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Masculinity and Sexuality in Sagas of Scandinavian Royal Saints

The fourteenth-century Icelandic Life of St Magnús of Orkney (c. 1075–1116/17), *Magnúss saga lengri*, reflects on the earl's conversion from youthful viking to devout Christian in the following terms:

Ok [...] gerðist inn heilagi Magnús jarl Paulus af Saulo, predikari af manndrápsmanni, ok hefndi hann þat á sjálfum sér, þat er hann hafði illa lífat. Tók hann at gráta sík dauðan í syndum með dagligum sýtingum ok staðfastrí iðran, ok galt hann nú makliga hefnd í margföldum meinleikum, syndugum girndum veslugs holds. Þá sýndist hann orðinn nýr maðr, sá er eptir því er fallinn sem guði er sænd í, ok hann skipti í annan mann, í góðan af vándum, í sæmiligan af syndugum, í helgan af herfiligum, í sælan ok hreinan af saugum. [...] Með þessum hætti var inn heilagi Magnús um stúinn í helgan mann. (*ML* pp. 349–50)

By alluding to the fashionable concept of the 'New Man' and translating 'þá sýndist hann orðinn nýr maðr' as 'then he seemed to have become a new man' (rather than the gender-neutral alternative 'new person') I want to emphasise at the outset of this paper that the models of behaviour in terms of which Scandinavian royal saints are presented in the Icelandic sagas are gendered: they are ways of being masculine. Men's behaviour has in the past often been treated as if it were 'unmarked' in relation to gender – as if only women were gendered – and it is only relatively recently that medievalists have begun to render masculinity visible by trying to understand what it meant to be male in the Middle Ages and how this shaped men's lives, including their sexual behaviour (cf. Sørensen 1983, Lees 1994, Murray 1999, 2000).

In what follows I will focus on the sexual conduct of royal saints in some Icelandic sagas in order to show how in each case that sexual conduct is gendered as masculine. I will relate this gendered sexual behaviour to the masculine ideals which inform the saga narratives, in particular the ideals of the *rex iustus* and the royal martyr. It will become clear that by revealing a conflict or tension between alternative masculinities the saga narratives illuminate a period of transition between different ways of 'being a man'. The approach taken here might be compared with Doyle's account of five historical male role ideals (1995, 27–33): while his 'Epic Male' and 'Spiritual Male' do not exactly coincide with the masculine roles portrayed in sagas of Scandinavian saints there are very close correspondences.

The earliest Old Norse Life of St Magnús is in Chapters 34–52 of *Orkneyinga saga*, a history of the earls of Orkney from c.AD 900 to the early thirteenth century that survives in a revised version made c.1230. Although there is no reference to it in the saga, the writer of *Orkneyinga saga* almost certainly drew on a version of the earliest text about St Magnús of which we know, a Latin **Vita sancti Magni* which unfortunately now survives only in abbreviated versions. Two separate Lives of St Magnús in Old Norse, *Magnúss saga skemmiri* (mid-thirteenth century) and *Magnúss saga lengri* (fourteenth century), are both based on *Orkneyinga saga*, but *Magnúss saga lengri* also incorporates homiletic material translated directly from the lost Latin Life of the saint.

All three Old Norse saga accounts of St Magnús draw attention to his ten years of chaste marriage; *Orkneyinga saga*, for example, has the following statement:

Byggði hann tíu vetr hjá henni, svá at hann spillti hvárskis þeira losta ok var hreinn ok flekklaus allra saurlífissynða, ok er hann kemdi freistin á sér, þá fór hann í kalt vatn ok bað sér fulltings af guði. (*OS* p. 104)

This passage needs to be seen in the context both of hagiographic commonplaces and of the history of the institution of 'spiritual marriage' (cf. Elliott 1993, McGlynn and Moll 1996). The passage employs a variation of a common hagiographical motif of immersion in water as

a prophylactic for sin that is found especially in Irish and Northumbrian hagiography, including that of St Cuthbert (see Ireland 1997). Ascetic immersion also appears in accounts of another Scandinavian royal saint, St Eric of Sweden (d. 1160), as for example in this passage from an Old Swedish Legendary:

Vm fasto ælla vm andra helgha thima kom han ey J drotninginna sæng, vtan tha naturlikin iuste krafðhe køtit, tha hafðhe han eet kar fult m[edh] kalt vatn badhe vm vintir ok somar, som han slækte naturlikan losta m[edh]. (Stephens 1858, 885)

St Magnús's celibate marriage may strike the modern reader as sufficiently saintly, but the writer of *Magnús saga lengri* evidently felt the need to justify Magnús's marrying at all, even though that marriage was a chaste one:

En með því at inn heilagi Magnús jarl hafði ríki ok stjórn yfir veraldarfólki, á vildi hann líkjast heimligum síðum veraldligrá höfðingja; fekk hann sér ok fastnaði eina ríkborna jungfrú ok ina skerustu mey af inum tignustum Skotlands höfðingja ættum ok flutti heim til sín ok gerði brúðlaup til. Þetta gerði inn blessaði Magnús [...] til þess at blekkja blíðligar teygingar þessa heims, heldr en at fullgera fýstir síns líkama, því at hann var hólpinn guðligri gæzlu ok himneskum krapti. (*ML* p. 353)

This somewhat inept attempted justification seems to raise more problems than it solves. The writer claims that Magnús married in order to be like other worldly rulers, but they do not refrain from sexual intercourse during their marriages and it is difficult to see how a chaste marriage which allowed no outlet for sexual desires could help drive away temptations of the flesh. In the standard study of medieval chaste or 'spiritual' marriages, Dyan Elliott shows that in this period it was usual for the wife rather than the husband to initiate a commitment to such a marriage and she suggests that in this context Magnús's taking of the initiative associates his commitment to chastity with remorse over his viking youth (Elliott 1993, 247). This is not, however, a connection which is explicitly made by the medieval writers.

If Elliott is right, then by taking the initiative in adopting celibacy within marriage Magnús adopts a typically feminine role and does so to atone for previously having performed the aggressively masculine role of viking. Jo Ann McNamara, however, suggests that although sainthood through sexual abstinence was particularly associated with women in the early Middle Ages, in the eleventh century it became an attribute of kings (e.g. Henry II of Germany; Edward the Confessor) and Magnús might therefore be seen as one among several male rulers who adopted sexual behaviour previously more characteristic of women. Either way, this story confirms McNamara's view that celibacy threatens any gender system (McNamara 1994, 6).

It seems clear that Magnús's abstinence is gendered behaviour, though it remains uncertain whether it would have been felt to be characteristically feminine or had by this stage become a socially approved way of 'being a man'; it is likely that initiating a chaste marriage would have been a more ambiguously gendered act during Magnús's lifetime than in the later period during which the extant texts were produced.

To understand better how Magnús's sexual behaviour relates to ideologies of masculinity we need to look at its relationship to other aspects of his life as presented in the sagas. Magnús is one of a handful of eleventh- and early twelfth-century vikings who, despite the inherent unlikelihood, nevertheless acquired a reputation for sanctity which led to their veneration as saints and the establishment of cults in their honour. These holy vikings were also rulers – holy kings (or earls or dukes) – and the establishment and later development of their cults owed much to political circumstances (see Hoffmann 1975).

Latin hagiographic literature produced for the cults of these Scandinavian royal saints often omits mention of the ruler's viking activities or explains them away by describing his conversion from viking to saint. These were perhaps obvious ways of negotiating the paradox

inherent in the idea of a holy viking. A rather different approach, however, was taken by Scandinavian historians, also writing in Latin, who had aims other than promoting the ruler's cult and edifying the faithful: while acknowledging that the ruler was a saint, their accounts of his life are often more forthcoming about his viking activities and sometimes pay less attention to miracle stories and other evidence of his sanctity. When late twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic writers included Lives of holy vikings in Old Norse histories of the rulers of Orkney, Norway and Denmark they captured more fully both sides of the paradox of the holy viking, drawing on the literary traditions and conventions of both hagiography and history and providing material of an edifying nature alongside material which reflects very differently on the ruler concerned (I explore this paradox and its negotiation in sagas and Latin texts in Phelpstead 1998).

