspect of David's reign is perhaps not as memorable as others and is never directly referenced in the saga, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Sverrir, Karl Jónsson, and the author(s) of meta-Grýla had it in mind when choosing David as the biblical model for Sverrir.

### *Óláfr Helgi*

Another important piece of Sverrir's royal propaganda in the saga is his connection to Óláfr *helgi*, Norway's national saint. The relationship is established in a dream early in the saga shortly after Sverrir learns of his true parentage. In the dream, Sverrir finds himself in Norway where he is unable to choose sides in a conflict between Óláfr and the joined forces of King Magnús and his father Jarl Erlingr. After siding with Óláfr, he finds himself in a small room with a select few of the royal retinue watching the saint-king wash. When Óláfr is finished, another warrior wishes to wash in the same water, but Óláfr forbids him and instead summons Sverrir, whom he calls by "Magnús", and instructs him to wash in the same water. After this, Óláfr gives Sverrir his sword and his banner and the two lead Óláfr's army to victory over Magnús and Erlingr as all the while Óláfr protects Sverrir with his shield.<sup>90</sup>

The implications of the dream are far from obscure. Sverrir is the only man among Óláfr's company who is worthy to wash in the same water as the saint-king. So worthy is he that Óláfr calls him by "Magnús", the name of Óláfr's son and successor to the throne, implying that just as Magnús Ólafsson was Óláfr's biological successor, so Sverrir is Óláfr's spiritual successor. That both Sverrir and Magnús Ólafsson are the illegitimate sons of kings may be a noteworthy parallel as well, but more importantly, the name Magnús is also telling of Sverrir's aspirations, for it is the Latin word for "great", and prior to its adoption by the Norwegian royal house, was not a name but an epithet denoting greatness.

The Óláfr dream serves a very pragmatic function in Sverrir's propaganda, for due to Óláfr's status as *rex perpetuus Norvegiae*, his son, Magnús *inn góði*, and all subsequent

---

<sup>90</sup> SvS., 9

rulers were regarded as subservient to Norway's eternal king.<sup>91</sup> Sverrir's dream that he wielded Óláfr's sword and carried his banner against their shared enemies shows quite plainly that Óláfr has entrusted him with the defense of Norway. The saga narrative will later confirm this when Sverrir goes to battle against the men of Niðarós, who are supporters of Magnús and Erlingr. The men of Niðarós attempt to carry the banner of Óláfr *helgi* into battle against Sverrir, but without success. The mounted man who carried the banner into battle loses control of his horse, which injures one man, kills another, and throws its rider, proving either that none but Óláfr's rightful heir could carry the banner safely, or that none could carry the banner against Óláfr's heir safely.<sup>92</sup> In any event, the episode is remarkably reminiscent of that in I Samuel, in which the Philistines capture the Ark of the Covenant and hope to carry it into battle against the Israelites. But because the Ark is a cult-object of the God's chosen people and is accompanied by the presence of God, the Philistines are unable to carry it against the people of God and are stricken with tumors for trying.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, none of Magnús's followers are able to carry the banner of Óláfr *helgi* against his spiritual heir and God's chosen king.

Another reason Sverrir would have wanted to tie himself to Óláfr was the fact that Óláfr was Norway's patron saint and the founder of the diocese of Niðarós, and therefore was not only a very meaningful figure for the monarchy, but also for the Norwegian Church, which Sverrir sought to control. Thus however successful or unsuccessful Óláfr was in life, after death as a symbolic figure he was one of the few people in medieval history to legally wield both of the two Gelasian swords. By advertising his appointment by Óláfr, Sverrir reveals that alive he seeks to rule over all that Óláfr rules from the grave. That Sverrir was permitted to wash in the same water as Óláfr, however, may go a step beyond that, for it seems to imply equality between the two kings. This, taken together with the quasi-hagiographical nature of the earlier portions of the saga could reveal that Sverrir hoped that he, like Óláfr, might one day be posthumously recognized as a saint.

There is a none-too-subtle hint of this shortly before Bishop Eiríkr's appointment as archbishop. When Archbishop Eysteinn is on his deathbed, he calls Sverrir to him so

---

<sup>91</sup> Ármann, 111

<sup>92</sup> *SvS.*, 25-26

<sup>93</sup> I Samuel 5

that he can ask the king's forgiveness for all of the wrongs he has committed against him.<sup>94</sup> In this episode, Sverrir fills the role that should normally be filled by a priest while the bishop takes a role more typical for a dying layman. That the dying priest asks Sverrir's forgiveness shows that he recognizes the king as his spiritual superior, suggesting that he is either a fellow high-ranking Church official or a saint. Just one sentence later, the author writes that the two forgave each other, bringing to mind something more akin to old friends making up after a long-standing disagreement, but this is likely done to soften the overtness of the confessional language in the preceding sentence and make the literary Sverrir's sanctity less obvious or offensive to those who would be quick to criticize him as a heretic.

Sverrir's connection to Óláfr is fairly important for establishing his identity as a Davidic figure, for the extent of David's power as both a religious and political figure goes beyond that which was accepted for the medieval king. For following his ascension to the throne, David was the sole ruler of the Israelites and was not beholden to a ruling priesthood in the same sense that a medieval king would have been to the papacy. Instead, as the king of God's people and a type of Christ, he was regarded as something of a religious ruler as well as a political one. By tying himself to Óláfr, Sverrir links himself to the one precedent figure in Norwegian history who can give him claims to both religious and political powers that he would need to become David.<sup>95</sup>

### *Typological versus Ecclesiastical Authority*

Nowhere in the saga are the problems with ruling based on a typological connection to David and a dreamed connection to Óláfr more apparent than in a dispute between Sverrir and Bishop Eiríkr over the jurisdiction of chapels built on private property. Again, a major part of the dispute is over who has the authority to appoint priests – Sverrir argues that this authority lies with the property owner, and Eiríkr argues that it lies with the archbishop – but the informative part of the debate lies in which laws are cited by which orators: Sverrir cites the “laws of the land”, sanctioned by Óláfr *helgi* and Magnús *inn góði*, including the old laws of Trøndelag, while Eiríkr cites canon law

---

<sup>94</sup> SvS., 164

<sup>95</sup> Ármann, 111

and papal edict.<sup>96</sup> Here we see the difficulty with claiming legitimacy through Óláfr, for Óláfr was responsible for the creation of both the laws that Sverrir cites and for establishing the Roman Catholic Church, an institution governed by papal authority as well as its own laws, in Norway. While Sverrir's choice of citations show a more palpable connection to Norway's patron saint, since Óláfr fought to establish the Roman Catholic Church in Norway, then it stands to reason that it would be the saint's will that his nation followed Roman Catholic law. But the two laws don't seem to agree with each other.

Also evident in this clash is the incompatibility of Sverrir's view of typological legitimacy with the Church's doctrine. While Sverrir's use of typology is rooted in the ecclesiastical tradition of historical exegesis, historical exegesis only worked when applied to events that had already become history. Determining what contemporary persons or events took on what, if any, typological qualities is impractical due to the necessity of knowing their ends in order to correlate them properly to biblical antitypes. Óláfr *helgi*, for example, did not take on his symbolic significance until after he died. In *Sverris saga*, Sverrir claims to know in his own time that he is typologically related to both David and Óláfr, and he wants the Church to treat him accordingly to the degree that they give him precedence over ecclesiastical law, something the Church cannot be expected to do.

