

"The Authorship of Konungs Skuggsjá"

Who wrote Konungs Skuggsjá? Its author, if we may judge from the Prologue of the work, desired to remain anonymous, and for the last two hundred years he has been remarkably successful, for no attempt that has been made to identify him has met with general approval. Recently, a number of scholars have considered or reconsidered various aspects of the provenance of the work, and more solid reasons than hitherto have been put forward for dating it to a particular decade and establishing the socio- and religio-political background of the work and the place in society of the man who wrote it. But to paraphrase Ludvig Holm-Olsen, dean of Konungs Skuggsjá studies, the identity of the author remains uncertain.

In the absence of concrete information, earlier investigators used internal evidence of different kinds to put forward, with greater or less vigour, views as to the when, where and by whom of Konungs Skuggsjá (hereafter KS). The unquestioned influence of En tale mot biskopene on KS and the generally pro-monarchical tone of KS (comparable in part with En tale) were among the reasons why certain scholars favoured the times of King Sverrir for the composition of KS, thus leading to the identification of 'Ulv of Lauvnes' as the author by no less a scholar than Munch, to quote but one example. However, more recent scholars have come down massively and (in my view) conclusively in favour of the latter part of Hákon Hákonsson's reign, and probably the 1250s, for the composition of the work as we have it -- among others, one may cite the views of Johan Schreiner and Sverre Bagge (Den Politiske Ideologi i Kongespeilet, 536ff), and Holm-Olsen's introduction to the second edition of KS (Oslo 1983). It is clear, both from this and the corroborative evidence I shall supply, that the only candidates for the authorship of the work we know as Konungs Skuggsjá that we may short-list are those who were alive and well and living in the 1250s.

The place of composition has provoked far less comment: it is natural to conclude that it was written at Hákon Hákonsson's court, and thus by one of the circle of writers who may well have counted the king's sons Hákon den unge and Magnus among their supporters and even collaborators. Reference to Halogaland in northern Norway, and specific astronomical observations which led Hans Geelmuyden to associate the work with the district of Norway just north of Namsos (or within roughly half a degree either side of the 65th parallel), do not affect this, for it is possible that one or both of these references relate rather to the home of the Father in the discourse than either that of the author or the place of composition. But in any case it has not proved possible to identify anyone on the basis of a connection with this particular part of Norway.

What of the author? If his name is unknown, much has been deduced about him from the KS text. Holm-Olsen and Bagge are only the most recent of those who see him as a cleric, in view of the contents of in particular the last part of the work, but also a man closely connected with the court and its activities, and perhaps used for administrative duties by the king. This view of the author led Paasche to identify him as Einar Gunnarsson, archbishop from 1255-1263, and his view received some support, though it was countered by Schreiner -- and indeed it is true that the archbishop makes a much better Father- than Son-figure! Other ecclesiastics known to have been alive at the time have also been suggested: but in reading at least some of the arguments one is inclined to conclude that almost the only reason to consider them is that their names have been preserved. Thus, perhaps, the disinclination of KS scholars of today to investigate the matter further. However, there is one other factor, well known for more than a century but not so far taken fully into account in this matter, which may lead to a more solidly-based identification than those put forward so far.

My own starting-point in this investigation is this very factor: the undisputed and indisputable connection between KS and the translation of the post-Pentateuchal historical material contained in the biblical compilation Stjórn. In a well-known article dating back to 1886, Gustav Storm demonstrated this relationship clearly, and lists of parallel passages in the two texts have since been given by Finnur Jónsson in his 1920 edition of KS and Dietrich Hofmann in his Skandinavistik 1973 article. Further, Storm came to the natural conclusion that where biblical material was to be found in identical or almost identical form in a Bible version such as Stjórn and an essentially secular work such as KS, the secular work must have taken its material from the Bible version. This apparently obvious conclusion, that KS borrows from the latter part of Stjórn and must therefore be younger than it, received the assent of scholars until the 1970s, when it was separately attacked by two investigators: Hofmann, in the above-mentioned article, and Sverre Bagge, in 'Forholdet mellom Kongespejlet og Stjórn' (ANF 1974). Close comparison of the two texts persuaded these scholars that Storm's view was wrong, and that it was the Bible translator who had used the KS text -- though Hofmann additionally postulated that the two authors were writing in the same place at the same time and used each other's work (Die Königsspiegel-Zitate, p. 4).

