

## Religious Visions and Christian Rule in Old Icelandic Romance

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The medieval prose sagas of Iceland which modern critics term 'romances' (or *riddarasögur*, 'sagas of knights') constitute a somewhat heterogeneous group. Leaving aside the versions of continental romances and *chansons de geste* first translated in Norway at the behest of King Hákon IV, but preserved in Icelandic manuscripts, most of the *riddarasögur* which are assumed to be original Icelandic compositions fall into one of the following two categories: they either treat the exploits of courtly heroes in chivalric, continental European settings (for example, *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, *Adonias saga*, and *Mírmanns saga*), or else are sensational adventure stories, closely resembling the Viking-orientated *fornaldarsögur* ('sagas of ancient time') in terms of themes, structure, and motifs (examples include *Ála flekks saga*, *Sigurðar saga fóts*, and *Valdimars saga*). Sagas in the second group tend to be thoroughly secular works of entertainment, containing no religious or overtly moralising elements, but many of the texts in the first group do contain significant Christian themes and references. These religious aspects most often take the form of a conflict between Christians and heathens, as in *Mírmanns saga*, for instance, but also occur when heroes become hermits and devote themselves to the religious life after enjoying the fruits of worldly success, or, as is the case for the three sagas which I shall discuss in this paper, when characters experience religious visions during the course of their quests.

In the majority of the Icelandic romances, the hero attains (or regains) a position of prestige and power by battling against fearsome enemies and making alliances with other rulers, often by assisting them in their own conflicts against evil invaders or non-human aggressors. These adventures are usually presented in a fiercely individualistic spirit, the glory of the hero himself eclipsing any broader social vision or religious concern. At first sight, the three romances to be dealt with in this paper, *Bærings saga*, *Flóvents saga*, and *Dámusta saga ok Jóns*, all sagas, it must be noted, with conspicuous Christian elements, appear to present heroes who operate in much the same way as those of any other *riddarasaga*. All three feature heroes who, largely or partly through the use of physical violence, eventually accede to royal power. However, in each of these texts, a character experiences a religious vision in which divine support is given to the hero. These visions, I would argue, have important implications for the sagas' treatment of kingship, suggesting an awareness of the importance of the doctrine of royal authority *dei gratia* ('by the grace of God'), a political dimension which does not appear to be present in many other *riddarasögur* nor in the majority of the *fornaldarsögur*.

### *Bærings saga*

Let us begin with *Bærings saga*, a romance preserved in Icelandic manuscripts from the early fourteenth century and later (Kalinke and Mitchell 1985, 24-25). Although the saga's first editor, Gustaf Cederschiöld, believed the saga to be a thirteenth-century Norwegian translation of a German romance (1884, clxxxvii), it is now generally

accepted that the work is an original Icelandic composition. The saga tells the story of the young and handsome Bæringr's attempts to regain his patrimonial lands in Germany after the treacherous knight Heinrekr murders Bæringr's uncle and seizes power. After escaping to England with his mother, Bæringr serves a number of European rulers, proving himself to be an accomplished warrior. Eventually, he returns home to defeat Heinrekr and take the throne.

Although much of the saga is taken up by the obligatory battle scenes, Bæringr's quest to retake his uncle's realm also faces obstacles other than military ones. Matters are complicated by the effect his great beauty has on the women he encounters. A series of women fall in love with *hinn fagri riddari* ('the fair knight'), as he is nicknamed, and this causes tensions between Bæringr and the rulers he serves. For example, the Greek Emperor is betrothed to Vilfríör, the daughter of the King of France, with whom Bæringr is staying. As soon as Vilfríör sees Bæringr, she regrets her decision to agree to the marriage, and claims that she was told in a dream that she must enter a nunnery and never marry. Bæringr rejects her advances, and later enters the service of the Emperor. Shortly afterwards, as a reward for defeating heathen invaders, he is offered the hand of the Emperor's sister, Vindemia, along with half of Greece. Bæringr replies that he wishes to recover his own patrimonial lands before marrying Vindemia, but promises to remain faithful to her. Later, during a campaign in Italy, the widow of a warrior he has slain falls in love with Bæringr, which causes him to regret his handsome appearance. At this point, an angel appears to Bæringr to urge him to remain loyal to his betrothed, and warns him that further temptations and dangers await him (*Bærings saga*, 105):