*Sverris saga*'s account of ecclesiastical opposition to Sverrir's reign gives ample material for understanding the historical Sverrir's desire to rule over the Norwegian Church, but further motivation is revealed in other historical sources. In his book on Sverrir, Claus Krag prints an excerpt from one of Bishop Eiríkr's letters to Pope Clement III in which he reports Sverrir had approached him to ask him to crown him.<sup>97</sup> This is an odd move, for being crowned by the Church suggests symbolically that the Church has the authority to grant the king his crown, exactly the opposite of the scenario that the literary Sverrir desires. Yet this was an established practice in Europe at the time, and it symbolized the king's divine appointment. Even Charlemagne had allowed himself to be

---

<sup>96</sup> *SvS.*, 177-179

<sup>97</sup> Claus Krag, *Sverre : Norges største middelalderkonge*, (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2005), 151.

crowned by the pope, however reluctantly.<sup>98</sup> But Eiríkr refused to crown Sverrir on the grounds that the young king was a usurper.<sup>99</sup>

Krag suggests two possible reasons that the saga writer neglected to include this detail. The first is that if it were included, then the resulting conflict would appear to be Sverrir's retaliation, and therefore the result of Sverrir's provocation. This would have had counteracted the saga's propagandistic goals. The second is that the saga writer might have been unaware that Sverrir ever made any such request, or simply neglected to mention it due to its insignificance.<sup>100</sup>

I propose a third reason. Because Eiríkr's refusal to take part in Sverrir's coronation would have been humiliating to Sverrir and would, more importantly, also have deprived him of the important symbolic value of ecclesiastical approval, Sverrir had to find another way to assert his legitimacy, and settled on establishing a typological image for himself during his life rather than leaving the task to future historians. As a biblical king and a type of Christ, Sverrir would need an ecclesiastical figure to crown him only as a formality, for God had already appointed him, much as God appointed David through Samuel long before David was officially recognized as king of Israel.<sup>101</sup> To embrace Eiríkr's rejection of his request would be to concede that he required the clergy's blessing to become king and, consequently, to disprove his status as the Lord's anointed. In contrast, when he coerces Nikolas to crown him, saying that he knows of the priest's rebellion against him, he again reverses the roles of the priest and the king, for he creates a scenario in which the clergy owes his repentance to the king, showing that Sverrir is the superior moral authority.<sup>102</sup> The narrative therefore clearly sets up Sverrir as spiritually higher ranking than the Church while still preserving the formality of having them place the crown on his head.

---

<sup>98</sup> Samuel Epes Turner, trans., *Einhard: The Life of Charlemagne* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1881), <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/einhard.asp/> (accessed July 6th, 2012), ch. 28.

<sup>99</sup> Krag, 151

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> David is crowned king twice: once in Hebron over the house of Judah (II Samuel 2) where he rules for seven years before being crowned in Jerusalem (II Samuel 5) where he establishes his fortress at Zion.

<sup>102</sup> SvS., 188-189

This explains Sverrir's decision to commission his own saga, for the story of his life needed to make clear his divine significance to prove to future generations that he was in the right. If history remembered Sverrir as a divinely anointed figure of Old Testament proportions, then the contemporary Church should appear less significant in comparison to him, proving it corrupt and unjust when opposing him and repentant when acknowledging his God-granted position.

It is therefore very important that in the saga, Sverrir cites Bishop Eiríkr's offenses against the old law in their climactic debate over private chapels, for if the reader can be convinced of Sverrir's superiority over the Church and of the severity of the bishop's offenses, then Sverrir will appear to be in the right in his conflict against them. He accuses Eiríkr of having more bodyguards than what is legal under the old law, saying that nobody would attack him, and for having an unnecessarily large warship.<sup>103</sup> Sverrir's rhetoric here is very clever, for he not only reveals Eiríkr's violations of the law – albeit the law that best serves Sverrir's interests – but he picks particular laws that question Eiríkr's intentions. Why should an archbishop need such a large bodyguard? Sverrir's insistence that nobody would attack him hints either that the paranoia implied by having too many bodyguards is indicative of the bishop's knowledge of his own guilt, or that the bishop does not put the appropriate amount of trust in the king, who is supposed to be the defender of the Church. Sverrir also points out that Eiríkr used his warship to help Magnús and Erlingr attack him at Hattarhamar, reminding his listeners that the bishop once dared to assault the Lord's anointed.<sup>104</sup> As if to prove the worth of Sverrir's accusations, following his banishment, Eiríkr flees to stay with the Danish archbishop whose name is coincidentally, yet conveniently, Absalon, the same as that of David's rebellious son who leads a civil war against his father. As further proof of the sinfulness of his rebellion, Eiríkr goes blind, and according to II Samuel, the blind were not permitted within the house of David.<sup>105</sup>

The timing of Sverrir's speech against immoderate consumption of alcohol also gives some indication of his moral superiority over the clergy, for the drunken riots in

---

<sup>103</sup> SvS., 177-178

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

Bergen that prompt Sverrir's speech happen in the wake of the Kuflungs' occupation of the town. The Kuflungs' invasion of the town is accompanied by several ill omens that indicate divine opposition to their regime. When they first arrive, they interrupt and bring an abrupt end to high mass. When they chase Askel, the man in charge of the town, into a church, a rock mysteriously, or providentially, falls from the tower and kills one of them, and when Askel is hiding in the tower, the cross at the altar begins to bleed.<sup>106</sup> It is true that the wine that causes the drunkenness is brought by merchants rather than priests, and it is also true that the Kuflungs' presence in the town does not necessarily prove that the rampant alcoholism was their responsibility, but taken together with these signs, it seems probable that the author intended an accusatory reading to be easy. When the drunkenness begins, the wine is said to be so plentiful that it was "no dearer than ale".<sup>107</sup> This word choice implies that the wine should be held dear, which is probably telling of its importance. On the one hand, it could easily be said that the scarcity of grapes in Scandinavia made wine a valuable commodity, and that this has no more significance. But taken together with other subtexts in *Sverris saga*, it is not unreasonable that the "dearness" of wine also relates to its religious significance as part of the Eucharist. After the Kuflung occupation, wine has lost its sanctity to the occupants of Bergen so much that it is treated as a more mundane intoxicant. When treated with such profanity, it leads to drunkenness and a loss of reason and wisdom, as discussed above. Only Sverrir, the Lord's anointed, is able to return the wine to sanctity and the town to civility.

### *Sverrir's Dreams*

The dreams in *Sverris saga* have received a good bit of scholarly attention due to both their abnormality and their originality. Lars Lönnroth has commented that most dreams in Old Norse literature "warn of coming disasters, and they typically contain deadly beasts, ogres, fetches, and other horrifying creatures, which are also likely to appear in folklore and pagan myths."<sup>108</sup> It is safe to say that they seldom lay the grounds

---

<sup>106</sup> SvS., 157

<sup>107</sup> "... svá at þá var í Björgyn eigi dýrra vín en mungát." (SvS. 158)

<sup>108</sup> Lars Lönnroth, "Sverrir's Dreams," *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York; 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> August, 2006, vol.2*, eds. McKinnell, John, David

for the dreamer's ideology of kingship. Sverrir's dreams, in contrast, often predict his victories in his royal career and present symbolic images that promote his claims to the throne and of his divine legitimacy, and come not only before disasters, but rather are scattered about the saga and form an important part of Sverrir's narrative rhetoric.