At the time these articles appeared, my own work on the Norse Bible had been completed as a PhD thesis, and I was engaged in preparing it for publication. Since the views of Hofmann and Bagge, if correct, might have made it necessary for me to modify the chronological arguments I had put forward concerning the different parts of Stjórn, I was obliged to undertake a very detailed examination of their arguments. The result of this will appear shortly, as the final appendix to my book on the Bible in Old Norse, page proofs of which await my attention. Suffice it to say here that although I think I can claim to have shown that a number of their arguments are not incontrovertible, others are less easily disposed of, and that in consequence it may be that the relationship between the KS and Norse Bible texts may be more complex than a simple dependence of one on the other: as Hofmann speculated, they may in some way be

inter-related.

At this point it is appropriate to summarise what is already known about the Bible version in question, and what I hope to have demonstrated in my forthcoming book. It has long been known that the Bible compilation Stjórn contains parts of three separate and very different versions of parts of the Old Testament historical material from the Creation to the Exile: but views have differed as to the seniority of the versions and their extent, among other things. My own views are as follows. At a relatively early date, a straightforward and partially abbreviated but otherwise literal translation of at least the Pentateuch was made: this was in existence by the early 13th century, and is represented by one long passage only, the interpolated material in AM 226 fol. which links the elaborate treatment of Genesis and the first part of Exodus (to chapter 18) with the post-Pentateuch material, and is printed in Unger's edition at pp. 300 - 349. Some time in the 13th century (to take for the moment a conservative view) another version of the historical material appeared: this is again a close translation in the main, but augmented with material from a number of different sources, including the Imago Mundi and Speculum Ecclesiae of Honorius Augustodunensis, the Liber Exceptionum of Richard of St Victor, and almost certainly Comestor's Historia Scholastica, though this is not acknowledged as a source. This version is represented by the post-Pentateuchal material printed in Unger's edition at pp. 349-654, and almost certainly by the fragment from the book of Genesis in AM 238 fol. XIX, which confirms the otherwise likely hypothesis that this version comprised the Old Testament historical material as a whole: further, it is probable that the Exodus material in Stock. perg. fol. 12, IV, which like the 238 material does not correspond with the main Stjórn text, is also from this source. It is uncertain whether this version used the earlier one. Finally, early in the 14th century (according to the Prologue, during the reign of Hákon Magnusson) a third version was begun, using three principal sources: the Bible, the

above-mentioned work of Comestor, and Vincent of Beauvais's Speculum Historiale. This version is represented by the first part of the Stjórn text, from Genesis chapter 1 to Exodus chapter 18, beyond which it was almost certainly never continued: Unger prints it at pp. 1-299 of his edition. It is of course the second of these versions that concerns us here: and in the rest of this paper I shall follow my normal practice of referring to it as Stjórn III (the order of its appearance in Unger's edition and AM 226, not its chronological order as I postulate it, determining its title). This is, then, the work that in Hofmann's view was contemporaneous with KS and inter-related with it, and whose author knew the KS author and admired and used his work.

What more can be known about the Stjórn III version which is relevant to the present argument? Clearly, if Hofmann is right it will be of great value if we can substantiate the dating of Stjórn III and identify its author. Here again, I must refer the reader to my substantial (in length, at any rate!) consideration of these questions in my forthcoming book. But in fact what I say there does not differ essentially from the conclusions I presented in my thesis back in 1973: the author of Stjórn III was Brandr Jónsson, abbot, and bishop of Hólar at the end of his life, probable author of Gyðinga saga and also Alexanders saga, which according to the final paragraph of the former work he translated at the request of Magnus, the second son of Hákon Hákonsson. Nothing in the 'life' of Brandr as set forth by Tryggvi Þórhallsson (Skírnir 97, 46-64) invalidates this: Brandr is known to have been at the Norwegian court at the end of his life, for there is no reason to disbelieve the saga of Hákon Hákonsson on this point, and in addition his movements in the last decade of his life (which ended in 1264) are relatively unknown -- he could perfectly well have spent part of this time in Norway. Further, there are a number of similarities between the three works attributed to him which also support the view of common authorship. I thus conclude, with Hofmann (pp. 14-16 of his article), that Brandr, author of Stjórn III, was at the