Anokkvri nott syndiz honvm isvefni eingill gvds ok mælti til hans: 'Gvd hefir gefitt þer mikinn fridleik; ok vil hann eigi, at þv leynir giof hans ne fegvrd þinni. En at fegrð þinni mvn þer verða meinleiti; því at dottir Lvcij Rvmveria konvngs, er heitir Lvcinia, man miok freista þinn, ok margar adrar; þvíat þær vilia þinvm vilia na. En engri þeirra þarftv at trva, nema Vindemie; hon er in kvrtæisazta mær; hana skaltv þer til eiginkvnn taka, en ei adrar, þær er villaz fyrir fridleik þinvm ok villia mvnvd drygia, en avnga einvrd halda.' Síðann valnaði Bæringr ok hvgleiði fegrð eingilsins ok ihvgsade, með hverivm hætti hann hafði synnz honvm, ok gengr til kirkiv ok kallar a gvð til miskvnar, at hann liai honvm þan fagnað, er engillinn bodaðe honvm. Ok þorðe hann eigi at byrgia andlitt sitt ne leyna gvds giof.

As the angel has predicted, Bæringr's good looks soon bring him into more danger. While Bæringr is in the service of the King of the Romans, the latter's daughter, Lucinia, confesses her love for him and suggests that they should marry (as Lucinia is the only heir to Lucius, Bæringr would stand to gain the kingdom as well as a bride). Furthermore, she demands that Bæringr satisfy her carnal desires immediately, and threatens to have him killed if he refuses. Bæringr does indeed refuse Lucinia's advances, and attempts to placate her by claiming that he is of too low a status for such a marriage to be appropriate. Unimpressed, Lucinia soon takes revenge by tricking Bæringr into entering a room alone with her, and pretending that he is trying to rape her. Her father arrives on the scene and, believing that he has caught Bæringr red-handed, has him thrown off a waterfall and, apparently, killed. Bæringr survives

thanks to an angel who rescues him as he is falling. For the rest of the saga, Bæringr remains faithful to Vindemia, and finally marries her, having defeated his enemies, retaken his patrimonial lands, and arranged the marriages of his various allies (Vilfríðr is to marry the Greek Emperor after all, and Lucinia is to marry King Ríkarðr of England).

Bæringr's success, then, depends not solely on his military exploits, but on his ability to negotiate the moral challenges he is faced with as a result of his sexual magnetism. By the end of the saga, his fitness to rule has been confirmed not only through his superiority as a warrior, but by his loyalty to those he himself has served as well as by his avoidance of the temptations of the flesh and his loyalty to his betrothed.

### *Flóvents saga*

*Flóvents saga* appears to be one of the earliest of the medieval Icelandic romances, preserved in manuscripts from the fourteenth century onwards (Kalinke and Mitchell 1985, 47). The saga is closely related to continental works, but does not seem to be a translation of any extant foreign source. As we shall see, it bears a certain resemblance to *Bærings saga* in terms of theme and action, and it seems likely that the author of the latter drew on *Flóvents saga* for inspiration. The work is extant in two redactions, one of which lacks an ending, and both versions are included in Cederschiöld's edition (1884, I: 124-67; II: 168-208).

The story begins when Flóvent is forced to flee the court of his uncle, the Roman Emperor, after killing one of the latter's dukes during a petty argument. Accompanied by his faithful servants, Otun and Jofrey, Flóvent takes refuge with a hermit, who, in his previous career as a heathen chieftain, was responsible for the deaths of a number of holy men, but has now converted to Christianity. The hermit warns Flóvent that escape to the north will be difficult, as France has been subjugated by the heathen King Salatres of Saxland. If Flóvent is discovered to be Christian, he will be in grave danger. During the night, while his guests are sleeping, the hermit experiences an angelic visitation (*Flóvents saga* I, 129):

Einsetv maðr geck til kirkiv; en þegar kom engill gvðs til hans ok mælti: 'Broðir!' sagði hann, 'vng menni þetta er systvr son keisara, er reðr ollv Roma riki; ok hefir hann land flemdan Flovent, því at hann drap mañ hans .i. fyrir bordi keisara. En Flovent verðr at þeta þenna glép með miklvm meínletvm; ok hann mañ þola margar þessa heims píslir ok stór vendreði, aðr hann avðliz af londvm sva mikít, at rvm hans se. En Iesvs Crístr sendi mik til þin; ok byð ec þer i hans nafni, at þv gefir Flovent vapn þin oll; því at þav skolo þer nv ecki. En hann mañ margan heidíngia gera hvgsivkan fyrir gvðs sakir ok hans laga, er hann mañ vpp hefia. Ok ef hann trvir a hans miskvnn ok mátt, þa mañ hann .i. raða ollo Fraclandi með retrri stíorn.' Einsetv maðr svarar: 'Ek vil blíðliga veita þa gíof.' Þa hvarf engillinn fra honvm at sýn.

