

Approaches to paganism and uses of the pre-Christian past in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Snorri Sturluson



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Abbreviations

<i>CÆ</i>	<i>Chronicon Æthelweardi: The chronicle of Æthelweard</i> , Citations from: A. Campbell, ed and trans. London, New York : Nelson, 1962
<i>HB</i>	<i>Historia Brittonum</i> , cited from: <i>Historia Brittonum in Six Old English chronicles</i> , J.A. Giles, ed. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847-8
<i>HKR</i>	<i>Heimskringla</i> , 3 volumes cited from: Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. ÍF 26-28. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafelag, 1941-51.
<i>HKRH</i>	Cited from: Hollander, Lee M. trans. <i>Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway</i> Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964
<i>HN</i>	<i>Historia Norwegie</i> , cited from: Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, eds. Peter Fisher, trans. København: Museum Tusculanum Press 2003.
<i>HRB</i>	<i>Historia Regum Britanniae</i> , Cited from: Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>The History of the kings of Britain: an edition and translation of Degestis Britonum (Historia regum Britanniae)</i> , edited by Michael D. Reeve, translated by Neil Wright, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007
<i>SE</i>	<i>Snorra Edda</i> . Cited from Snorri Sturluson,, <i>Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning</i> ,, Anthony Faulkes, ed. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1988
<i>SEF</i>	Cited from: <i>Edda</i> , Anthony Faulkes. trans. London: Dent, 1987

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Topic

Historians of high medieval England or Scandinavia, who wanted to provide their patrons' families with a long, unbroken dynastic history, faced a number of difficulties when reaching beyond the respective conversions to Christianity. Early medieval pagan communities were normally illiterate, and the native sources to the pre-Christian history were parts of an oral tradition often presenting conflicting accounts of fundamental political events, mixed with local legend and pagan mythology. The writing of pre-Christian history happened long after the conversion and written accounts could therefore not provide high medieval historians with absolute secure historical narratives from the pagan era.

Genealogy was a central element to both insular and Scandinavian historiographical tradition in the middle ages and many prominent families traced their ancestors to times before the conversion to Christianity. This created another problem for historians. Since the prominence was attributed to patrons of historical writing through the duration of their dynastic control over a certain territory, which by local tradition began before the conversion, the pagan past was an unavoidable, but possibly offending element to the Christian present. Therefore historians to process paganism, maintaining the status of the dynastic claim to antiquity, and simultaneously avoiding insult to religious sentiment. This dissertation deals with the strategies historians employed to explain paganism, how they balanced political and religious considerations, and how pre-Christian history was used in high medieval England and Scandinavia. Case studies for this investigation will be the Icelandic poet and politician Snorri Sturluson and the Welsh cleric and scholar Geoffrey of Monmouth.

Christian approaches to paganism in the Middle Ages have been thoroughly discussed over the past century, and this dissertation is indebted to the categories defined by Rudolf Schomerus and developed by later scholars.¹ But as Lars Lönnroth notes, the boundaries of these categories are fuzzy and the approaches should therefore not be regarded as mutually exclusive doctrines, but rather interpretations that were applied in various ways, often

¹ Schomerus, Rudolf. *Die Religion der Nordgermanen im Spiegel Christlicher Darstellung*. Leipzig: Borna, bez., 1936. ; Lönnroth, Lars. 'The noble heathen: a theme in the sagas.' *Scandinavian Studies* 41, 1969, 1-29 ; Weber, Gerd Wolfgang, 'Intellegere historiam. Typological perspectives of Nordic prehistory. (in Snorri, Saxo, Widukind and others)'. In *Tradition og historieskrivning: kilderne til Nordens ældste historie*, Kirsten Hastrup and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, eds. Acta Jutlandica 63:2, Humanistik Serie 61. Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1987, 95-141 ; Lassen Annette. *Odin på kristent pergament: en teksthistorisk studie*. København: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2011.

depending on the purpose and function of the text.² This dissertation will mainly be concerned with the purpose of such approaches and therefore it is necessary to widen the scope of the categories defined by scholars such as Schomerus, Lönnroth, Weber and Lassen.

The first category for approaching paganism can be called the rejection of pagan religion. This can be manifested as demonisation, the labelling of pagan gods as demons and the pagans as devil worshippers, or deluded by demons into religious error; idolatry, where paganism is described as the worshipping of idols, which may or may not be inhabited by demons; and finally omission, where the authors reject notions of paganism by consciously leaving out details about the beliefs, rituals, or achievements of the pagans.