In all the saga accounts, St Magnús is portrayed as a firm but impartial ruler in the tradition of the *rex iustus*, an ideal developed in the Western church on the basis of the teaching of Augustine and Pseudo-Cyprian. Early in the account of Magnús's rule in *Orkneyinga saga* (Chapter 45) there is an idealized description of him as a model ruler which includes a passage on his attitude to vikings. He was

harðr ok óeirinn við ránumenn ok víkinga, lét drepa mjök á menn, er herjuðu á bóendr ok landsmenn. Lét hann taka morðingja ok jófa ok refsaði svá rikum sem órftum rán ok þýfskur. (*OS* p. 103)

This passage may be contrasted with the tales of Magnús's own youth recorded in *Magnúss saga lengri*, which mentions but also attempts to explain Magnús's youthful viking activities:

En með því at margir snúa sínum síðum eptir þeim, sem þeir hjá lifa, ok hverr er í tjöruna tekr, saurgast af henni: Sem Magnús var orðinn mjök svá fullroskinn at aldri, staddr millum grimruna ok ósiðugra manna, [...] þá sýndist hann nökkvra vetr líkr vera ósiðamönnum ok svá sem víkingr með ránsmönnum eðr hermönnum lifði við rán ok herfang ok stóð at mamdrápum með öðrum; ok er þat trianligt, at hann hafi þetta gört meirr af vándra manna ósiðum ok áeggjan en eiginlígr illsku. (*ML* p. 344)

The writer's unease is evident here: Magnús was led astray by his companions, but only 'seemed' like a wicked man, and although he lived 'as a viking' by stealing and plundering, 'it is to be believed' that Magnús did these things only because he was incited by others. We might say that here peer pressure forces Magnús to adopt or perform a particular way of 'being a man': the way of a viking.

Another incident from Magnús's youth, recorded in all texts, shows him refusing to conform to a 'viking-masculinity' and adopting instead a Christian non-violent form of heroism. Magnús is forced to go on an expedition to the Hebrides and then on to Wales, where the forces he is with engage with those of two Welsh earls in the Menai Strait. As the other men prepare to fight, Magnús sits down on deck and refuses to arm himself: he says that he has no quarrel with anyone there, and 'vil ek því eigi berjask' (*OS* p. 96). Instead of fighting, Magnús 'tók saltara ok söng um bardagann, en hlífði sér ekki' (*OS* p. 96). Nevertheless, although the saga emphasizes that the battle was long and hard, Magnús miraculously remains unharmed. Peter Foote, however, points out (1988, 200–02) that unlike other soldier-saints who permanently renounce violence (e.g. St Martin) Magnús is not a pacifist, but rather a proponent of 'Just War' theory: at this point he refuses to fight only because he does not have a just cause against the Welsh.

Magnús escapes after the Battle of Anglesey and *Magnúss saga lengri* alone of the sagas then has an account of a conversion experience which prompts Magnús to repent of his viking past (this is the passage quoted at the beginning of this paper). At this point *Magnúss saga lengri* has already described Magnús's pious youth and miraculous preservation at the Battle of Anglesey, but he is now presented as if he had never been anything other than a viking and a sinner, a simplification which accommodates the narrative to a hagiographic

convention but which risks undermining that hagiographic purpose by drawing attention to the whitewashing that has been going on earlier in the saga. The conversion narrative is particularly interesting for the way it acknowledges that the life of a viking and that of a saint are alternative masculinities: in turning from one to the other Magnús becomes a 'nýr maðr', a 'new man'.

The sagas, however, contain hints that Magnús's break with his viking past may not have been as clean as the conversion story in *Magnúss saga lengri* would suggest. Thus, *Orkneyinga saga* says of Hákon and Magnús that

Svá er sagt í kvæði því, er ort er um þá, at þeir hafi barizk við þann höfðingja, er Dufniáll hétí ok var manni finnari en brøðrungr jarla, ok fell hann fyrir þeim. Þorbjörn hét göðugr maðr, er þeir tóku af lífi í Borgafirði á Hjaltilandi. (OS p. 104)

A sixteenth-century Danish translation of *Orkneyinga saga* supports the reading of *Magnúss saga skemtri* which gives a description of the manner in which Þorbjörn was killed: 'En svá er sagt, at þeir hafi tekit hús á honum ok brennt hann inni' (*MSk* p. 317). It is likely that a scribe deleted this sentence at some point in the textual tradition behind the surviving Norse text of *Orkneyinga saga*, recognising that saints ought not to burn people in their homes.