The fact that Sverrir has such remarkable dreams departs from the saga's Davidic portrayal of him, for the books of Samuel make no mention of David having predictive dreams. In this he is more similar to Joseph, who is renowned not only for having prescient dreams, but also for being able to interpret the dreams of others. Like Sverrir, he is portrayed as the Lord's anointed, and also like Sverrir, his earliest dreams foretell his rise to greatness. It is understandable that Sverrir should want to emulate Joseph in this way, for in medieval society the Church was seen as the link between God and the people, and if Sverrir wished to be above the Church in any meaningful way, he had to forge some sort of spiritual link between himself and the almighty apart from the Church to show that he was not only divinely anointed, but also had some way of comprehending the more immediate will of God. While David speaks with God on several occasions in the books of Samuel, for Sverrir to have dreams like Joseph is a much more powerful narrative illustration of his knowledge of God's will, especially in a literary culture that did make use of dreams, if normally for different purposes. Furthermore, for Sverrir to claim that he had conversed in an audible fashion probably would not have been considered as credible.

In his first recorded dream, Sverrir dreams that he is a great bird whose wings stretch over all of Norway, representing that he will one day rule the country. When he wakes, Sverrir claims not to know what the dream means, but guesses that it indicates that he will have power of some kind. He consults a wise man named Einarr, who guesses that it must indicate that Sverrir will become archbishop, a prospect that Sverrir finds unlikely because, in his opinion, he is unsuited to be a priest.<sup>109</sup> Since the archbishop and the king are the only two positions whose "wings" would stretch over all of Norway, Sverrir's doubt that he would be a suitable archbishop create the very obvious implication that he will become king. In this case, the failure of a man so wise as Einarr to foresee this is

---

Ashurst, and Donata Kick (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 603.

<sup>109</sup> *SvS.*, 6

indicative of just how unlikely a contestant for the crown Sverrir is, increasing his resemblance to the folk-tale hero paradigm that Ármann describes. But taking care to note Sverrir's later desire to govern both Church and state, then we need not discredit Einarr's wisdom so much, for in a sense he is right. Sverrir does come to function as the archbishop, but he does so as king.

Joseph also has dreams with connotations of power early in his story. In the first, he and his brothers are harvesting wheat, and each collects one sheave, after which his brother's sheaves all bow down to his. The second is similar: Joseph dreams that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars, representative of his parents and his brothers, bow down to him.<sup>110</sup> Both predict that Joseph will come to rule over his family members, which he does. After rising to prominence in Egypt, his family falls victim to famine and come as refugees to Egypt where Joseph does indeed rule over them.<sup>111</sup> It is also noteworthy that both Sverrir and Joseph are ridiculed for their dreams.<sup>112</sup>

Apart from the Samuel dream, discussed above, the dream that has the most impact on Sverrir's connection to David is not one of Sverrir's own dreams, but the one that his mother had shortly before he was born. In it, Gunnhildr dreams that she is in the upper room of the house and in labor. Her midwife cries out, "Gunnhildr mín, þú hefir fæddan undarlígan burð ok ógurlígan sýnum," three times.<sup>113</sup> When she asks the midwife what horrible thing she has given birth to, she learned that it is a shining white stone, shooting sparks, and hot as a forge.<sup>114</sup> Lönnroth has found analogues to this in William of Malmesbury's *Chronicle of the King's of England*, in which King Athelstan's mother dreams that the moon shines out of her body and illuminates all of England, and in Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, in which Alexander's mother dreamed that a thunderbolt struck her womb, and a flame leapt from it that travelled all around before going out.<sup>115</sup> This, he concludes, surely indicates that Gunnhildr's dream should be interpreted along the same lines.

---

<sup>110</sup> Genesis 37

<sup>111</sup> Genesis 41-46

<sup>112</sup> SvS., 6; Genesis 37; Lönnroth, p. 605

<sup>113</sup> SvS., 4-5

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Lönnroth, pp.604-605

Certainly Lönnroth is right and Gunnhildr's dream is analogous to others of its ilk, but it also contains an extra innovation in the image of the stone. In the first place, Lönnroth notes that sparkling white stones and gems are associated with divinity and spirituality in Christian literature.<sup>116</sup> Secondly, Anselm Salzer cites a kenning used by Isidore of Seville that identifies Mary as the sling of David.<sup>117</sup> The idea is that in the Bible, David's sling was a type of Mary, and therefore the stone from David's sling that killed Goliath was a type of Christ defeating sin.<sup>118</sup> By giving birth to a stone, Gunnhildr becomes analogous to a sling launching a stone into the world. By extension, her son's reign should bear a typological resemblance to Christ's, a matter discussed previously.

Sverrir's most disturbing dream occurs the night before his defeat of Jarl Erlingr the battle of Niðarós, though it is not reported in the saga until after.<sup>119</sup> In it, Sverrir is awakened from his sleep by a mysterious figure that tells him to rise and follow him.<sup>120</sup> He leads him to a fire where the body of a man is being roasted, and he commands him to eat. Sverrir is initially hesitant to obey, saying that he has never before eaten any unclean thing and was unwilling to now. But the mysterious figure tells him that he must eat, for it is the will of "He who governs all things," (*sá er ǫllu ræðr*) and Sverrir obeys, finding that the more he eats, the more ravenous he becomes.<sup>121</sup> But when he reaches the head, the voice commands him to stop eating and, though just as reluctant to stop as he was to begin, Sverrir obeys. Following his victory at Niðarós, Sverrir theorizes that the body was Jarl Erlingr's, and that by eating it in his dream, he foresaw that he would defeat him in battle the following day. The head, he believes, must have represented King Magnús, who escapes the battle to fight another day.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> "Maria funda utilis, per quam David Goliath destruit," in: Anselm Salzer, *Die Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens in der deutschen Literatur und lateinischen Hymnenpoesie des Mittelalters: Mit Berücksichtigung der patristischen Literatur* (Linz: Feichtinger, 1893), 488.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *SvS.*, 66-67

<sup>120</sup> Lars Lönnroth suggests that the figure is an angel (Lönnroth, 605), but this is not clear from the text.

<sup>121</sup> *SvS.*, 66

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

This dream bears what must be a more than coincidental resemblance to a biblical dream of culinary confusion. In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Peter has a vision of a great sheet filled with animals, reptiles, and birds, being let down by its four corners from heaven and hears a voice commanding him to rise, kill and eat. Like Sverrir, St. Peter refuses on the grounds that he has never before eaten anything unclean, but the voice commands him to do so anyway, saying that God has made the animals clean.<sup>123</sup> Following the vision, a Roman centurion named Cornelius invites St. Peter to his house to eat with him, but Peter knows that Jewish dogma forbids him to eat with Gentiles. He concludes that the dream, in which he was permitted to eat unclean food, must have meant that he is permitted to associate with unclean people, a change in dogma that allows the Church to encompass the Jews and the Romans alike.<sup>124</sup>

Sverrir's resemblance to St. Peter is, of course, a useful piece of propaganda, for St. Peter too is the Lord's anointed; in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells him that he is the rock upon which he will build the Church and says that he will give him the keys to the kingdom of heaven.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, Sverrir wishes to have the power of the archbishop so that he can control the Norwegian Church, much as St. Peter, as the first bishop of Rome and, therefore, the first pope, had control over the Roman Church, and therefore the entire Church. It may also be useful for Sverrir's purposes that the vision of St. Peter's that his dream mirrors occurs shortly before St. Peter's first significant inclusion of the Romans into the Church. The first recorded conversion of a Roman centurion is, in a way, a harbinger of the eventual conversion of the Roman Empire, a sort of victory through evangelism that eventually leads to Rome becoming the geographic center of Christianity as a sort of new Zion. Sverrir's dream occurs the night before he gains a military victory over Jarl Erlingr and takes hold of Niðarós, the geographic center of the Norwegian Church, where he too builds a new Sión.