The second major approach is modification, where the Christian authors alter the character of pre-Christian religion to make it more acceptable to their contemporary audience. Two main forms of modification will be discussed in the dissertation, namely *Christianisation*, which is a strategy to describe pre-Christian people as proto-Christians or virtuous pagans, that is people who had a basic understanding of essential Christian truths not reached by reading scripture, but by natural reason and wisdom. *Euhemerisation* is another modifying approach, which can be described as explaining pagan gods as historical persons who were later believed to be gods by the pagans. This approach was closely linked to the widespread genealogical tradition found in both Anglo-Saxon England, and medieval Scandinavia, of making pagan gods into ancestors of Christian rulers.

The third and final category is glorification, which uses stories about the pagans to present the kings and aristocrats of the past as members of a magnificent pagan culture who can be admired for their valour and heroism, even though they were not Christians. It is the purpose of this dissertation to investigate the reasons, and circumstances under which, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Snorri Sturluson used these different strategies, and how the approaches function as a part of the larger narrative, as the pagan past may prove to be both a building block and an obstacle for the construction of an honourable and believable dynastic history.

1.2 Geoffrey of Monmouth and mythical history

Geoffrey of Monmouth is mentioned in the first half of the twelfth century as a *magister* in Oxford, where he was most probably a secular canon. In 1151 he was elected Bishop of St Asaph and he died shortly afterwards in 1155.³ His main work is *Historia Regum Britanniae*,⁴

² Lönnroth 1969: 5

³ Wright, Neil 'Introduction' In *Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth: I. Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568*, Neil Wright, ed. Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985: x.

which Geoffrey claimed was merely a translation of a book in the Breton language.⁵ It is an extensive work with wide scope, covering almost 2000 years and the reigns of 99 kings.⁶ The abundance of material and widespread ambiguity in the *Historia*, make it particularly susceptible for a myriad of different interpretations, to which it has been submitted through the centuries.⁷ Its popularity in the middle ages is evident by the 215 complete manuscript extant to this day, a vast number for medieval standards. The work also had a tremendous influence on later medieval literature, especially the Arthurian tradition and it was translated, and republished in various forms as verse or prose in a variety of vernacular languages, including Icelandic.⁸

How the *Historia* was originally divided is not entirely clear, and chapters vary greatly between the different manuscripts. Julica Crick has divided it into eight parts,⁹ whereas the newest critical edition by Reeve and Wright consists of eleven chapters and 207 sections. Since Reeve's and Wright's edition is the foundation for this dissertation, their division will also be referenced to here. The Galfredian account of the Breton conversion to Christianity marks a relevant watershed, and can be found early in Book V, but this does not exclude the rest of the *Historia* from the scope of this dissertation. In Book VI the pagan Saxons arrive with Hengest and Horsa in Book VI and this triggers an era of political and religious struggle in Geoffrey's narrative.

An important question in Galfredian historiography is how the legendary parts of the *Historia* are supposed to be read and understood. In modern historical discourse there has been a tendency to avoid condemning the mythical parts of Geoffrey's *Historia*. Finke and Shichtman argue that medieval history was both 'serious' and 'fabulous' and that its truth was poetic rather than literal.¹⁰ Their question is not about the credibility of the *Historia* or its sources, but about to whom Geoffrey provided a past and why. Such an approach enables historians to read Geoffrey's as a source for understanding the social, cultural, and political ideas of the era of its production. This is an essential premise for this dissertation, because it does not address the narrative truth and factual historical events of pre-Christian times, but

⁴ In the newest edition, Michael Reeve argues that Geoffrey must have called the work *De gestis Britonum*, but for reasons of continuity, this dissertation will still refer to it as *Historia Regum Britanniae*. HRB: vii-viii

⁵ Piggott, S. 'The sources of Geoffrey of Monmouth I. The "pre-Roman" king-list', *Antiquity* 15, 1941.: 272.

⁶ Gillingham, John. 'The context and purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*.' In *Anglo-Norman Studies XIII*, 1990: 99.

⁷ Gillingham 1990: 99.

⁸ The reworked editions includes Lazamon's *Brut*, Wace's *Roman De Brut*, William of Rennes' *Gesta Regum Britanniae* and the Icelandic *Breta saga*.

