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The Garter of St Óláfr: Links between Poets and Kings

Like most of the heroes of the poets' sagas, – Björn Hítöelakappi – according to what we are told in his saga – led a double life. Eager to win advancement, political, military and/or poetical, in their excursions abroad, these poets are represented in their sagas, and often also in the *konungasögur*, as the confidants, sympathisers and mouthpieces of kings, while at home they are involved in colourful brawls, fighting sometimes to the death with their rivals in love and poetry. To say that this dichotomy is the product of the awkward fit between biography and fiction – between the status in the Scandinavian political arena of historically authenticated poets such as Sighvatr Þórðarson and Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld and the fanciful tales in which Icelandic narrative tradition embroiled them – is merely to beg the question why these respected literary voices attracted this particular kind of fictional elaboration. The disjunction is neatly illustrated in the introductory account of Björn's rival Þórðr Kolbeinsson in *Bjarnar saga (Borgfirðinga sögur 111-12)*:

hann var skáld mikit ok helt sér mjök fram til virðingar; var hann jafnan útanlands vel virð af meira háttar monnum sakar menntanar sinnar . . . Ekki var Þórðr mjök vinsæll af alþýðu, því at hann þótti vera spottsamr ok grár við alla þá, er honum þótti dælt við.

[he was a considerable poet and did much to maintain his reputation. He was always held in respect by the more important men abroad because of his skill as a poet. . . Þórðr was not very popular with people in general because he seemed to be mocking and spiteful to everyone he considered himself a match for.]

In the cases of Hallfreðr and of Björn Hítöelakappi the dichotomy is sharpened by the hagiographic glow surrounding the kings they serve, Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson 'the Saint', respectively. It is resolved to different degrees in the sagas of these two poets. In the case of Hallfreðr, the nickname *vandræðaskáld* may well be the kernel around which the saga's account of an arbitrary and restless character developed; it 'encapsulates his whole nature and experience' (Whaley 2001, 286). In Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* the name is bestowed on him by the king – almost literally a christening – because of his reluctance to accept Christianity; *Hallfreðar saga* generalises the aspect of difficulty to include Hallfreðr's insistence on presenting a poem to the king, and the name may well have been a stimulus to the development of traditions based on the poet's *níðskár ok margbreytinn* temperament.

Hallfreðr is of course richly attested in the *konungasögur* as a witness to the life, and especially the death, of Óláfr Tryggvason; *Fagrskinna* refers to him as 'sá maðr, er svá mikit hafði unnt konunginum, at menn segja, at eptir fall konungsins fékk hann vanheilsu af harmi, þá er honum vannsk til dauðadags' (*Fagrskinna* 160) [that man who had so greatly loved the king that men say that after the king's death he suffered a sickness from grief which stayed with him till his dying day], and this aspect of his reputation had to be reconciled with the story of his aggressive and unstable exploits back in Iceland. There are no such extenuating circumstances for the paradoxes in *Bjarnar saga*, for Björn is not mentioned as a poet in any source outside the saga; indeed, little is said of him in any other capacity either. The hero is represented in the saga as a steadfast, though not particularly pious, devotee of King Óláfr Haraldsson, one who finds himself participating posthumously in a minor miracle in evidence of the king's sanctity. To this the saga adds an overlay of piety in the statement that he built a church at his home at Vellir, dedicated to St Thomas the Apostle, in whose honour he is also said, highly improbably, to have composed a *drápa*. I have argued elsewhere (Finlay 1994, 129, 201) that the intermittently hagiographical cast of the saga may explain the author's *parti pris* attitude towards Björn, who is presented as the innocent victim of Þórðr's aggression.

This characterisation is greatly at odds with the bulk of the saga's narrative, which shows Björn getting the better of his opponents both through his physical prowess and in barbed verbal exchanges reaching their climax in the most explicit example in saga literature of the legally proscribed *níð*, heavy in pre-Christian overtones.

The miracle is related in the early part of the saga where Björn's sojourn at the court of King Óláfr is recorded. We are told that the king and Björn, among others, share a bath at a feast; the Icelandic perspective is emphasised by the detail that this was a *kerlaug*, *því at eigi er annarra lauga kostur í Nóregi* (*Borgfirðinga sögur* 133) [tub bath, for there are no other kinds of bath in Norway]. Afterwards Björn's and the king's garters are accidentally switched. The king declines to remedy the mistake, and, we are told,

Björn hafði ávallt þessa reim um fót sinn, á meðan hann lifði, ok með henni var hann niðr grafinn. Ok þá miklu síðar, er bein hans váru upp tekin ok færð til annarrar kirkju, þá var sú in sama reima öfúin um fótlegg Bjarnar, en allt var annat fúit, ok er þat nú messufátalindi í Gørðum á Akranesi. (134)

[Björn always wore this garter around his leg for as long as he lived, and with it he was buried. And then much later, when his bones were dug up and moved to another church, that same garter was undecayed around Björn's leg-bone, while everything else was decayed, and that is now the cincture on a set of mass vestments at Garðar on Akranes.]