None of this does anything to ameliorate the dream's unnerving use of cannibalistic imagery, for St. Peter does not dream of eating Cornelius. Lars Lönnroth believes that the cannibalism is neither Christian nor heathen, but must instead be "the

---

<sup>123</sup> Acts 10

<sup>124</sup> Acts 10

<sup>125</sup> Matthew 16

product of Sverrir's own feverish imagination," though he also suggests that other texts may have similar metaphorical images of the king as the head of a body.<sup>126</sup> But the idea that any image in Sverrir's reported dreams would be concocted entirely at whim without the intention of conveying some propagandistic meaning would not seem entirely consistent with other elements in the saga. But in the introduction to his French translation of the saga, Torfi Tulinius shows that the image of eating one's enemies exists in other medieval texts and, furthermore, has religious value for Sverrir. Citing a study by Philippe Buc titled, "The Dogma of the Eucharist," Torfi explains that the imagery of bishops eating and digesting infidels represented incorporating them into Christian society.<sup>127</sup> The dream, therefore, predicts Sverrir's assimilation of the entire kingdom, represented by the body without King Magnús as its head, into the new Christian era that Sverrir ushers into Norway. This is consistent with his resemblance to St. Peter who, following his vision of eating, begins the assimilation of the Roman Empire into Christian society. It is also noteworthy that the image of eating one's enemies is associated with the clergy, and Sverrir seeks ecclesiastical as well as royal authority.

Sverrir's final dream takes place when he lies ill on his deathbed. Like his cannibalistic dream, it involves an unnamed figure. But when he reports this dream to Pétur *svarti*, he tells him that it is a figure that has appeared to him often in the past.<sup>128</sup> This would mean that the figure is some sort of guardian spirit – perhaps a guardian angel or patron saint – Sverrir's link to the Almighty, making its final appearance before Sverrir's death, much as *fylgjur* do in other sagas.<sup>129</sup> The identity of the figure is, of course, entirely unclear. Lönnroth assumes it is the same figure that appeared in the cannibalistic dream, which, though probable, is not expressed in the saga.<sup>130</sup> The dream foretells Sverrir's impending death with its admonition that he prepare for a rising.<sup>131</sup> Though Sverrir claims

---

<sup>126</sup> Lönnroth, 611

<sup>127</sup> Torfi Tulinius, trans., *Le Saga de Sverrir, Roi de Norvège* (Paris: Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres, 2010), 32.

<sup>128</sup> *SvS.*, 278

<sup>129</sup> Lönnroth, 602

<sup>130</sup> Whether or not the two unnamed figures are the same, the fact that Sverrir says that the figure has appeared to him many times before also raises the question of whether the figure could be Samuel or Óláfr, but this question is unanswerable.

<sup>131</sup> *SvS.*, 278

that the dream seems ambiguous to him, its meaning is obvious to the reader even before Pétr *svarti* explains it to the king: Sverrir must prepare to rise again, meaning either that he will get well shortly or die and rise again at the last judgement.

## CHAPTER 5

## Another Interpretation

As we have seen, far from reducing the saga's meaning or suppressing Sverrir's personality, typological interpretation allows a fuller and more detailed vision of Sverrir and his rise to power by linking him to David and other biblical figures. Politics and biblical exegesis are intricately interwoven in medieval political discourse, and *Sverris saga*, being just such a discourse, is no exception. Nevertheless, the saga's portrayal of Sverrir does not always appear entirely positive. As is often the case with Old Testament heroes, many unflattering elements of Sverrir's life that could contribute to a negative reading of his character are included, adding to the character's complexity and at times creating a sense of moral ambiguity. While it is probable that Karl Jónsson, under Sverrir's instruction, did not intend for Sverrir to be seen as anything less than the ideal king, the meta-Grýla author's motives cannot be described with any such certainty. It is true that the continuator also invokes biblical imagery and narrative patterns, but as we shall see, these do not necessarily demand a positive reading of Sverrir and, in some cases, can as easily be used to create a negative portrayal of the controversial king as they are to create the more positive image described above.<sup>132</sup> I want to entertain the possibility that the continuator of *Sverris saga* deliberately created an ambiguous narrative that could allow a positive or a negative reading of Sverrir that, in effect, asks the reader to judge Sverrir him or herself. Because the positive reading is discussed above, the negative reading will be examined here.

In order to entertain such a theory, we must first address the fact that the saga does not mention the fact that Sverrir was never brought back into Catholic communion after his excommunication and Norway's papal interdict was not lifted until after Sverrir's death. Should the author have wanted to give the fullest possible view of Sverrir's moral ambiguity, this would ought to be a fundamental part of his biography. But there are at least two reasons it might not be included. The first is that the author might not have been aware of the fact, and there is certainly no reason to assume that he was. Indeed, given

---

<sup>132</sup> This furthers his similarity to biblical models, for most characters in the Old Testament, far from being idealized heroes, are depicted with the full complexity one would expect to see in fallen humanity.

that he was finishing a work started under Sverrir's own supervision for Sverrir's purposes, it could simply have been excluded from the information that was given to him, and it is not inconceivable that for similar reasons it was not a widely known fact. The second, though, is that he could have deliberately omitted it. This would be an understandable position if he finished the saga within the reigns of either of the Hákon I or Hákon II, Sverrir's son and grandson respectively, and neither king would have wanted a saga circulating that might have portrayed their ancestor as an enemy of the Church. But as a result for later readers is that the thought provoking nature of Sverrir's carefully constructed ambiguity is no longer hindered by the Pope's judgment, and the reader is forced to make up his or her own mind about whether or not Sverrir was a good king. Without it, Sverrir's other bad qualities, as well as the previously discussed good qualities, could take on more prominent roles.

The saga writer includes some events from Sverrir's life that do not seem speak well of Sverrir's character. The most noteworthy of these is his uneasy relationship with his alleged brother, Eiríkr. Eiríkr's first major involvement in the saga is when he undergoes an ordeal to prove that he is the son of King Sigurðr. When he requests Sverrir's permission to do this, Sverrir asks him to take the ordeal to prove both that he is the son of King Sigurðr and Sverrir's brother. But when the time comes, Eiríkr announces that he will undertake the ordeal to prove his paternity alone and no one else's.<sup>133</sup> By doing this, Eiríkr causes the reader, and quite probably many onlookers as well, to question Sverrir's legitimacy once again, for when Eiríkr's paternity claim is proven true, we cannot help but wonder whether or not he would have had the same results had he agreed to take the trial for both himself and Sverrir. We are also left to wonder why Sverrir did not simply take the ordeal himself. It seems that in trying to have someone else take it on his behalf, his own lack of confidence has been betrayed. This is made all the worse for Sverrir for now there is not only another royal heir, but one whose legitimacy is more certain than Sverrir's.