Magnúss saga lengri also briefly recounts the killing of Dufniáll, and refers to the killing but not the burning of Þorbjörn. This writer's unease is evident in his justification of Magnús's actions in terms of the ideal of a just ruler:

Hefir inn heilagi Magnús þessa hluti framit eigi sem víkingr eðr ránsmaðr, heldr sem lögligr stjórnari ríkisins ok geymslumaðr laganna, eiskari fríðarins, til at hirta ósiðu manna ok reísa rangendi, fríða ok náða sína undirmenn ok sitt ríki af ofska ok ágandi vándra manna, er æ sátu um þat at spilla fríðinum. (*ML* p. 352)

This suggests that the ideal Christian ruler, far from being a pacifist, must perform deeds that might be open to interpretation as those of a viking or thief. In other words, there is not simply an opposition between aggressive viking and pacifist saintly masculinities, but also a third way of 'being a man': that of the model Christian ruler.

The influence of hagiographic conventions is clearly seen in the accounts of Magnús's death. Although Magnús's 'martyrdom' is motivated only by Hákon's political ambitions, the accounts of it are influenced by the biblical narratives of Christ's Passion. Magnús's spending the night praying in the church after arriving on Egilsay, for example, parallels Christ's watching in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His arrest. Magnús faces death as befits a Christian martyr, 'glæðligr sem honum væri til veizlu boðit' (OS p. 110). He prays for his enemies and then asks his executioner to strike him on the head rather than behead him: 'eigi samir at höggva höfðingja sem þjófa' (OS p. 111). At this fatal moment Magnús asserts that he is a nobleman and, as in the passage just quoted from *Magnúss saga lengri*, we again see here a class-based distinction between the two male roles of the chieftain and the thief. The courage with which Magnús faces his death is a virtue common to the value systems of both vikings and Christian martyrs: 'Eptir þat signdi hann sik, ok laut hann undír höggit, ok leið |nd hans til himins' (OS p. 111).

The portrait of Earl Magnús which emerges from the sagas is an intriguing combination of viking, ideal ruler, married virgin and (political) martyr in which the inherent paradox of his being a 'holy viking' is never, even in texts closest in approach to hagiography, entirely resolved. This situation may to some extent be understood as resulting from the way the texts juxtapose hagiographic with non-hagiographic discourses. It seems, though, that the issue is not only one of literary genre, but also of ideologies of masculinity: not only a question of what kinds of text these are, but also what kind of man Magnús is.

St Knútr Sveinsson

The saga accounts of St Magnús may fruitfully be compared with the Life of the Danish royal martyr, St Knútr Sveinsson (d. 1086) in the Icelandic *Knytinga saga*, a text from the other end of the main period of Kings' Saga production.

St Knútr Sveinsson's reign occupies Chapters 23–72 of *Knytinga saga*, a history of the kings of Denmark from the tenth century to the year 1186 that was written sometime between 1235 and 1300. The saga's account of St Knútr depends on Danish-Latin traditions embodied in two hagiographic accounts of Knútr's Life by Englishmen living in Denmark, one anonymous, the other, called Ailnoth, a monk from Canterbury who was living there as an exile following the Norman conquest of England. Their hagiographies provided source material for several later Latin histories of Denmark, including most famously the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus.

In *Knytinga saga* Knútr performs a number of masculinities: like Magnús, he is portrayed as a viking, a just ruler and a Christian martyr. He is on a viking raid when his own father dies, yet is later elected king in order to protect against vikings, and then rules in such a way as to be condemned by his own subjects as a viking. Þórðr skorri addresses the rebels whom he incites to rise up in rebellion against Knútr with the statement that

Hann er ótrúr maðr ok ágjarn, svá at hann kann ekki hóf at, ok má hann at réttu kalla heldr viking en konung. (KS p. 173)

Yet after his accession Knútr had outlawed viking raids, activity which the narrator associates with paganism:

En er Knútr var konungr orðinn, þá varði hann landit harðfengiliga ok rak alla heiðingja af landi sínu ok jafnvel af sjónum, svá at engi þorði úti at liggja fyrir Danmörk fyrir sakir ríkis Knúts konungs ok herskapar. (KS p. 148)

Knútr himself later makes the same equation: when he reproves Blóð-Egill for his raids against the Wends he says of viking activity, 'Er þat heiðinna hátr' (KS p. 157). There is no attempt in this saga to suggest that Knútr had a conversion-type experience after which he repented of his viking past, although in Ailnoth's Latin *vita* a whole chapter is given over to describing Knútr's confession of the sins of his youth and the severe penitential disciplines he imposed on himself to atone for them (*Gesta Svenomagni regis et filiorum eius et passio gloriosissimi Canuti regis et martyris* ch. ix (VSD pp. 95–96)).