The same story is interpolated in two fourteenth-century manuscripts of Snorri's *Separate Saga of St Óláfr* (Tómasskinna and AM 61 fol.; *Saga Óláfs konungs* 2 766-67), giving a brief account of Björn's relationship with the king. The anecdote of the garter in this version is very similar, but there are reasons to believe this account to be independent of *Bjarnar saga*. In the first place its statement that Björn had his famous sword *Mæringr* as a gift from the king is radically different from the saga's highly-coloured account, in an earlier chapter, of his winning it in single combat in Garðaríki. The saga does not say at this point, as the *Separate Saga* texts do, that Björn was buried at Vellir; there is no need, for this is specified at its proper time at the end of the saga (*Borgfirðinga sögur* 206-07):

Frændr Bjarnar létu gera eptir líki hans, ok var þat jærðat á Vøllum at kirkju þeiri, er hann hafði þar gera látit Tómasi postula, ok var niðr lagðr með klæðum ok ræmnumi, *sem fyrr var sagt*.

[Björn's family made arrangements for his body, and it was buried at Vellir at the church he had had built there for Thomas the Apostle, and he was buried with his clothes and the garter, as was said before.]

It has not in fact been said before in the saga that Björn was buried in his clothes, but this is spelled out in the *Separate Saga* interpolation: 'Björn hafði i klæðum uerit niðr settr' [Björn had been buried in his clothes]. This suggests that the two versions derive from a common source, and that it is to this that 'sem fyrr var sagt' is referring.

The *Separate Saga* account, moreover, is more specific than *Bjarnar saga* about Björn's burial and disinterment:

Björn var grafinn a Uøllum. þuait þar var þa kirkia. huildi Björn þar lengi sþan. þar til er staðr efiðiz at Husa felli. var þa upp tekin kirkian a Uøllum. ok grafinn garðrinn ok aull bein færð i Hítar dal þau er þar höfðu iørðut uerit.

[Björn was buried at Vellir, because there was a church there then. Björn rested there for a long time until the church at Húsafell was founded. Then the church at Vellir was removed and the graveyard dug up and all the bones that had been buried there were moved to Hítardalur.]

The specificity of this account indicates not only knowledge beyond that conveyed by the saga, but also local knowledge. Incidentally it seems to put paid to the saga's later assertion that Björn himself was responsible for the building and dedication of the church at Vellir, since the *Separate Saga* version, for all its specificity, does not mention this. The saga cites as authority for it a certain Runólfr Dagsson (*Borgfirðinga sögur* 163):

Á Vøllum lét Björn gera kirkju ok heilga með guði Tómasi postula, ok um hann orti Björn drápu góða. Svá sagði Rúnólfr Dagsson.

[At Vellir Björn had a church built and consecrated to God and Thomas the Apostle, and Björn composed a good *drápa* about him. So said Rúnólfr Dagsson.]

Rúnólfr has been identified as Rúnólfr Dálksson, who is listed in Ari Þorgilsson's *prestatal*, a list of nobly-born priests from 1143 (*Diplomatarium Islandicum* I 186, 191) and in *Sturlunga saga* (1946 I 103-04), which locates him in Helgafell in 1170 and refers to him as 'inn mesti lærdómsmaðr ok höfuðprestr' [a great scholar and priest of an important church (Helgafell?)]. *Laxdæla saga* places the foundation of the church at Húsafell within the period when Klængur Þorsteinsson was bishop of Skálholt (1152-76) (*Laxdæla saga* 227 n. 5; *Diplomatarium Islandicum* I 217). There is no other mention of a church at Vellir, but it is plausible enough that if such a church existed and was abandoned, its effects and the incumbents of its churchyard should find their way to the nearby monastery at Hítardalur, which was founded in the 1160s.¹

Sigurður Nordal maintains (*Borgfirðinga sögur* xcii) that the reference in *Bjarnar saga* to Rúnólfr Dálksson is to a written work, and that this might have been a short biography of Björn written in connection with the founding of the monastery:

Það varpaði nokkurs konar helgiblað á dalinn, að þar hafði verið maður, sem var handgenginn hinum heilaga Ólafi konungi, hafði verið trúrækin og ort helgikvæði, og jarlein hafði gerzt í sambandi við grip, sem hann var grafinn með (reimína).