Norwegian court at the same time as the author of KS as we have it, and that the works are inter-related. This conclusion confirms the view of Holm-Olsen, Bagge and others that the author of KS in its surviving form must be looked for among the clerics at the Norwegian court in the latter part of Hákon's reign.

Let us now return to KS. The acute reader will have noted that in the foregoing I have taken care to refer to the KS author as the author of the surviving text, without so far taking a standpoint on another debated question, whether this text is a single original work by one author or a work of multiple authorship. This is however of major importance: for obviously the identification of the cleric of the 1250s may well depend on whether we regard him as the author of the whole work or the reviser of the work of another.

In the entire history of KS scholarship, the single authorship view has held the field, with only a few dissentient voices. Early scholars seem to have taken it for granted -- and not only early ones -- and there has been a general readiness to accept that the burden of proof lies with those who disagree: as Eirik Vandvik remarked at the end of his 'A new approach', "'unitarianism' . . . has never made any attempt to base itself upon evidence". And matters do not seem to have changed much since Vandvik's day. Holm-Olsen's latest views, in the introduction to the second edition of KS, are based on the single authorship principle. Bagge, in his Den Politiske Ideologi, considers that his investigation strengthens the unitarian viewpoint, though he does not entirely exclude the possibility of interpolation (p. 554). Jole R. Shackelford's second paragraph deserves quotation almost in its entirety (though in fairness it must be added that for him the authorship question is a minor concern):

"Eirik Vandvik's suggestion that The King's Mirror is the product of interpolation seems aesthetically less appealing than the single author idea, but has greater explanatory

power in the face of varying content and uneven style.
 . . . Despite the lack of good evidence to support this opinion, it cannot be ruled out that the work may have been added onto and reworked by the author himself."

(Maal og Minne 1984, p. 72)

The insouciance of such a statement seems incredible: but it seems to reflect the majority view, that there is no good evidence to support multiple authorship.

Vandvik is in fact almost the only scholar to question seriously the unitarian standpoint: and apart from Moltke Moe, whom he refers to in the second footnote to his 'A new approach', he would seem to be the first. He died before he could elaborate his ideas and perhaps give effect to the investigation he called for in the conclusion to his article, namely, into whether the book might be essentially the work of one man, but with later interpolations, or a book in which material from different writers had been compiled in a single work. This remains to be undertaken, though Anne Holtsmark took up the multiple authorship possibility both in her KLNW article (IX, 1964, p. 66) and her consideration of the Fall of Man materials -- she here regards multiple authorship as a possible reason for the existence of two different representations of the 'myth'. And there, by and large, the matter stands.

My own approach to KS has been very different from that of acknowledged scholars in the field: for me, KS was first a repository of biblical material to be collected and where appropriate cited or alluded to in my work on biblical quotation in Norse religious works. It then became an important link in the chain of my deductions concerning the provenance of Stjórn III; and only as a result of the necessity to examine the apparently startling conclusions of Hofmann and Bagge about the relationship between the two works did I begin to consider the possible relevance of my

own research to the question of the provenance of KS. For both the very substantial use of biblical material in KS and its distribution within the work seem to me to have a powerful bearing on the nature of KS. And this may possibly be what Vandvik had in mind when in the first paragraph of his article 'A new approach', after referring to KS as a 'tangle of problems', he wrote

"But w h e n the book was composed, and w h o wrote it — these are only two questions out of many. Such topics as the political ideology of the work, its peculiar use of the Bible, and the cultural background of its learning, are still craving for closer inquiries or considerable supplements to previous research."