⁹ Crick 1991:5-6.

¹⁰ Finke, Laurie, and Martin B. Shichtman. *King Arthur and the myth of history*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004: 40.

rather the ideas communicated by medieval historians who were writing about the pre-Christian era.

Indeed, Geoffrey's purposes and the function of his *Historia* are other important issues that have been studied by several scholars. John Gillingham has outlined three major trends in this branch of Galfredian scholarship.¹¹ One group of scholars emphasises Geoffrey as an author and artist and his purpose as literary, parodical and humorous rather than historical or political. Sir John Lloyd states that 'his first and last thought was for literary effect'.¹² Christopher Brooke shows how certain passages are there only for the purpose of 'mockery and mischief',¹³ and Valerie Flint argues that 'Geoffrey's desire to display his literary gifts is indeed the motive most in evidence in the *Historia*.' Such an interpretation would correspond to the idea of Geoffrey as a writer of fiction who was concerned more about teasing and ridiculing his contemporaries and less about writing serious history.

The second major trend concerns Geoffrey's considerations to the political status of the Anglo-Norman elite. Many scholars have particularly addressed Geoffrey's use of the Trojan myth to provide symbolic legitimacy to the Anglo-Norman aristocracy who constituted his audience.¹⁴ With Trojan ancestors, the Anglo-Normans were connected to antiquity through honourable individuals, and Britain became the sister realm of to the Roman Empire, sharing their myth of origin.¹⁵ The importance of the classical past and the specific purpose of this myth of origin is relevant because of its pagan origins, and will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2.

Some historians have shown how episodes in the *Historia* correspond to the political situation in Anglo-Norman England, at the time of writing. This, however, is a complicated task since the exact dating of the *Historia* is uncertain. 1139 is the *terminus ante quem*, because a copy of it is mentioned by Henry of Huntingdon, but this does not answer how long before 1139 the *Historia* was completed.¹⁶ Christopher Brooke argues that if the *Historia* was completed as late as 1138, it cannot be read as propaganda against the civil war, as many historians do, because Empress Matilda, contender for the English throne against King

¹¹ Gillingham 1990: 100-103.

¹² Gillingham 1990: 100-101.

¹³ Brooke, Christopher. 'Geoffrey of Monmouth as a historian.' In *Church and government in the Middle Ages*, edited by Christopher Brook *et al.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976: 82.

¹⁴ Tolhurst, Fiona. 'The Britons as Hebrews, Romans, and Normans: Geoffrey of Monmouth's British epic and reflections of Empress Matilda.' *Arthuriana: Quarterly of the International Arthurian Society, North American Branch* 8, 1998, 69-87 ; Waswo, Richard. 'Our Ancestors, the Trojans. Inventing Cultural Identity in the Middle Ages' *Exemplaria* 7, 1995, 269-290 ; Ingledew, Francis. 'The Book of Troy and the genealogical construction of history: the case of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*.' *Speculum* 69, 1994, 665-704.

¹⁵ Ingledew 1994: 678.

¹⁶ Wright 1984: xii.

Stephen did not enter England until a year later.¹⁷ But even though the Angevins did not arrive in England before the summer of 1139, early fighting happened in 1138, when Robert of Gloucester, one of the dedicatees of the *Historia*, rebelled against King Stephen.¹⁸ Moreover, King Henry designated Matilda as his heir as early as 1127 or 1128, and King Stephen seized the throne in 1135. Even if Geoffrey could not necessarily foresee the civil war, and even if he did complete the *Historia* before the early fighting broke out in 1138, conflict over succession and female rulership were legitimate issues on which the *Historia* may have commented. Thirdly, Gillingham shows that some scholars suggest that Geoffrey was a proponent of Celtic tradition, an example of which is B.F. Roberts.¹⁹

The attitudes of the different proponents of each of the three historiographical interpretations of Geoffrey's purposes are often more impassioned than strictly necessary. Lloyd, Brooke and Flint seem to think literary purpose is manifest at the expense of political purpose. Such a notion is unjustified. Of course Geoffrey was concerned about literary effect, but that does not preclude strong political motivations concerning either the Normans or the Britons, or both. Indeed, literary effect and political purposes can work exceptionally well together and do so in the *Historia*.