[It cast a certain holy aura over the valley that there had been a man there who was the retainer of the holy King Ólafur, had been pious and had composed religious poetry, and that a miracle had taken place in connection with a treasure that he had been buried with.]

The association with the monastery at Hítardalur, records of which are in any case fugitive, is speculative, as is Nordal's further supposition that the local monks might have been broad-minded enough to weld Rúnólfr's pious account together with less high-minded local traditions, probably including verses attributed to the rival poets, into what was ultimately to become *Bjarnar saga*. The postulation of a single written source that was used both by the saga and by the interpolators of the *Separate Saga* leaves some questions unanswered, and is probably an over-simplification. Why, for instance, did the *Separate Saga* interpolators not include in their local minutiae the information that Björn had founded the church at Vellir? Nordal's explanation of this (lxxxv) is not altogether convincing:

Í Ólafs sögu var sleppt öllu því, sem talað var um Tómas postula, því að það kom ekki við þeirri sögu.

[Everything that was said about Thomas the Apostle was omitted from *Ólafs saga*, because it was not relevant to that saga.]

On the other hand, the absence of any surviving trace of the church at Vellir and the inherent improbability of the composition of a *drápa* about one of the apostles in the early eleventh century (by Björn Hítadælakappi of all people)² raise suspicions about the attribution of this information to such a reputable source as Rúnólfr. But if Nordal's speculation that Rúnólfr's biography stimulated the monks of Hítardalur into further elaborations to the greater glory of

¹ An inventory from Hítardalur dated 1453 lists 'eitt kugildri er rodukrossinn a a u'llum' (*Diplomatarium Islandicum* V 407) [one *kugildri* belonging to the crucifix at Vellir], which implies that the cross was *in situ* then, but not necessary attached to a church; it may have been one of the free-standing crosses that existed throughout Iceland (Cormack 105-07).

² The closest extant parallel is the *Jónsdrápa*, a poem in *hrynhent* metre on St John the Apostle, four stanzas of which are cited in *Jóns saga postola*. It is attributed to Gamli kanóki, a canon of Þykkvabæ, which was founded in 1168; other poems on explicitly Christian subjects, too, are products of the twelfth rather than the eleventh century.

the local hero is right, the unreliable information about the building and dedication of the church and the composition of the *drápa* may have been among the elements that began to cluster around the original nucleus. Why Björn should have been credited with a particular interest in Thomas the Apostle, who otherwise did not have a high profile in medieval Iceland, is not clear.³

A model for the kind of short biography proposed by Nordal is the *Ævi Snorra goða*, which survives in the 15th-century Melabók as an appendix to its fragmentary version of *Eyrbyggja saga*, and is attributed to Ari Þorgilsson on the authority of *Laxdæla saga* (*Laxdæla saga* 226). It is interesting to compare it with the account of Björn in the *Separate Saga* interpolation. Like Björn, Snorri in his saga incarnation is a somewhat ambivalent character. The first half of the *Ævi* is concerned with genealogy, which is conspicuously lacking from the account of Björn; but this is an element that could well have been excluded as irrelevant to the saga of St Óláfr. The latter part, which covers Snorri's life from birth to death, gives particular emphasis to his church-building activities (*Eyrbyggja saga* 186):

Hann lét kirkju gera at Helgafelli, en aðra í Tungu í Sælingsdal; en sumir segja, at hann léti gera í annat sinn at Helgafelli með Guðrúnu kirkju, bá er sú brunn, er hann hafði gera látit. Hann andaðisk ór sótt á inum sjaunda vetri ins sjaunda tigar aldrs sins; þat var einum vetri eptir fall Óláfs konungs ins helga; ok var Snorri goði grafinn heima þar í Sælingsdalstungu at þeirri kirkju, er hann sjálf hafði gera látit.
[He had a church built at Helgafell, and another at Tunga in Sælingsdair; and some people say that together with Guðrún he had a second church built at Helgafell when the one he had built was burned down. He died of sickness in his sixty-seventh year; that was one year after the death of King Óláfr the Saint; and Snorri goði was buried there at home at Sælingsdalstunga at the church he himself had had built.]