There is little evidence in *Knytinga saga's* Life of St Knútr of the kind of religious devotion one might expect of someone whose sanctity was confirmed by miracles after his death. Chapter 31 of the saga employs a conventional hagiographic topos, the sexual temptation of a saint, but turns the convention upside down so that the future saint is the tempter or seducer rather than the tempted. *Knytinga saga* is the only surviving text to record Knútr's intention to commit adultery with the beautiful wife of a priest; Ailnoth, by contrast, praises Knútr for marrying and not preferring mistresses (VSD p. 93). The saga mentions in the previous chapter that Knútr was married and had a son and this makes the sinfulness of his subsequent behaviour all the clearer. Having noticed the priest's wife at a feast, the king orders his steward to ensure that she is brought to his bed. When Knútr climbs into bed with her, the woman persuades him not to commit adultery: she tells him that 'svá vel ok fagrliga sem þér siðið aðra menn í þessu landi, þá samir yðr þó at hafa fegrsta siðu, því at þér eruð fyrir öllum mönnum hér í landi.' (KS p. 149). She then reminds him that there is a greater King than he, and implies that God will treat Knútr in the same way in which he treats her. Knútr agrees to spend the night in a different bed, saying that 'þó er nú at sinni nökkut athald í at gera eigi sinn vilja, en þó er þetta lítit hjá stórum hlutum, er várr herra Jhésús Kristús hefir þolt fyrir várar sakir' (KS p. 150). This may appear to be an appropriately pious response, but

it is somewhat grudging and makes a rather far-fetched comparison between Christ's crucifixion and the discomfort caused by the need to remain monogamous.

Understanding this episode requires a knowledge not only of the hagiographic topos of the tempted woman which is inverted here but also, I think, of the church-historical context of Gregorian reforms aimed at ensuring clerical celibacy.

In the story Knútr, the future saint, is cast as tempter and the beautiful woman as virtuous evangelist. This exactly reverses the roles expected in a Saint's Life, but nevertheless preserves the gender roles conventionally performed in this hagiographic topos. The wife's role as the virtuous woman who converts her would-be seducer, is a common motif in Lives of Holy (female) Virgins. Whereas Magnús's initiation of a chaste marriage may involve some blurring of gender roles in conforming to a non-violent and celibate Christian masculinity, Knútr's sexual conduct (or at least, his intended conduct) conforms to a masculine gendered role which conflicts with the role of Christian martyr that he performs elsewhere in the text; there is, I think, a clear assumption in his behaviour that a king can have any woman he wants (Knútr's conduct also echoes some of the biblical King David's sexual misdemeanours).

The fact that Knútr's intended victim is a priest's wife may give her a greater moral authority, or, given that clerical marriage was becoming less acceptable, it might show that Knútr's intended sin was so great that even someone already to an extent morally compromised could recognize its wickedness.

This strange story, which appears in no other surviving source and is completely at odds with Ailnoth's praise of Knútr's marital fidelity draws our attention to ways in which conflicting masculine ideals, heroic, kingly and saintly, relate to gendered sexual roles.

Alternative masculinities are juxtaposed in the saga's account of Knútr's death. This is presented as a Christian martyrdom, and its self-sacrificial aspect is emphasized by the contrast with the heroic way in which his brother Benedikt meets his death. The rebels advance on the king while he is at Mass. Although advised to escape, Knútr says that he would rather lay down his life so that his men might be spared:

Nú þó at ek frelsa svá líf mitt, þá munu þeir þó gera hér þann mannskaða, er seint mun ek boðr biða. Vil ek miklu heldr gefask upp einn fyrir alla oss, því at ek veit þat, ef þeir ná lífi mínu auðvelliga, at þá munu gríð hafna menn mínir flestir. (KS p. 188)