In spite of the substantial variation in Galfredian scholarship, no extensive study has so far thoroughly analysed the question of paganism and its purpose in Geoffrey's *Historia*, even though paganism is frequently described by him. This universal lack of scholarly analysis of this significant element in the *Historia* has without doubt influenced the evaluation of its entire purpose and function. It may well be necessary to reassess this in light of the conclusions of this investigation.

1.3 Snorri Sturluson and Saga Historiography

Snorri Sturluson was an Icelandic politician, poet and historian. He was the richest man in Iceland and twice elected to the powerful political position of law-speaker, and he was a prominent member of the Norwegian court.²⁰ Snorri eventually fell out of favour with the Norwegian King, and was killed in his home in 1241.²¹ His two main works are *Heimskringla*, and *Snorra Edda* (also known as *the Prose Edda* and *The Younger Edda*). *Snorra Edda* was a

¹⁷ Brooke 1976: 87.

¹⁸ Carpenter, David. *The struggle for mastery: The Penguin history of Britain 1066–1284*. London: Penguin, 2004.: 169.

¹⁹ Roberts, B.F. 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Welsh historical tradition', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 20, 1976, 29-40.

²⁰ Whaley, Diana, *Heimskringla: an introduction*, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London 1991: 9.

²¹ *SEF*: vi.

‘treatise on myth and poetry,’²² completed in the 1220s and consists of four main parts: The *Prologue*, *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal*. It is important to mention that this dissertation will mainly be concerned with the *Prologue* of *Snorra Edda*, since it presents a historicised version of the pagan myths. *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál*, and *Háttatal* are, unlike the *Prologue*, not purporting to be history and will only be used in cases where they clarify Snorri’s historical use of paganism or in the rare cases where historical claims are made by the four chapters.

Heimskringla is a work of sixteen sagas about Norwegian kings, Earls, and their ancestors, presented in chronological order. Even though there is good reason to discuss whether the version of *Heimskringla* extant today was in fact written by Snorri,²³ there is a general consensus among modern historians, based on convincing arguments that he is the author and this attribution will be here accepted.²⁴ The topic of this dissertation includes the sagas of *Heimskringla* about pagan rulers as well as the sagas about missionary kings. Snorri considered the conversion process to end with Óláfr Haraldsson, and, with the exception of some pagan poetical references in the Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar, the dissertation will concentrate on the sagas up until *Óláfs saga ins Helga*.

Not unlike Galfredian scholars, saga scholars have been predominantly interested in the trustworthiness of the historical narratives they study. This is also the case with those who study the writings of Snorri Sturluson. A fairly large part of his historical work in *Heimskringla*, deals with matters of the pre-Christian era and the conversion process, which has caused Snorri to be frequently used as a source for Norse paganism and the Christianisation process. Unique descriptions of pagan ritual, belief and history can be found in *Heimskringla* and *Snorra Edda*, and the purpose of much scholarship has been to dispel Snorri’s religious and cultural bias in order to grasp the true nature of pre-Christian, Scandinavian religion and the religious shift. This is not a useful approach for this dissertation because the ‘true nature’ of paganism is not the issue here. This dissertation will nevertheless draw on such scholarship to some extent, because in the modern analysis of Snorri’s allegedly biased description of paganism there are relevant theories about his audience and motivations.²⁵ It is indeed the interpretations and expressions of the pagan past by this ‘Christian bias’ which is the topic of this dissertation.

²² Whaley 1991: 10.

²³ Ghosh, Shami, *Kings' sagas and Norwegian history: problems and perspectives*, Leiden: Brill, 2011: 16.

²⁴ Whaley 1991: 13.

²⁵ Bagge, Sverre. *Society and politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*. Berkeley, California.: University of California Press, 1991 ; Steinsland, Gro. *Den hellige kongen: om religion og herskermakt fra vikingtid til*

There is also a large scholarship on Snorri's sources, which is relevant to an understanding of Snorri's use of ideas that were not his own.²⁶ Since Snorri used both textual and oral sources for his histories, it is also important to understand the nature of oral transmission. A recurring debate about Snorri's oral sources concerns the dating of the scalding poems *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal* that provide ancestors for two Norwegian aristocratic families. In the prologue to *Heimskringla*, Snorri expressly mentions these poems among his sources to the early history. The reason that the poems, particularly *Ynglingatal* are so central to Snorri's use of pagans, is because they can contribute to the understanding of euhemerisation, and divine descent.