Eyrbyggja saga relates Snorri's building of the church at Helgafell in the context of the conversion of Iceland to Christianity, which he had enthusiastically promoted; the significance of the establishment of a church at what is represented earlier in the saga as a major site of pagan ritual is obvious. The building of the church at Sælingsdalstunga is mentioned only in connection with his death, which is related in a close paraphrase of the *Ævi* (*Eyrbyggja saga* 183):

Snorri goði andaðisk í Sælingsdalstungu einum vetri eptir fall Óláfs konungs ins helga; hann var þar jarðaðr at kirkju þeirri, er hann hafði sjálf gera látit.

It is not improbable that Rúnólfr, setting out to write a short biography to the greater glory of the local hero of Hítardalur, modelled it on the example of Ari's life of Snorri. The building of churches and their location was of particular concern to these twelfth-century churchmen, who dealt with it in detail. The author of *Bjarnar saga* was content to gloss over some of these; on the other hand he enhanced his hero's pious CV with an addition in the same genre, that Björn (like Snorri) was the founder of a church on his farm, and was buried there himself. Alternatively, this and the more fanciful details of the hero's dedication of church and *drápa* to St Thomas may have been in Rúnólfr's account and abandoned by better-informed later users of the material who interpolated it into St Óláfr's saga.

The moving and re-interring of bones is a theme that recurs in the *Íslendingasögur* (Bjarni Einarsson 1976); coincidentally, one of the five examples is that of Snorri goði, in *Eyrbyggja saga*. The saga ends, immediately after the passage cited above, with the much later disinterment of the bones of Snorri and those of other major characters in the saga. As in

³ No other church is recorded with this dedication, though there is one whose patron may be either the Apostle or the much more popular Thomas Becket. Two versions of *Thomas saga postola* are preserved in 13th- and 14th-century manuscripts (Foote 1976, 168; Cormack 1994, 155-56).

all other examples except that of *Bjarnar saga*, the appearance of the bones is used as testimony to their owners' personal characteristics and/ or the events of the saga:

En þá er þar var kirkugarðr grafinn, váru beinn hans upp tekin ok færð ofan til þeirar kirkju, sem nú er þar; þá var við stöðð Guðný Þoðvarsdóttir, móðir þeira Sturlusonar, Snorra, Þórðar ok Sighvats, ok sagði hon svá frá, at þat væri meðalmanns bein ok ekki mikil. Þar kvað hon þá ok upp tekin bein Barkar ins dýgra, fjoðurbroður Snorra goða, ok sagði hon þau vera ákaflika mikil. Þá váru ok upp tekin bein Þórdísar kerlingar, dóttur Þorbjarnar súrs, móðir Snorra goða, ok sagði Guðný þau vera lítil kvenmannsbein ok svá svört, sem sviðin væri; ok váru þau bein öll grafin niðr þar, sem nú stendr kirkjan.

[But when the churchyard was dug up, his bones were taken up and moved down to the church which is there now; Guðný Þoðvarsdóttir, mother of the Sturlusonar, Snorri, Þórðr and Sighvatr, was present then, and she reported that they were the bones of a middle-sized man, not large. She said that the bones of Þorkr inn dýgr, Snorri goði's uncle, were also disinterred then, and she said they were extremely large. The bones of the old woman Þórdís, daughter of Þorbjorn súr, were also disinterred then, and Guðný said that they were the bones of a small woman, and as black as if they had been scorched; and all those bones were interred where the church now stands.]

Bjarni Einarsson gives *Bjarnar saga* the credit for introducing this theme, founded in hagiographical stories of the translations of relics of saints, into the *Íslendingasögur* (and *Egils saga* the credit for its secularization).⁴ This can only be part of the story, in view of such antique evidence as the reference in the *Liber monstrorum* (7th-8th c.) to the bones of Huiglaucus, king of the Getae (the Hygelac of *Beowulf*) which were exhibited on an island at the mouth of the Rhine because of their enormous size. This suggests that much older ideas about confirming a hero's qualities from his mortal remains – which perhaps underlay Christian *translatio* stories in the first place – were combined with the hagiographical tradition.

That said, it is striking that the *translatio* story in *Bjarnar saga* (and presumably also in Rúnólfr's *ævi*) is unique not only in its miraculous aspect, but in being revelatory of the properties not of the hero but of someone else altogether. It is a demonstration of the sanctity of St Óláfr, as the *Separate Saga* interpolation makes clear:

Nu syndiz í þessum atburð mikill heilagleikr Olafs konungs. at sa einn lutr uar ofwin j iorðo a beinum Bjarnar er helgaz hafði af líkama Olafs konungs.