Following this encounter, the hermit returns to Flóvent, hands him his special sword, and assures him that he will have victory if he trusts in God's mercy. The fugitives then leave the hermit and defeat a number of assailants before reaching France,

concealing their Christian beliefs. They ally themselves to King Flórent of France, and, after a series of adventures and fierce battles, finally overcome Salatres, whose daughter Flóvent marries following her conversion to Christianity. After Flórent's death in battle, Flóvent assumes the throne of France, decrees that Christianity should be adopted throughout the kingdom, and arranges for the construction of many churches. He is eventually reconciled with his uncle, the Roman Emperor.

### *Dámusta saga ok Jóns*

*Dámusta saga ok Jóns*, probably composed in Iceland in the fourteenth century, is preserved in manuscripts from the fifteenth century and later (Kalinke and Mitchell 1985, 32). The saga tells the story of two rival suitors for the hand of Gratiana, the daughter of the Emperor of Constantinople. Dámusti, the son of one of the Emperor's twelve counsellors, is a popular knight and friend of the princess, and a devotee of the Virgin Mary. He has harboured his love for Gratiana in secret, and when she accepts the suit of King Jón of Smáland, who, having heard of Gratiana's beauty and accomplishments, has travelled to Constantinople in order to woo her, he gains approval from the wise men to kill his rival in the forest. After a fierce battle in which many men are slain, Dámusti kills Jón but falls ill immediately afterwards. He asks the wise men to arrange a settlement with the Emperor on his behalf. This is eventually done, and Jón's body is placed in a tomb. Although Dámusti recovers, the princess Gratiana falls ill and, as it seems, dies. Her body is also placed in a tomb. A grief-stricken Dámusti regrets his crime, and prays to God for mercy. At this point, he receives a holy visitor (*Dámusta saga ok Jóns*, 90-91):

Sijþann rann á hann ómeiginns hófge, ok þegar jafnn skiótt sá hann liós mikid koma j herbergid, suo biartt, ad hann mátti ei á móte siá, suoad lijste umm allt húsid. Kona gieck j húsid, hun var suo, ad það geijslade af augumm hennar ok alla vegha af henne, enn þó sá hann deijle til hennar. Hun gieck ad huijlnunne þar sem hann lá, ok stód þar umm stund, ok mællte: 'Hier ligr þú, Dámuste, ok hefr sofnad frá miklum andvara, ok er það ad lijkindumm. Enn þó fallast þier nú kuediur vid mik, enn hier er kominn Maria drottning ad finna þig; enn vita skalltu, ad son minn er þier reidr saker jllgiórða þinna ok manndrapa, enn þó lofade hann mier ad vitia þijn; heijrde hann ákall þitt, ok ef þar fjiłger hugr mále, þá mon þier duga; suo ok heijrda ek ákall þitt, er þu ákallader mik til árnadarords. Nu skal þess ad nióta af mier, at þu hefur kuatt mik Mariu tjidumm, ok gleimtt þui j minnsta læge; ok óllum þeim, er það gióra med skinseme, skal ek það umbuna. Enn þó skalltu nú vpp standa ok taka vopnn þijn, ef þu villt veria umustu þijna, þuiat nú þarf hun þess. Hest þinn Fulltrúa skalltu hafa, þui nú montto reina, huor hann er edur huad hann má; hauk þinn Huijtserk ok Albus hund þinn skalltu láta fjiłgia þier. Alldre hefur þu komid j sliłka mannaun, enn ek mon vera med þier.' Nú lijdr brott liós, það er Dámuste sá j húsinu. [...] Dámuste vaknar nú, oc ummhuxar, huad fjiłrer hann hafe borid, ok þikist ei vita, huar fjiłrer hann hafe sliłjekt dreimtt, þui hann þikist ei á nockre annare elsko hafa, enn keijsara dóttur, enn visse hana þó dauda.