Háleygjatal is the listing of the ancestors of the Norwegian Earl Hákon Sigurðarsson in twenty-five generations, culminating with Sæming and his father Óðinn.²⁷ *Ynglingatal* is the recitation of the ancestors of Rognvaldr heithumhæri in thirty generations, culminating in Fjölfnir. *Ynglingatal* does contain obvious references to the last two generations in the genealogy, Freyr and Njörðr, both gods of the Scandinavian pantheon. Rognvaldr was presumed to be the cousin of King Haraldr hárfagri,²⁸ and *Ynglingatal* is thus the genealogy of the Norwegian royal dynasty throughout the entire middle ages.²⁹ In the Prologue to *Heimskringla*, Snorri claims that the two poems were composed by the skalds Þjóðólfr of Hvinir and Eyvindr Skaldaspillir,³⁰ and although the dating of these skaldic poems has been highly disputed, most contemporary scholars do indeed date them to a pre-conversion era, *Háleygjatal* to the late tenth century, and *Ynglingatal* to the late ninth century.

The most vehement defender of the hypothesis supporting a post-conversion origin is the Norwegian historian Claus Krag, who points to what he terms a euhemeristic approach in the early parts of the poem. Arguing that euhemerisation was a Christian tradition he concludes that *Ynglingatal* was probably composed in the twelfth century.³¹ The claim is

middelalder. Oslo: Pax, 2000 ; Steinsland, Gro. *Norrøn religion: myter, riter, samfunn*. Oslo: Pax, 2005 ; Wanner, Kevin J. *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: the conversion of cultural capital in medieval Scandinavia*. Toronto Old Norse-Icelandic series. Toronto ; London: University of Toronto Press, 2008 ; Abram, Christopher. *Myths of the pagan North: the gods of the Norsemen*. London: Continuum, 2011.

²⁶ Ghosh 2011 ; White, Paul A., *Non-Native sources for the Scandinavian kings' sagas*, New York: Routledge, 2005.

²⁷ In some versions of *Heimskringla*, the father of Sæming is Odin.

²⁸ Steinsland, Gro et.al, ed., *Ideology and power in the Viking and Middle Ages*. Leiden: Brill, 2011: 22.

²⁹ Genealogists disagree on whether later generations of this dynasty actually descended from Haraldr hárfagri, but for the sake of this argument it is enough to know that Snorri asserted a genuine genealogical connection between the Ynglinga dynasty and the Norwegian kings of the high and late middle ages.

³⁰ *HKRH*: 3.

³¹ Krag, Claus. *Ynglingatal og Ynglingesaga: en studie i historiske kilder*. Studia humaniora 2, Oslo: Rådet for humanistisk forskning, NAVF, 1991.; Lassen, Annette. 'Gud eller djævel?: Kristningen af Woden.' *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 121 2006: 125.

controversial but is supported by a number of historians.³² In this assertion, however, Krag may be confusing the idea of descent from Gods with euhemerisation, which are not necessarily the same thing, but depend on the culture in which the genealogy is presented. Óðinn as an ancestor in a pagan context does not make Óðinn into a human, even though he seems to have human qualities, because pagan gods did often resemble humans. Óðinn as an ancestor in a Christian context, however, necessarily implies that Óðinn was human.

Anthony Faulkes argues that it would make more sense if the various, and often inconsistent, genealogies were constructed by Christians, who did not have the same sense of divine reverence for traditional, pagan authority. According to Faulkes, that is the reason for the various inconsistencies between Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian genealogies, and between the genealogies and the pagan myth.³³ This assessment, however, is rather arbitrarily projecting the idea of religious conformity upon a diverse paganism, or rather paganisms. While, in high and late medieval Europe, the church developed a 'literate mentality,' and established routines such as visitation, mandatory confession and inquisitions in order to supervise the orthodoxy of its adherents,³⁴ no evidence of such corrective institutions can be observed in the oral, pagan communities of Scandinavia and the British Isles.