"Its peculiar use of the Bible". Whatever Vandvik himself was thinking of, it is an apt phrase, for more than one reason. First, because the use of the Bible in KS is relatively free: either because, if we follow the traditional view, the KS writer used not the Vulgate but Stjórn III, or else because he did not quote verbatim from the Bible but adapted it to his particular purposes, mixing it with materials from other parts of the Bible or other sources, if we are to believe Hofmann and Bagge. Second, because there is a total contrast between the use of the Bible in the section about the king which concludes the work and the entire earlier part: in this, Bible material is limited to a couple of accurate single-verse quotations at the beginning, a few loose references, a Latin quotation, and a few quotations where KS appears to depend on En tale mot biskopene, whereas all the long passages taken directly or indirectly from the Bible are to be found in the last part. Thus, apparently, the KS writer adopts two different approaches to the Bible: in the greater part of the work he restricts himself to individual verse quotation or reference, while in the last part he makes far more profound and detailed use of it. Indeed, while the rest of the work could perfectly well have been written without using the Bible

at all, the last part could not exist without it. And it is of course this feature which in large measure causes the last part to differ so markedly from the rest.

Now this, if it were the end of the matter, might be dismissed as a curiosity, or in the nature of the subject-matter itself: but it is not. It seems to me far too much of a coincidence that in this last part the KS writer seems to diverge from the plan he had apparently established for his work in the introduction, namely, to touch on the conditions of merchants, kings, clergy and ordinary people, by developing the section on kings into a very elaborate consideration of the relationship of a king to those around him. While the plan seems to have called for a general overview of society, among other things, what we actually have has developed, in the last part, into a very specific and detailed treatment of the head of state which does not correspond with the plan. Or, to put it another way: if the outline of the work called for the Speculum Regale to be among other things a mirror for the king, in which he could see society and his place in it, the last part is essentially a mirror of the king, in which others (including, right at the end, bishops) can learn of their right relationship with their sovereign.

This apparent modification in the direction of the work has recently produced comments by scholars, relating to one aspect or another of the problem. One approach, adopted most notably by Holm-Olsen in his article in Speculum Norroenvm, is to discount the originality of the prologue: "Let us", he says in his final paragraph, "venture the suggestion that the Prologue in its present form was composed by an Icelander who worked at a time when there was no longer a royal court in Norway, and who wanted to introduce Konungs skuggsiá to a different audience from that for which it was written". Another approach is to regard the author as having modified

his original plan as he went along: it has been argued, for instance, that it would be very inappropriate to continue with a treatment of clergy and ordinary people after that of the king, which allows the work to move towards a climax. In this connection one may perhaps note Holm-Olsen's recent approbation of the idea that the work may have been destined essentially for one or both of Hákon Hákonsson's sons (see, again, the introduction to the second edition of KS). But I am decidedly uneasy about both suggestions: in particular, in the present context, because the first argument does not seem to me to give sufficient weight to the fact that the plan is a highly appropriate one for the first part of the work, setting out as it does to give a coherent overview of society -- students of other medieval literatures will readily recognise the three estates of society, bellator, orator and laborator, with the rising fourth estate given pride of place in both the plan and the work itself -- while the second argument, which presupposes the completeness of the work as we have it, runs counter not only to the plan but also the actual ending, which clearly breaks off for the time being, at least in intention: the final phrase envisages a continuation, ef synist.

As a result of all this, I have come to take as my departure point the following view of the textual history of KS. Prior to the latter years of Hákon Hákonsson's reign, perhaps but not necessarily in the first half of the 13th century, an essentially secular work was produced in Norway of the 'estates literature' genre: it may have been completed according to the programme set forth in the surviving prologue. No complete text of this work survives, of course; but it might bear investigation that the earliest Norwegian fragment of KS, RA 58A, which is considered not only to be hardly younger than ca. 1260, but also to be independent of all other MSS of KS, is a fragment of this postulated work. Whether or not this work was revised or added to in the meanwhile is one of

the many associated questions which I must leave aside for the moment. But what I think certainly happened was that a cleric at Hákon Hákonsson's court used this earlier work as the basis of the existing KS, modifying it, and notably the last part of it, in accordance with the special purposes he had in compiling KS. In doing so he made use (in my view) of the recently-produced Stjórn III version of the Old Testament historical material, of which he had a very profound knowledge indeed.