Dámusti is puzzled, but arms himself as instructed and goes to the church where Gratiana is buried, where he prays again. He soon encounters a giant, who identifies himself as Alheimr, claiming that he wishes to enjoy the princess's body in death as he can no longer enjoy her alive. The two fight fiercely, with neither gaining the advantage, until they call a truce and discuss the situation. Alheimr reveals that Gratiana is not dead, but merely in a deep sleep as a result of his trickery. He explains that he induced feelings of lust in Dámusti, knowing that only he would have the courage to kill Jón and so remove a major obstacle to Alheimr's ambitions of having the princess for himself. Alheimr was also responsible for Dámusti's illness, which he had hoped would kill his remaining rival, but the intervention of the Virgin Mary prevented this from happening. The giant concedes defeat, and tells Dámusti how to revive Gratiana. He tells him that he should explain to the Emperor what has happened, and that he will then be able to marry the princess and become Emperor after Gratiana's father's death. He must, however, repay God for this in the end. Events proceed as Alheimr has outlined, and Dámusti marries the princess and eventually becomes Emperor. Many years later, Dámusti announces that his son should be crowned Emperor, and that the couple are to become hermits devoted to God. Gratiana does not live long as a hermit, but Dámusti lives for a long time before his death. They are finally buried alongside the previous Emperor and King Jón.

### Flawed Heroes

A reader accustomed to entirely virtuous heroes in other medieval Icelandic romances might be surprised by the crimes committed by the heroes of two of the sagas under discussion here. Dámusti's brutal murder of Jón seems, at first sight, to be provoked only by his jealousy. Flóvent's killing of the duke at his uncle's court seems similarly blameworthy, resulting from the hotheadedness of youth: Flóvent accidentally spills a drink on the duke at a feast, and, in the ensuing argument, kills him. It might seem odd, then, that the two heroes should achieve victory and attain power by the end of their respective sagas, and even odder that the heroes appear to receive divine approval for their elevation to kingship.

A careful examination of the events, however, shows that, although the killings are portrayed as morally reprehensible, there are mitigating circumstances in both cases. As I have mentioned, it is revealed in the course of *Dámusta saga* that the evil giant Alheimr used magic powers to induce feelings of jealousy in Dámusti, knowing that only Dámusti had the ability to destroy Jón, Alheimr's love-rival. Dámusti, then, was not fully in control of his emotions when he slew Jón. He was not compelled to kill his rival, of course – he could, presumably, have chosen not to act on his feelings of jealousy – and so he acted sinfully. Alheimr's intervention, however, if not quite allowing us to consider Dámusti's behaviour 'amoral', as Marianne Kalinke has suggested (1990, 134), reduces his culpability considerably. Flóvent's killing of the duke comes about when a servant, envious of Flóvent's superior qualities, overfills a cup which Flóvent wishes to use to salute the Emperor. Because it is too full, he spills some of the drink on the duke's clothing, who angrily seizes Flóvent and insults him. Flóvent, incensed by this, strikes out and kills the duke. Flóvent's actions are morally incorrect, but the duke's overreaction and, more importantly, the servant's malicious

intent in overfilling the cup brought the situation about in the first place. These circumstances mitigate Flóvent's crime somewhat.

Unlike Flóvent and Dámusti, Bæringr commits no reprehensible act. However, the angel warns him against the temptations of the flesh, the implicit suggestion being that he is susceptible to such dangers. Bæringr also describes himself as a sinful man when he describes how he was rescued from the waterfall by the angel (*Bærings saga*, 110). These facts serve to emphasise that Bæringr is to be understood as merely human and so subject to the same frailties as anyone else. He is, however, like the heroes of the other two sagas, favoured by God, as his dream-vision indicates.

### Visions, Religious Literature, and the Sagas

Oracular dreams – that is, dreams in which an authoritative figure appears to an individual and gives advice or encouragement or makes prophecies about the future – are not uncommon in Old Icelandic literature, and feature in sagas of various kinds. Such cases may involve the appearance of a distinguished ancestor or of a hero of antiquity, as in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*, when the poet Egill Skalla-Grímsson appears in a dream to his distant relation Egill Halldórsson to express his dismay at Snorri Sturluson's plans to move from Borg to Reykjaholt (*Íslendinga saga*, 22), or when the heroine of Germanic legend, Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, appears to the young wife of a priest, Jóriðr Hermundardóttir, and recites prophetic verse about events in thirteenth-century Iceland (*Íslendinga saga*, 487-92). In sagas with a more religious concern, such as the *Biskupa sögur* ('sagas of bishops'), dream-visitors are more likely to be associated with Christian belief, as in *Guðmundar saga Arasonar*, when the Virgin Mary appears to a woman who is watching over a lunatic to advise her on how to cure the latter of her illness (*Guðmundar saga Arasonar*, 211-12).