[Now the great sanctity of King Óláfr was revealed in this event, that the one thing on Björn's bones that had been made holy by the body of King Óláfr was uncorrupted in the earth.]

Miracles have been divided into the two broad categories of 'practical miracles' (those effecting cures or other benefits) and those offering supernatural confirmation of sanctity through apparitions, bodily incorruption, the odour of sanctity, and so forth (Sigal 1985, 15). Not unexpectedly, in the progress of a cult the earliest miracles are likely to be of the latter kind, justifying the translation of the body and the establishment of relics as the focus for practical miracles, which are also often presented as occurring in response to supplication of the saint. In the case of St Óláfr, revelatory miracles were reported from immediately after his death in battle in 1030; when his body was disinterred a year later, we are told in the contemporary *Glælognskviða* of Þórarinn loftunga, it was *hreinn* and *með heilu* 'sound and healthy'; his hair and nails were growing '*sem kvikum manni*' 'as if on a living man' (*Sktj.* B I 300-01). But the miracles recorded in the *Passio et miracula beati Olavi*, compiled by Archbishop Eysteinn of Niðaróss probably in 1180-83, but drawing on records kept at the shrine since earlier times, are overwhelmingly of the practical variety, with a heavy emphasis

⁴ 1976, 50. He points out (51-52) that its popularity would have been reinforced by the translation of the bones of two bishops of Hólar in 1198. Bjarni argues from the absence of archaeological evidence that stories of the disinterment of bones were largely fictitious – despite *Eyrbyggja saga's* citation of an eyewitness account.

on healing.⁵ The closest parallel to Björn's miracle, in that its goal is authentication rather than practical benefit, is an 'odour of sanctity' story; a suspicion having arisen that the saint's body has been carried off to Denmark, the shrine is opened to general reassurance: 'such a sweet fragrance pervaded the entire church that all those who partook of that experience understood fully that they had savoured a heavenly, not an earthly, experience' (*The Passion and Miracles* 61).

Thus the writing down of a miracle of St Óláfr around 1170, if that is when Rúnólfr's account was written, would be in accordance with the current trend of Eysteinn's strengthening of the cult of St Óláfr. That it should be the more unusual type of revelatory miracle is appropriate to the context, which we may take to be the attempt to establish the cult of Óláfr in Iceland. And another striking feature of the story is that it is vouched for by the claimed existence of a local relic: the garter found on Björn's leg, 'ok er þat nú messufatalindi í Gørðum á Akranesi' according to the saga; in the *Separate Saga* interpolation, 'Sv silki réma uar síþan haufð til messu fata linda. ok er nu ² þeim bæ er iGørðum heitir ³ Akra nesi'. Although it may be safer to take 'nú' as referring to Rúnólfr's time rather than to the 14th-century expansion of the *Separate Saga*, both surviving texts claim the garter's continued existence at Garðar, whether in the church or the farm, as a tangible link between Iceland, and more particularly the district around Hítardalur, and the expanding cult of St Óláfr. Like most objects mentioned in the sagas as still in existence at the time of writing, the garter/ cincture has never been seen since (see Perkins 1989 for further examples).

It has been noted that reactions in Iceland to early manifestations of the cult of St Óláfr may have been less than enthusiastic, and that it may have been in competition there with a rival attempt to establish his predecessor Óláfr Tryggvason, honoured for converting Iceland to Christianity, as its patron saint (Cormack 1994, 10, 143). Latin lives of Óláfr Tryggvason were written at Þingeyrar by Oddr Snorrason (c.1180-90) and Gunnlaugr Leifsson (perhaps a few years later). These biographers did not necessarily see the two Óláfrs as competing with each other; rather, the consistent Icelandic tradition that Óláfr Tryggvason was responsible for the baptism of the saint placed them in a relationship of partnership, in which Óláfr Tryggvason was the senior partner as the inaugurator of Christianity, but never achieved the spiritual pre-eminence of the officially canonised Saint Óláfr:

oc a env fimta ari hans rikis helt O. konungr nafna synom vndir skirn oc tók hann af þeim helga brvne i þa liking sem Ioan baptisti gerðe við drottin, oc sva sem hann var hans fyrir rennari. sva var oc O. konungr T. s. fyrir rennari ens helga O. komungs (*Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar* 1).

[and in the fifth year of his reign King Óláfr carried out the baptism of his namesake, and raised him from the holy font after the pattern of what John the Baptist did to the Lord, and just as he was his forerunner, so also was Óláfr Tryggvason the forerunner of King Óláfr the Saint.]