Sverrir is aware early on that Eiríkr could be a threat, for when Eiríkr first asks his permission to take the ordeal, Sverrir makes him promise that should he pass the ordeal, he

---

<sup>133</sup> SvS., 93

will not try to take the crown from him.<sup>134</sup> The threat is made all the more real when Eiríkr undergoes the ordeal, for he does so by carrying a brand through the Jordan River in the Holy Land near Jerusalem.<sup>135</sup> The reader will be quick to see the typological significance here, for the Jordan is also where Jesus was baptized, and where a voice from Heaven proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God.<sup>136</sup> By proving his paternity in the same place that the King of Kings proved his, Eiríkr shows that his actions carry as much typological weight as Sverrir's dreams, and he could just as easily use them to lay claim to the throne. Though we could perhaps attribute it to brotherly love, we can more easily see Sverrir's fear of Eiríkr's potential rivalry as the reason for his decision to keep the son of Sigurðr *munni* in his personal bodyguard where he could watch him closely.

Though the saga writer generally speaks well of Eiríkr, two chapters before his death he begins to act in a way that may indeed indicate that he is beginning to consider the very insurrection that Sverrir seems to fear. He asks Sverrir for a higher title and for some share in the realm.<sup>137</sup> After Sverrir refuses, Eiríkr takes a large number of his followers to plunder in the Baltic, and then to Sweden, where Eiríkr wins the favor of King Knut.<sup>138</sup> These two things, his popularity among Sverrir's followers and his independent diplomatic relations, show that his power is growing, something that must be worrisome to Sverrir. Upon his return, Sverrir gives him his own land in Vík and grants him the title of Jarl.<sup>139</sup> In doing so, he grants Eiríkr's earlier requests, acknowledging his growing influence and possibly even showing a concern of what the consequences could be should he not grant Eiríkr these requests. It is not long after this that Eiríkr, his wife, and his son all die of illness, though the saga writer informs us that many suspect they were poisoned. Almost as if to suggest a suspect, he also writes that Sverrir takes back the Eiríkr's land for himself. Though he does not answer definitively whether or not Sverrir is responsible, he does leave the reader with sufficient reason to suspect the quality of Sverrir's character.

---

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Matthew 3

<sup>137</sup> *SvS.*, 172

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 173

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

The possibility that Sverrir is a murderer could be taken at first glance as his link to David's darker side, specifically as manifested in David's murder of Uriah the Hittite following his affair with Bathsheba. Though the circumstances of the two incidents are largely dissimilar, when simplified, they are both cases of (at least allegedly) divinely anointed kings revealing that they too are sinful by murdering trusted allies. To the reader who wishes to see Sverrir in a positive light, the fact that Sverrir's guilt is uncertain could be reason enough not to consider the matter too seriously, but a justification along the lines of, "well, even David committed a murder," could be sufficient to excuse the king. But on further examination, there are several very important differences between the two murders that weaken any claims made in Sverrir's favor. This first is of course the fact that the reader remains uncertain of Sverrir's guilt, meaning that if he is responsible for the murder, he has gotten away with it. David, in contrast, is confronted by the prophet Nathan.<sup>140</sup> Then comes what the part of the story that the author of *Konungs Skuggsjá* sees as the most important: David repents of both his affair with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, and displays a genuine remorse for both that is made all the worse when his child with Bathsheba is nearing death.<sup>141</sup> Perhaps the pro-Sverrir reader might see Sverrir's lack of repentance as verification that Sverrir is not guilty, for if he is, then surely the type of David would exhibit remorse just as David did. But the reader unconvinced of Sverrir's innocence might argue instead that Sverrir's failure to ever confess his guilt is proof of his failure to emulate David's most desirable qualities, those that demonstrate why he is acknowledged in the Bible as a man after God's own heart.<sup>142</sup> This may lead the reader to wonder whether Sverrir's failure to repent as David did might preclude him from being the Lord's anointed as David was. But here we can draw our first comparison to Saul, for though the connection is not strong, Sverrir's treatment of Eiríkr bears a closer resemblance to Saul's treatment of David than it does to David's treatment of Uriah, excepting the fact that Saul's attempts to kill David were unsuccessful. Both kings give indications of being jealous of their captains and keep them close to ensure their loyalty, and both are compelled to grant them honors as a result of their popularity.

---

<sup>140</sup> II Samuel 12

<sup>141</sup> Brenner, *Speculum Regale*, 181-183; II Samuel 12

<sup>142</sup> I Samuel 13:14

Sverrir's dreams also provide a great deal of information that appears to be supportive of Sverrir, but on closer examination can be interpreted as either favorable or questioning toward him. As is noted above, the Samuel dream is recounted by the narrator in third person, and thus does not leave open the possibility to be considered one of the literary Sverrir's fabrications. This can be said of only two of Sverrir's dreams, the other being that of his cannibalistic feast on Jarl Erlingr's charred corpse. His dream in which he becomes a great bird that stretches over Norway and that in which he fights alongside Óláfr *helgi* are qualified by the narrator with "hann sagði þann draum einn..." and "með þeim hætti hefir Sverrir sagðan þenna draum..." respectively.<sup>143</sup> He relates a final dream, in which he foresees his resurrection, in direct speech on his deathbed to Pétr *svarti*.

While it is likely that Karl Jónsson did not intend this decision to have any major thematic consequences, if Grýla is glossed with a mindset that is less supportive of Sverrir than Karl's and taken together with the dreams in meta-Grýla, then it is possible to question Sverrir's honesty when he reports most of his dreams. It is clear from his education that, willing or unwilling, he is at least capable of fabricating dreams that make clever use of learned material to support his claims to the crown, and it is clear from his behavior throughout the saga that he has the ambition and motivation to do so. For while Sverrir almost certainly believes in his own right to the throne, his refusal to undergo trial by ordeal to determine the reality of his parentage reveals a certain degree of insecurity in the legitimacy of his birthright by any interpretation of the saga. It is not unrealistic to wonder if the same insecurity caused him to worry that his followers would not believe in his divine appointment, creating in his mind the need to fabricate more dreams as proof.

The two dreams that remain uncontestable can now take on somewhat different connotations. The first of these, the Samuel dream, is the more relevant to matters Davidic, though in order to consider how this could be interpreted if Sverrir's claims are questioned, it is important to remember that David is not the only king Samuel anointed. Saul too was anointed by Samuel, and Saul too, however ineffectual a ruler, is regarded as the Lord's anointed, for which reason even David dares not lay a finger on him.

In his dream, Sverrir arrives in town to find that everyone is looking for a king's son. In the book of Samuel, Saul is first anointed not long after the narrator has informed

---

<sup>143</sup> SvS., 6, 8

the reader that the nation of Israel is looking for a king when he arrives in a town where God told Samuel to wait for him. Saul's reaction upon his first meeting with Samuel and discovery that he is destined for kingship is to say that he hails from the smallest of Israel's tribes, Benjamin, and that his is the smallest clan within that tribe,<sup>144</sup> a piece of self-scrutiny not unlike Sverrir's statement that he is a poor and lowly man from the outer skerries.<sup>145</sup>

But the fact that Sverrir has these dreams at all makes him quite different from Saul, for one of the noteworthy flaws in Saul's relationship with God is Saul's "repeated exclusion from predictive knowledge".<sup>146</sup> Even supposing that Sverrir fabricated most of the dreams to perpetuate the belief that he was divinely inspired, the fact that a few of his dreams were authentic would seem to separate him from Saul in this regard. Or does it? Of all of the dreams that Sverrir purports to have, he is only responsible for interpreting one, the cannibalistic dream, and that, as discussed above, could have been a misinterpretation. For each of the others – the bird dream, the Óláfr dream, the Samuel dream, and the death dream – Sverrir is ignorant of the dreams' meanings and seeks the opinions of others. In the event that Sverrir is a type of David, it can be assumed that his ignorance is the product of his abundant humility, which prevents him from entertaining the possibility of his own greatness.<sup>147</sup> In the event that he is not a type of David, then he could be feigning the same such ignorance in the cases of those dreams that are not fabricated. But for any of the dreams that are authentic, Sverrir's ignorance could be the author's attempt to connect Sverrir to Saul in a way that accommodates and explains the historical Sverrir's tales of fantastical dreams.