As far as I am aware, there are only four instances of an oracular dream in the medieval Icelandic *riddarasögur*. One of these, from *Ectors saga*, involves the appearance in a dream of Hector of Troy (*Ectors saga*, 82-83). The other three feature dream visitors from Christian belief, and these are the instances under consideration in this paper. Considered purely as religious visitations, there is nothing remarkable about these three dream-visions. They are of the kind that might be found anywhere in patristic or hagiographical works, or, indeed, in the Bible. They are not, in themselves, of great interest to anyone interested in vision literature. They lack the striking content of the kind found in, say, Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, at least one of which, as is well known, was the inspiration for Flosi Þórðarson's dream in *Brennu-Njáls saga* (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, 346-48). The incidents in the romances were unlikely to have been included, then, because of how colourful the motifs were. Rather, they were included because they provided a means of showing clearly that the saga heroes enjoyed divine support, and to create a connection in the minds of the audience between these characters and saints or other holy men.

This connection is strengthened by other resemblances between certain situations in the sagas and incidents from the Bible. This is particularly the case for *Bærings saga*. The infant Bæringr's escape from Heinrekr at the beginning of the saga, floating down the Elbe with his mother on a log (*Bærings saga*, 87), might call to mind the young Moses floating down the Nile in a basket (*Exodus* 2). Like St. Paul in

the Mediterranean (*Acts 27*), Bæringr survives a shipwreck on his initial return to England from the continent (*Bærings saga*, 92). When he returns to his companions after his apparent death in the waterfall, he is, at first, thought to be a troll. Bæringr tells his companions not to be afraid (*'Ræðiz eigi, godir vinir!'*), and explains his miraculous survival (*Bærings saga*, 110). This scene resembles the miracle of Jesus walking on the water, which causes some of his disciples to think they are seeing a ghost, to which Jesus replies in similar terms to Bæringr (*Matthew 14: 22-32*). It also calls to mind Jesus's appearance after the resurrection, Bæringr's return, like that of Jesus, coming three days after his apparent death. *Bærings saga* is not alone in containing biblical parallels, however. Dámusti's killing of Jón of Smálönd in order to obtain Gratiana, and his subsequent repentance, bears a certain resemblance to David's arranging the death of Uriah the Hittite and taking his wife, only to repent of his crime later (2 *Samuel 11-12*). This story is even referred to in the Norwegian treatise on kingship, *Konungs skuggsjá* ('King's Mirror'), which examines David's status as a king and a sinner (*Konungs skuggsjá*, 88; 108-09). Dámusti, of course, succeeds his father-in-law as emperor even though he has committed murder, thanks in part to his devotion to the Virgin Mary, a cause which has enabled him to receive divine support.

### Heroic Might and Divine Right

In all three sagas, the divine assistance supplied to the heroes enables them to achieve victory over their enemies and to assume royal power. Bæringr, not only fortified by his vision, but also rescued from certain death by an angel, goes on to be crowned king of his homeland and to take revenge on the evil Heimir. He is subsequently crowned king of the Romans following the death of Lucius. The hermit's assistance starts Flóvent out on a journey which ends with his coronation as king of France and his reconciliation with his uncle, the Roman Emperor. The Virgin Mary's advice helps Dámusti to defeat Alheimr and to revive Gratiana, whom he marries, and as a consequence he becomes emperor after the death of his father-in-law.

It might be objected that, with the exception of Bæringr's rescue from the waterfall, the material assistance given to the hero in *Bærings saga* does not amount to much. Bæringr's qualities as a warrior and as a chivalrous knight ought to provide sufficient explanation for his rise to power. Similarly, in *Flóvents saga*, the hermit's assistance is useful, but not, it might be argued, the key factor in the hero's success. The hermit arms Flóvent and gives him encouraging words as a result of the angelic visitation, but he has, it will be noticed, already lent him considerable assistance by giving his party shelter and by warning him about the heathen takeover of France. Again, Flóvent's superiority in military matters, along with his ability to inspire the loyalty of his servants and to make alliances, might seem to be the main explanation for his victory. The divine assistance granted to Dámusti, on the other hand, is surely more significant. Although the Virgin Mary's appearance does little more than encourage the hero to defend his beloved, Alheimr later reveals that divine intervention prevented him from carrying out his plans fully (*Dámusta saga ok Jóns*, 98). Whatever the level of help given to the heroes in the sagas, however, I would suggest that the fact that heavenly powers intervene at all is of greater significance than the precise nature of this intervention. As far as my argument is concerned, the

most important function of the religious visions in the three sagas is to demonstrate that the heroes have divine support, and so to lend legitimacy to their ascent to power.