The ramifications of this view are of course enormous: and I must, sadly, resist the temptation to turn this into a 60-page paper by considering in detail the nature of this postulated earlier work and the exact nature of the representation of it in the KS we now have: this in any case, at the time of writing, comes for me under the heading of 'work in progress'. I shall limit myself to remarking that it explains far more than the peculiar form of KS, its incompleteness vis-à-vis the Prologue, and the distribution of biblical material. It also explains its almost unbelievable breadth of knowledge, stretching from the above-mentioned profound knowledge of Brandr Jónsson's Bible version to a knowledge of the intricate details of contemporary warfare -- and in this connection we may note L. M. Larson's footnote to page 218 of his translation of KS, where after referring to certain military equipment he notes: 'It seems clear that the author is somewhat confused as to these various coverings'; this is exactly what we should expect of a cleric who was revising such a text. It may also suggest an explanation of some of the uncertainties regarding the provenance of the work: it reopens the question of a possible association with the times of King Sverrir; it may mean that we do not need to limit ourselves to the latter part of Hákon's reign for a man of standing who was acquainted with Halogaland, the 65th parallel, or both. It may also mean that the identification of the Father and Son is not a priori restricted to individuals living in the 1250s (if of course we are to assume that they are real people, not just men of straw). And so on.

But my present concern is with the authorship of KS: and now, specifically, with the identity of the man who in the latter part of Hákon's reign produced the revision and partial reconstruction of an existing work. Much of the current thinking about this author remains undisturbed by the views I have put forward. That he was a cleric still seems certain: for whether or not he borrowed from Brandr Jónsson, as I believe he did, he himself, and not the postulated earlier writer, must if my views are correct have been responsible for the biblical material in the last part of the work. On the other hand, it is no longer necessary to presuppose that he had a profound knowledge of the intricacies of the equipment of warfare, to take one example from the secular scene. That he produced KS in its present form for the edification of Hákon's sons) remains probable; though it seems likely that this was not the only purpose he had -- as mentioned above, the work seems to be addressed also to clerics and people at large. Equally probable, still, is the suggestion that it was commissioned by Hákon Hákonsson in its present form, as suggested by Holm-Olsen in his article in *Einarsbók* (p. 119). That we must eliminate Archbishop Einar Gunnarsson from our short list of candidates also seems certain, principally for the reasons given by Schreiner at the beginning of his 'Kongespeilet som kampskrift'; but it will bear investigating whether, if as is supposed the cleric was at Hákon Hákonsson's court, he chose to adjust the picture of the Father to honour Einar, and thus perhaps soften his pro-monarchical stance -- though the author of the earlier work obviously speaks in terms of a natural Father/Son relationship, the spiritual relationship between the Archbishop and the 1250s writer could readily be adumbrated in this manner. On the other hand, I hope to have demonstrated that our cleric was not the single author of KS, but the reviser of an earlier work, who added in particular the Bible-based argumentation which leads to a specific view of the ideal relationship between the king and his people, and the king and clergy. This may perhaps appear relatively insignificant: but in fact it is vital to the case I shall try to make out.

This paper as it stands is intended rather as a report on work in progress than as a final statement of my position. Over the past few years I have tested my hypotheses about the authorship of KS, both against the text and critical opinions on it, and also in discussions with some of the acknowledged experts in the field. These hypotheses require further testing, which I hope to complete in time for the Saga Conference. But unless conflicting evidence appears in the meantime, I shall hope to persuade my hearers of my own conviction, that the question with which I began is not incapable of resolution.

Lausanne, April 1985.

I. J. Kirby.

Select Bibliography

To save space I assume that the reader will have access to Tveitane's Studier over Konungs Skuggsiá: several of the articles reproduced from it, and several of the books and articles listed in its comprehensive bibliography, are referred to or cited above (distance from a Scandinavian library at the time of writing must be my excuse for any imprecision in this respect!). The list below is primarily of material which has appeared since the publication of Tveitane's collection, or of material relating to Stjórn and other biblical materials. For the reader's convenience I add that Bagge's Den Politiske Ideologi also contains a comprehensive bibliography.

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