In the Bible, Saul's frustration with his lack of predictive knowledge drives him to seek supernatural guidance outside of the more religiously acceptable methods by consulting a witch in Endor, outside of Israel and the covenant community. It is an event that reveals a somewhat tragic hypocrisy in Saul, for it was he who drove all sorts of

---

<sup>144</sup> I Samuel 9

<sup>145</sup> SvS., 153

<sup>146</sup> Alter, 56

<sup>147</sup> In this case, we can assume that his ability to interpret the cannibalistic dream is the result of the fact that he won the battle before interpreting, or indeed even reporting, the dream, and thus the dream's meaning was simply revealed to him in fact.

sorcerers out of Israel previously in an attempt to cultivate the righteousness of the community, but after all of his efforts, he is unable to obtain the answers he seeks and feels compelled to go outside of the people of God to find them. When he does, the witch conjures up Samuel's ghost, which predicts that Saul will die soon. Sverrir too is told of his impending death by an apparition, and because comment that the unnamed figure is one he has seen before, and because we know that Samuel appears in a past dream, we might even wonder if both kings learn of their impending deaths from the same deceased prophet.

Saul's reign is flawed in many ways, but one of the king's defining characteristics is that he is prone to temperamental outbursts. On several occasions when it would seem that Saul and David have made amends and are back in each other's good graces, Saul loses his temper suddenly and tries to kill David with his spear.<sup>148</sup> It is not as easy to pin this accusation on Sverrir, but with a certain reading, it is not hard to imagine Sverrir's final words in the investiture argument with Eiríkr – that all of the bishop's excess bodyguards will be outlawed, have their safety and property forfeited, and be slain on sight – to be the products of a temper tantrum.<sup>149</sup> The same can easily be said of his harsh reaction when the papal legate refuses to crown him.<sup>150</sup>

One of Saul's most shameful moments is his murder of the priests of Nod, described briefly above. Because the Hebrew members of Saul's retinue are unwilling to lay a finger on the priests of the Lord, Saul entrusts the task of execution to Doeg, an Edomite who, as a non-Hebrew, was something of a political undesirable.<sup>151</sup> One can easily draw a correlation to Sverrir's support from political undesirables, the *Birkibeinar*, in his war against the Church-supporters, the *Baglar*.

This would turn Bishop Eiríkr into one of the saga's more sympathetic figures, for rather than being the headstrong villainous clergyman trying to prevent the Lord's anointed from taking his rightful place as ruler of Norway, he instead becomes a figure of religious reason who, much to his peril, is chosen to be archbishop against the will of a powerful king whose policies could threaten to defy the rules of investiture laid out in the

---

<sup>148</sup> I Samuel ch.18

<sup>149</sup> SvS., 178-179

<sup>150</sup> SvS., 188

<sup>151</sup> I Samuel 22

relatively recent Concordat of Worms. The righteousness of Eiríkr's character is revealed when Sverrir opposes his appointment because he is too generous, a complaint that also speaks poorly of Sverrir. That Eiríkr's predecessor, Eysteinn, asks Sverrir's forgiveness on his deathbed could show that Sverrir's pressure on the Church is so great that even the archbishop's fidelity to Rome gave way. This would be the narrator's way of showing how daunting a task Eiríkr has before him. If Eiríkr is unsuccessful, then Sverrir's rule can diminish the ecclesiastical integrity of the relatively new archdiocese of Niðarós. Furthermore, Sverrir's insistence on tying himself to Óláfr *helgi*, the founder of the original diocese at Niðarós and the nation's patron saint, in opposition to the established Church smacks of heresy.

It is also hard not to notice the brief similarity between Eiríkr and Samuel. For just as Eiríkr's predecessor is shown to be a failure shortly before Eiríkr becomes archbishop, so Samuel's predecessor, Eli, is revealed to be a disappointment to God not long before God reveals that he will appoint Samuel to replace him, though his takes place long before Saul enters the story.<sup>152</sup>

Also of interest for this interpretation is the matter of which model of kingship Sverrir most resembles. In the event that Sverrir is meant to be understood as somewhat delusional, many, though not all, of the saga's the more religious legitimacy arguments that would depict Sverrir as a *rex iustus* are made questionable by the fact that they are Sverrir's assertions. While this would not result in so great a change as to reclassify Sverrir into the traditional Nordic warrior kingship model, it would imply that the vestigial remnants of that form of kingship have a greater sway over Sverrir's kingship than in the previous interpretation. In this case, we are once again reminded of Saul, for while Saul is the first of the Israelite kings and is, like Sverrir, legitimized by his status as Lord's anointed, it is also apparent when Samuel first discovers him that he fits the expectations for the earlier Old Testament warlords like Joshua, Sampson, or Gideon, for he is said to be very strong, and to stand "head and shoulders" above everyone else in Israel. In this he is sharply contrasted to David, for when Samuel ventures to the house of Jesse to find the new king, he finds each of David's strapping older brothers to be appealing candidates for the kingship before God reveals David to him, and while David is described as being

---

<sup>152</sup> I Samuel 2

handsome, it is clear that in terms of physical prowess he is unassuming in comparison to his brothers. Thus Saul, though he is the first to hold a new office of leadership, shows many of the tendencies of the older office, just as Sverrir shows many of the characteristics of an older Norse “gang-leader” king though he represents an important step in the development of the *rex iustus* in Scandinavia.

Saul is perhaps best remembered for his opposition to and eventual replacement by David. To this Sverrir’s life shows no parallel, though he need not imitate Saul perfectly in order to be a type of Saul, just as in more conventional interpretations he is not a perfect imitation of David, despite the parallels he highlights in his speeches. Yet in this case, the absence of a Davidic figure to replace Sverrir could also have significance for the text’s interpretation. It is unclear in the biblical books of Samuel what Israel’s fate would have been had Saul reigned into old age, but his violent tantrums, antagonism to the priesthood, and occasional decision to ignore the pertinent Philistine threat in order to chase David, who swears not to hurt him, do not give much cause for optimism. Norway, on the other hand, does have to deal with the results of Sverrir’s rule – the country is engulfed in civil war and put under papal interdict, and its king is excommunicated.

The second uncontestably valid dream, the cannibalistic dream, would retain the same primary meaning – that Sverrir would triumph over Erlingr but Magnus would escape – but its grotesqueness can now take a more prominent role as well. Though Sverrir is initially reluctant to eat human flesh, his willingness and gluttony grow and by the time he reaches the head, he is more unwilling to stop than he was to start.<sup>153</sup> This growing enthusiasm for such taboo behavior is a dark echo of Sverrir’s character development in the saga so far, for he was initially hesitant to seek the kingship, driven ultimately by the coercion of the *Birkibeinar*, but his continued fighting, his opposition from the Church, and his claim to the authority of bishop, jarl, and king, reveal a gluttony for power that grows throughout the saga.