There is no such suggestion of divine backing in most of the *fornaldarsögur* and original Icelandic *riddarasögur*. In these texts, the heroes' own prowess elevates them to power and success. That is not to say that these characters receive no help from others in achieving this success. Alliances with other warriors play an important role in this regard. The help given to such heroes may even be supernatural, with assistance forthcoming from dwarves, elves, or even from the dead. When *riddarasaga* or *fornaldarsaga* heroes receive help from supernatural beings, however, it is usually as part of a negotiated agreement or exchange. When, for example, Vilhjálmr receives a magic sword from a dwarf in *Sigurðar saga þögla*, this is given in return for an act of kindness towards the dwarf's child, who had previously been injured by Vilhjámnr's impetuous brother (*Sigurðar saga þögla*, 113-17). Similarly, in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, when an elf-woman asks the saga's hero to lay his hands on her daughter in order to lift a curse and so enable her to give birth, the latter is rewarded with the stag he had been pursuing, a magic ring, and a warning about his companion's treachery (*Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 199-201). In cases such as these, supernatural assistance is no different qualitatively or functionally from any other kind of help that might be given to the hero. It might even be argued that it makes little sense to attach significance to the difference between supernatural and natural activities in these contexts, given that it is unclear if medieval people conceived of this distinction in anything like the same way as we do (cf. Ármann Jakobsson 1998-2001, 69). One ought also to consider the fantastic mode in which such sagas operate: marvellous phenomena are the norm in the *fornaldar-* and *riddarasögur*, and are integrated more or less seamlessly into the narrative. However, regardless of how magic and supernatural beings were viewed, this kind of intervention would, to a medieval Christian audience, certainly be distinguished from the assistance lent to individuals from God. Divine intervention must be of greater significance.

The distinction I have made between the two models of kingship found in the romantic sagas broadly reflects a shift in royal ideology which had already taken place in Scandinavia by the time these sagas were written. The change from what we might term the '*fornaldarsaga* model', in which kings attain and maintain power through military strength and by relying on the individual loyalty of followers, to the '*dei gratia* model', in which royal authority proceeds from divine blessing, is visible in the political development of the Norwegian state in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, according to Sverre Bagge's analysis of kingship in *Sverris saga* and *Håkons saga Hákonarsonar* (Bagge 1996). As the title of his study (*From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed*) suggests, Bagge considers the two *konungasögur* ('sagas of kings') to exemplify a change in the nature of kingship from one in which Sverre Sigurdsson 'was primarily the leader of a closely knit community of warriors, and the success of his claim to the Norwegian throne depended on his ability to gain the confidence of these men and make them fight for him' (1996, 12) to one in which Hákon Hákonsson 'governs as the representative of the dynasty and by virtue of his divine election' (1996, 156). Of course, this ideological shift is not a sudden and complete upheaval, but is, rather, a change of emphasis in how royal authority was conceived. The connection between the Norwegian king and Christianity had been established since



conversion. Neither did the conception of the king as an individual actor in events die in the thirteenth century. Nonetheless, it does appear that efforts were made at the highest level to promote the new royal ideology through the commission of works such as the aforementioned *konungasögur* and *Konungs skuggsjá*, which, as I have mentioned, dealt with the role of the king in society.

By the time the sagas we are concerned with here were composed, Iceland had already been brought under the control of the Norwegian kingdom. Our uncertainty about the precise circumstances of composition of these works precludes us from making any straightforward connection between historical and political events of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and the models of kingship presented in the sagas. The doctrine of royal authority proceeding from divine election must, however, have been useful for those who wished to justify the dominion of the Norwegian king over Iceland from a theoretical perspective, and it seems possible that this justification was a motivation for the production of fiction which propounded such an ideology. In any case, the examples I have discussed here show that romance heroes were, like the sagas themselves, a heterogeneous group, embracing both sacred and profane aspects. They could, like Bæringr, Flóvent, and Dámusti, be portrayed with some sophistication and depth.

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