This self-sacrifice on behalf of others implicitly associates Knútr's death with Christ's. His brother Benedikt, however, gives eloquent expression to heroic values:

Þá skömm skal oss aldregi henda, at vér skylim selja yðr undir vápn óvína yðarra, þótt vér vissim oss vísan frið. Hitt skulu heldr Danameyjar eiga til at spyrja, at vér kunnim at beita sverðunum ok várn konung at verja, því at víst eigi vil ek at vita, at þeir höggvi þik fyrir augum mér, en ek standa hjá. Hefi ek þat ok aldregi heyr't, at guði líki betr huglausir klækismenn hugfullir drengir ok kvatir. Viljum vér miklu heldr deyja með drengskap með þér en lífa eptir þik með klakiskap. (KS p. 189)

That this is behaviour gendered as masculine is clear from the contrast that Benedikt draws with that of the Danish maidens whose role is simply to be suitably impressed by tales of the (male) warriors' heroic swordsmanship.

While Knútr's men prepare to defend the church he seats himself in state by the altar, and begins to sing from a psalter, a detail that is found only in *Knýllinga saga*. When some flying debris injures him, causing profuse bleeding, he sets a basin on his knee so that the blood does not spoil his clothes and he then continues singing. A prominent rebel, Eyvindr bífra, requests an audience with the king in order to negotiate a truce. Knútr ignores Benedikt's suspicions and allows Eyvindr to come forward. As he does so he reveals a sword he had hidden under his cloak and lunges straight through the king's body; the king dies

commending himself to God. Eyvindr is killed trying to escape, and some of the king's men then flee, but Benedikt remains true to his heroic code and kills as many rebels as he can, before being killed himself. His resistance wins for him the kind of renown coveted by heroic society: it is said that he and his men fought so well 'at þeira vörn ok hreysti er æ ágætt' (*KS* p. 196).

In *Knýtlinga saga* the contrasting masculine roles of viking and saint to which Knútr conforms during his life are vividly contrasted at his death by being performed by two different men: Knútr and his brother Benedikt. The narrative, however, commends both brothers, suggesting that both ideals were, or were regarded as, valid alternative masculinities.

Other Sagas of Scandinavian Royal Saints

As he is portrayed in *Knýtlinga saga* (chs 78–92) St Knútr lávarör (d. 1131) is more thoroughly assimilated to models of Christian sainthood than is the case in other sagas of Scandinavian royal saints: he is idealised as a popular and efficient ruler and a martyr (at any rate, he is murdered) but we are given no information about his sexual conduct. Tensions between different masculinities (viking, king, martyr) are, however, notable in other sagas of Scandinavian royal saints. The Life of St Rögnvaldr Kali Kolsson (d. 1158/59) in *Orkneyinga saga* chs 58–104 would repay extended separate discussion examining masculinities in the context of ('courtly') love poetry.

In the sagas of St Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway masculine sexuality is aligned with one of the masculine roles performed by the saint in a more straightforward way than is the case in the sagas of SS Magnús and Knútr Sveinsson. The paradoxes of Óláfr's character have received a good deal of attention by scholars seeking to understand his presentation in the sagas as both a viking and a saint (cf. e.g. Bagge on Snorri Sturluson's portrait of the king in *Heimskringla*), but his sexual behaviour (such as his having a son, Magnús, by a concubine called Álfhildr: see Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga helga* ch. 122) seems unconnected to his sainthood and is unexceptional in terms of the normal behaviour of (non-saintly) kings of the period: the 'problem' of the relationship of Óláfr's sexuality to the masculine roles he performs is simply accounting for its wholesale alignment with one role (king) and opposition to what is expected of another role (saint/martyr).

Conclusions

In the sagas of Scandinavian saints examined in this paper canonised rulers are seen 'being men' in terms of alternative masculinities which may be characterised roughly as 'heroic' (violent viking) and 'saintly' (non-violent martyr), but this simple opposition is complicated by the fact that the saints are rulers whose biographies are also informed by theologically based ideals of just kingship. Their commitment to one or other masculinity varies in the course of their lives, and these rulers are 'holy vikings' who perform multiple and contradictory gender roles in their lives and deaths. In capturing that paradox the sagas provide a snapshot of an historical moment in which ideologies of masculinity were in flux, something also seen in the accounts of the saints' sexual conduct.

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