If conversion is regarded as a theme particularly associated with Óláfr Tryggvason, it is appropriate that, as Diana Whaley has written recently, 'the theme of reluctant conversion is a *leitmotiv* throughout' *Hallfreðar saga*, whether the unique verses incorporated in its central scene, dramatizing the poet's personal reluctance to abandon his pagan identity, form 'the historical kernel which inspired this rich development, or whether they are themselves part of the later process of elaboration' (Whaley 2003, 249). While there is some disjunction between anecdotes relating to Hallfreðr's pious devotion to Óláfr and the narrative of his intermittent love-affair in Iceland (his initial, unexplained refusal to marry Kolfinna, and his proprietorial resumption of his feud with her husband on his return from Norway are in themselves indications of the divided focus of the saga writer and, presumably, of the traditional material he was using), there is at least a sufficient body of anecdote about the convert's progress to

⁵ This is typical of royal saints; see Phelpstead in *The Passion and Miracles*, xliiv.

sustain the theme throughout the course of the saga. The only miraculous manifestations among these events are two posthumous appearances of the king in Hallfreðr's dreams, counselling him to avoid blood-vengeance (*Hallfredar saga*, 191, 194); the second dream had the function of authorizing him to compose poetry for the king's own enemy, Jarl Eiríkr, a common dilemma for the professional skald. These apparitions serve the purpose of maintaining the poet's special relationship with the sanctified king, while lacking the aspect of tangible verification of sanctity offered by the story of Björn's garter. But then Óláfr Tryggvason had no great reputation as a miracle-worker.⁶

Whaley is cautiously inclined to regard Hallfreðr's verses on his own reluctant conversion as genuine, but notes that they may have been composed retrospectively as part of a process of elaboration, for which

the likeliest context . . . would be the attempt to promote veneration of Óláfr Tryggvason in Iceland in the later twelfth century which is implied by the production of skaldic eulogies – Hallar-Steinn's *Reksteffa* and the anonymous *Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar* in *Bergsbók* – and of the Latin *vita* composed in the decades around 1200 by the Þingeyrar monks Oddr Snorrason and Gunnlaugr Leifsson and then translated into vernacular sagas (2003, 249-50).

It is very possible that the flurry of literary activity in Þingeyrar dedicated to the sanctity of the converter of Iceland to Christianity was matched by a rival effort at Hítardalur to bolster his successor and spiritual heir, Óláfr Haraldsson – widely acknowledged in Norway and beyond, still not securely established in Iceland. The foundation at Hítardalur was short-lived, but its candidate in the sainthood stakes soon overtook his rival. Óláfr Haraldsson's sanctity was vouchsafed in the tangible form of the local relic and in the person of the local hero, Björn Hítðœlakappi. The relations of Björn with the king presumably existed in legend, but were far less securely based than those of Hallfreðr with the earlier Óláfr; most significantly, they are not supported by any surviving verse nor even by the mention of any poetry composed by Björn for Óláfr or any other patron. The garter story, though it concerns Óláfr more directly than Björn, does have a value in the saga as support for the claimed link between the hero and the king. But the saga author had little else to go on in order to create a spiritual side to his hero.

Bjarni Guðnason (1994, 74) has remarked that 'bardaginn á Stiklarstöðum hefur verið höfundur Bjarnarsögu hugleikinn' [the author of *Bjarnar saga* was preoccupied with the battle of Stiklarstaðir], and detected in the climactic scene of Björn's last defence echoes of accounts in the *konungasögur* of the death of King Óláfr at Stiklarstaðir. Without subscribing to his argument that this shows the saga to be a late fabrication, I agree that the element of exaggeration in hero's last battle probably owes something to hagiographical traditions of martyrdom, perhaps even the specific example of his mentor, Óláfr Haraldsson. The fact that the account of this battle is framed by two specific mentions of the celebrated garter – we are told specifically that Björn was wearing it when he went into battle, and that he was buried with it after his death – suggests that this was an effect specifically intended by the author. Although the miracle of the garter reveals the quality of its first wearer rather than his surrogate, the author does use it to allow the hero to bathe in the saint's reflected glory, in the absence of secure historical or poetic evidence for the hero's connection with the sainted king.

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⁶ Cormack (1994, 10) notes Dietrich Hoffmann's argument that 'another work attributed to Oddr Snorrason was written as a sort of apology for a saint with no miracles'.

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