This raises the question of the identity of the unnamed figure that leads Sverrir to Erlingr’s corpse and instructs him to eat. Having already drawn the possible connection between this unnamed figure and the apparition of Samuel that appears to Saul in Endor, we might also note that in early Christian exegesis, there was some controversy over

---

<sup>153</sup> SvS., 66

whether that spirit was truly Samuel's ghost or an apparition from the devil. Though theologians may have had their minds made up one way or the other, it is easy to imagine that for many students and other educated people, the matter might have been less transparent. On the one hand, assuming the spirit's authenticity would be more consistent with the narrative itself, but on the other hand, the possibility that a sorceress has such power that she can summon a spirit from what should be its eternal destination in Heaven or Hell would be complicating for Catholic eschatology.<sup>154</sup> If the author of meta-Grýla was familiar with the books of Samuel, as seems likely, then he most likely would have been familiar with this theological puzzle as well. Thus, his creation of an unnamed spirit figure with an indiscernible identity could be a deliberate attempt to create a figure that would give rise to a similar amount of theological questioning.

If we consider that this figure could be the same as that Sverrir claims to see in his final dream, whom he also says has appeared to him many times before and has never led him astray,<sup>155</sup> then we know that Sverrir at least sees the figure as sent by God, perhaps an angel or a saint. But in the event that Sverrir is wrong and the figure is darker, perhaps even demonic, in which case we are immediately reminded of Sverrir's own observation that Saul too was plagued by an unclean spirit.<sup>156</sup> If the unnamed figure is an unclean spirit asking the aspiring king to eat unclean food, then here it is the personification of temptation for Sverrir. Notice that in this episode, Sverrir very clearly experience gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins, and is tempted with taboo eating, echoing a key element of the first temptation in the Bible, that in the Garden of Eden.

If this is the case, what are we to make of the dark figure's claim that it is the will of "He who governs all things" that Sverrir eat? The simplest answer would be that, good or bad, the figure is in fact sent by God. We must remember that in the book of Job, God allows Satan himself to torment the titular character, indicating that tempting figures operate with some degree of divine permission if it is God's will to test his followers. But here it seems that the situation's ambiguity is integral to its construction. Notice that the

---

<sup>154</sup> Peter Holmes, trans., *A Treatise on the Soul (Tertullian)* (Buffalo: University of Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0310.htm/> (accessed July 27, 2012).

<sup>155</sup> SvS., 278

<sup>156</sup> SvS. 152

unnamed figure does not say either that it is specifically the will of God or indicate in this particular sentence just what Sverrir is supposed to eat. The obscurity of this statement combined with the secrecy of the dark figure's identity could indicate that Sverrir's dream is a sort of theological riddle. Biblical tempting figures are known for twisting the words of the Lord, as is evident both in Eden and in the temptation of Christ in Matthew's gospel, and a riddle seems to be the proper result of such twisting if it occurs in Norse literature. Certainly the Bible does include several instances where the Lord wills his followers to eat, most memorably at the Last Supper, where the meal does, through transubstantiation, include a human body. Perhaps this dream is intended to have a dark anti-Eucharistic undertone. Thus both a dark interpretation and the victorious interpretation that Sverrir gives in the saga can be deduced, but only one can ultimately be right, and it is left to the reader to determine which. Perhaps Sverrir's reading is correct, but the reader knows that Sverrir is an easy target for devilish deluding, for he is so thoroughly convinced of his divine appointment, or at least desirous of being convinced, that he is unlikely to question the intentions of seemingly God-given dreams.

Sverrir's apparent resemblance to St. Peter would also not be lost in this reading, though now the contrast between them would be noteworthy. In the Bible, when St. Peter is commanded to eat, he refuses three times.<sup>157</sup> Though Peter recognizes that it is a divine voice commanding him – he addresses the voice as “Lord” – his conscience is clearly torn between his obligation to Old Testament law and his obedience to God, two things that he cannot fathom being contradictory. The dream is too paradoxical for St. Peter, and possibly the first century reader as well, to believe, but the three-fold repetition of St. Peter's resistance and the voice's reassurance serves as confirmation to the reader of the dream's holy validity. In contrast, Sverrir resists only once. Because of his conviction that he is the Lord's anointed, he is not as bothered by the apparent contradiction between old laws and present commands as St. Peter was, which shows that he is inadequate as a type of Peter, and too easily persuaded to engage in behavior that he initially found problematic to his conscience. We are also given a full account of Sverrir's gorging, whereas St. Luke never mentions whether or not St. Peter killed and ate before the

---

<sup>157</sup> Here, as in other places, the number three bears religious significance, seen most clearly in the Trinity.

menagerie was taken back up into heaven.<sup>158</sup> Thus by his flawed imitation, Sverrir becomes something of an anti-Peter, which is significant for this reading because St. Peter is the founder of the Church, whereas Sverrir threatens the future of the Church in Norway.

Also worth notice is that the orders that this possibly unclean spirit gives to Sverrir appear to be exactly the opposite of those that God gives to Saul before the battle of Gilboa. The unnamed figure commands Sverrir to eat, but then tells him to stop at the head, therefore not to defeat the entirety of Jarl Erlingr's army. Before the battle of Gilboa, God commands Saul to kill all of the Amalekites, sparing none, not even their livestock, but Saul disobeys and allows his followers to keep the livestock as spoils.<sup>159</sup> Both kings stop short of administering total defeat to their enemies, but in so doing, Sverrir obeys his tempter while Saul disobeys his God.

We must also take a moment to consider the value of the dreams that are related by the characters rather than the narrator, for their inclusion in the text means that the authors saw them as significant. In the event that they are lies, then their concoction by a usurper, no matter how creative, should indicate that they too have a darker reading possible, reflective (or indicative) of Sverrir's heresy.

Though not one of Sverrir's own dreams, Gunnhildr's dream has a very readily evident darker layer. For if Gunnhildr's giving birth to a stone has a Marian implication, then the dream comes dangerously close to being heretical, for while non-biblical figures can be types of biblical figures, to liken oneself too closely to the Mother of Christ and, by implication, to liken one's son to Christ, can be dangerous. Indeed, Sverrir's likening of himself to David shows some restraint, for by casting himself in the image of a type of Christ that Christian tradition already approved as orthodox establishes what we might call a safety barrier against the heresy of trying to be Christ. But this dream shows no such restraint, and Gunnhildr takes on the appearance of being "David's sling". This is particularly problematic, given that Gunnhildr's confession that Sverrir's father is not her husband means that she might be an adulteress, contrasting Mary who was a perpetual

---

<sup>158</sup> Acts, ch.10

<sup>159</sup> I Samuel, ch.15

virgin.<sup>160</sup> This could make her an anti-Marian figure, revealing the sinful circumstances that brought Sverrir about. It could, furthermore, make Sverrir himself an anti-Christian figure whose threat to the Norwegian Church prefigures the threat that the anti-Christ poses to the universal Church. Also, on a more practical level, much as other sagas use multiple generations of ancestors to foreshadow the protagonist's personality, so Gunnhildr's audacious claim foreshadows Sverrir's problematic, but somewhat less heretical, claims to the throne.

Sverrir's dream that he is a great bird whose wings stretch across all of Norway must also be seen as revealing something about Sverrir's character if it is a fabrication. But because it appears in the saga before Sverrir learns of his royal parentage and, therefore, may be lacking in proper motivation to fabricate a dream, we can also entertain the possibility that it too was valid. Perhaps this first dream is, in fact, more similar to dreams in other sagas and in Eddic poetry in which, according to Lönnroth, birds such as eagles, hawks, or ravens are symbolic of coming disasters.<sup>161</sup> If this is the case, then the ambiguous bird covering all of Norway with its wings could represent a coming disaster for the country that is Sverrir's rule. Even if we do not consider it more credible than the other dreams Sverrir relates himself, if Sverrir had fabricated the dream, it would still have an element of psychoanalytic foreshadowing of his growing ambition.

Thus we see that many of the elements of the saga that are traditionally understood as painting a positive image of Sverrir can also fairly easily be calling his character and legitimacy into question. This is perhaps more consistent with other historical sources which do not generally remember Sverrir fondly. By using imagery that can be interpreted in either way, the saga's continuator effectively asks the reader to decide for himself whether Sverrir was the Lord's anointed and the legitimate king of Norway, or a false-prophet. The use of biblical typology, then, does not oversimplify Sverrir's life into a mere morality tale, nor does it confine Sverrir's individuality to the imitation of sacral

---

<sup>160</sup> We need not fear too much for her soul, though, as we know that she took a pilgrimage to Rome to confess her sins, and her confession to Sverrir was part of her penance. I abstain from the conclusion that giving a confession to Sverrir might in this case be suggestive of the saint-like qualities that Sverrir takes on in the more positive interpretation, as it seems here too far-fetched.

<sup>161</sup> Lönnroth, 605

models. Rather, it helps to reveal the complexity of Sverrir's personality and adds depth the reader's understanding of the complex theological issues raised by such a larger-than-life character.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, I have given an overview of the various ways in which typology is used throughout *Sverris saga* to present the complex personality and political agenda of its titular character. I addressed first the usefulness of typological imagery for creating a political persona for Sverrir that was be rhetorically beneficial in his struggles first against Magnús and Jarl Erlingr, then against the various ecclesiastical factions that threatened his reign, by presenting Sverrir as the Lord's anointed king who is chosen by God to rule over Norway, standing without equals or superiors in the place of the king, the jarl, and the archbishop. I then discussed the possibility that, while Sverrir very definitely saw himself as a Norwegian David, the narrator did not share his enthusiasm, and may, in fact, have meant to portray Sverrir with a more uncertain tone more appropriate for such a controversial ruler.

For the historian, this raises interesting questions about the use of typological historiography in general. As discussed above, the literary Sverrir's apparent awareness of his own typological qualities is an uncommon trait in works of providential history, and it is more unusual still that much of the typological interpretation within the saga is done by Sverrir himself. Normally, historical figures within Christian history cannot see clearly what types they will resemble, for they do not know the ends of their own narratives, and it is the job of the historian and narrator to expound on the typological nature of the text's characters and events. But here the two have exchanged places and the narrator, who ought to be all knowing and fully aware of the logistics of God's plan in the historical narrative, is now uncharacteristically uncertain. This causes Sverrir's confidence in his divine appointment to appear laughable, and raises the poignant question of whether or not man is really capable of discerning the will of God in history.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Sverris saga*

Sverris saga in *Sverris Saga*. Ed. Þorleifur Hauksson. Íslenzk fornrit XXX, Reykjavík 2007.

*Other Medieval Texts*

Henderson, Earnest F., trans. "The Concordat of Worms," in *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, 408-409. London: George Bell and Sons, 1910.

Gildas. *De Excidio Britanniae; or, the Ruin of Britain*. Trans. Hugh Williams. Lampeter: Llanerch, 2006.

*Konungs Skuggsjá: Speculum Regale*. Kjøbenhavn. Edited by Finnur Jónsson. I Kommission I Den Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, 1920.

Marie de France. *Les Lais de Marie de France*, edited Jean Rychner. Paris: Libraire Honoré Champion, 1981.

*Speculum Regale: Ein altnorwegischer Dialog*. Edited by Brenner, Oscar. München: Christian Kaiser: 1881.

Turner, Samuel Epes, trans., *Einhard: The Life of Charlemagne*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1881. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/einhard.asp/> (accessed July 6th, 2012).

*Secondary Literature*

Alter, Robert. *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of I and II Samuel*, London: W.W. Norton & Company, inc., 1999.

Auerbach, Erich. "Typological Symbolism in Medieval Literature," in *Yale French Studies*, No. 9, *Symbol and Symbolism*. 3-10. New Haven: 1952.

Dodds, Marcus, trans. "City of God," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2. Edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.

Ármann Jakobsson. "Sinn eiginn smiður: Ævintýrið um Sverri konung," in *Skírnir* 179, 109-39. 2005.

Bagge, Sverre. *From Gang Leader to Lord's Anointed: Kingship in Sverris saga & Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, edited by Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht, and

- Gerd Wolfgang Weber. Odense: Odense University Press, 1996.
- Eusebius. *The Ecclesiastical History*. Edited by Kirsopp Lake, John Earnest, Leonard Oulton, and Hugh Jackson Lawlor. London: W. Heinemann, 1926.
- Fear, A.T. introduction to *Orosius: Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* Translated. by Orosius. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010.
- Gurevich, Aaron. "From Saga to Personality: Sverris Saga." in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, edited by Gísli Pálsson, 77-88. Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1992.
- Holmes, Peter, trans. *A Treatise on the Soul (Tertullian)*. Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885.  
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0310.htm/> (accessed July 27, 2012).
- Hanning, Robert W., *The Vision of History in Early Britain from Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. Robert W. Hanning (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).
- Krag, Claus. *Sverre : Norges største middelalderkonge*. Oslo: Aschehoug, 2005.
- Ljungqvist, Frederik Charpentier. "Kungaideologin i Sverris Saga." *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York; 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> August, 2006, vol.2*, edited by McKinnell, John, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, 583-592. Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006.
- Lönnroth, Lars. "Sverrir's Dreams." In *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York; 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> August, 2006, vol.2*, edited by McKinnell, John, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, 603-612. Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006.
- Marchand, James W "The Allegories in the Old Norse *Veraldar Saga*," in *Michigan Germanic Studies* 1. 109-118. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1975.
- Markus, Robert A. "History," in *Augustine through the ages; an Encyclopedia*. edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, 432-434. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.
- Salzer, Anselm. *Die Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens in der deutschen Literatur und lateinischen Hymnenpoesie des Mittelalters: Mit Berücksichtigung der patristischen Literatur*. Linz: Feichtinger, 1893.
- Schreiner, Johan. "Småstykker: Kong David i Sverres saga og Kongespeilet," in *Historisk Tidsskrift* 37, 22-24. Oslo: 1954.

- Teske, Roland J. 1985. "Vocans Temporales, Faciens Aeternos: St. Augustine on Liberation from Time". In: *Traditio*, Vol. XLI. Weteren, 29-48.
- Tkacs, Catherine Brown. "Typology," in *Augustine through the ages; an Encyclopedia*, edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, 855-857. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.
- Tulinius, Torfi. "The Prosimetrum Form: Verses as the Basis for Saga Composition & Interpretation." In *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, edited by Russell Poole, 191-217. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001.
- Tulinius, Torfi, trans. *Le Saga de Sverrir, Roi de Norvège*. Paris: Société d'éditione Les Belles Lettres, 2010.
- Wallace-Hadrill, D.S. *Eusebius of Caesarea*. London: A.R. Mowbray, 1960.
- Weber, Gerd Wolfgang. "Intellegere historiam: Typological perspectives of Nordic pre-history (in Snorri, Saxo, Widukind and others)." in *Tradition og historieskrivning. Kilderne til Nordens ældste historie (Acta Jutlandica LXIII:2. Humanistisk Serie 61)*, edited by Hastrup, Kirsten, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen. 95-141. Aarhus: 1987.