This thesis will lean upon the early origin hypothesis, because it provides a more cogent explanation of the process of euhemerisation. If descent from gods was an idea of Germanic paganism, the euhemerisation in Snorri can be interpreted not only as an ideological weapon against paganism, but also as a method of cultural syncretism. Because pagan royal dynasties distinguished themselves by claiming descent from the gods, divine descent can be understood as a legitimising mechanism for these dynasties. With euhemerisation, medieval authors could transform the religiously tainted elements of this mechanism and provide kings with legitimacy using signs from their native culture.³⁵ The gods could retain their prestige as historical men and women of so excellent qualities that they were later revered as gods.³⁶

If, on the other hand, descent from gods was a Christian idea from the Middle Ages, it can still be understood as a weapon to combat paganism, but it is more difficult to explain

³² Lassen 2006: 125 ; Faulkes, Anthony 'Descent from the gods.' *Mediaeval Scandinavia: a journal devoted to the study of mediaeval civilization in Scandinavia and Iceland* 11, 1978-1979 ; Faulkes 1982: 92-125.

³³ Faulkes 1978-79: 95.

³⁴ Stock, Brian. *The implications of literacy: written language and models of interpretation in the eleventh and twelfth centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

³⁵ Clunies Ross, Margaret. 'Two Old Icelandic theories of ritual.' In *Old Norse myths, literature and society*, Margaret Clunies Ross, ed. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003: 281-82.

³⁶ Seznec, Jean. *The survival of the pagan gods: the mythological tradition and its place in Renaissance humanism and art*. New York: Harper, 1961.: 14-15.

why anyone would bother writing about the pagan gods in favourable terms, as Snorri did. Krag's hypothesis is that the twelfth-century author of *Ynglingatal* wanted to enhance the glory and independence of the Norwegian kings against Danish expansionist policies, by connecting the Norwegian dynasty to the Ynglingar-dynasty, that was perceived as more illustrious.³⁷ The late origin hypothesis fails to explain why the historically euhemerised gods were given such prominent positions in Snorri's works. Why would Christian historians invent false gods and put them into the genealogy of the ruling dynasty? Would that not be an insult?

Much has been written on the subject of Snorri's use of paganism. In *Heimskringla*, the pagan mythology is made into history by Snorri. Central to this discussion is the function of Snorri's euhemerised gods and pre-Christian kings. The interpretation of euhemerised pagan gods as a conversion of pagan genealogical legitimation into an acceptable Christian frame for the same legitimising purpose is a well-established tradition,³⁸ but it is not a settled case.³⁹ Bergsveinn Birgisson convincingly argues that *Ynglingatal* was not a genealogical poem about the ancestors of an 'Ynglingar-dynasty' in Norway, but rather a satirical poem intended to ridicule foreign kings in Sweden and Denmark.⁴⁰ If Birgisson is right, it is more difficult to prove that there was indeed a pagan tradition of divine descent, and Snorri's use of a pagan satirical poem as legitimation for a Christian dynasty is maybe more original than normally assumed by modern historians.⁴¹

However, Else Mundal has emphasised the important difference between the motivations of the author of a particular source and the motivation of those using the source. Snorri might have understood the skaldic poems *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal* as legitimising the Norwegian aristocratic dynasties even though their original purpose was satirical.⁴² Moreover, the poem *Háleygjatal*, which is clearly modelled on *Ynglingatal*, contains none of the suggested satirical traits which Birgisson observes in the latter. This suggests that even pagan poets of the pre-Christian era interpreted *Ynglingatal* as providing legitimacy to the aristocratic families. As will be demonstrated in chapter 3, Snorri is clearly using the two poems in a legitimising way.

³⁷ Krag 1991.

³⁸ Wanner 2008: 149; Clunies Ross 2003: 281-82; Faulkes 1978-79: 93; Steinsland 2011: 58; Mundal, Else 'Kva funksjon har forteljinga om den mytiske fortida hjå Saxo og Snorre?'. In *Saxo og Snorre*, Karsten Friis-Jensen, Jon Gunnar Jørgensen and Else Mundal, eds. København: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2010: 236

³⁹ Birgisson, Bergsveinn. *Inn i skaldens sinn. Kognitive, estetiske og historiske skatter i den norrøne skaldedigtingen*. University of Bergen, 2007; Lassen 2010.

⁴⁰ See Steinsland's discussion of Birgisson, Steinsland 2011: 24.

⁴¹ Steinsland 2011: 24.

⁴² Mundal 2010: 235.

Even though an inquiry into Snorri's personal reading of *Ynglingatal* could only lead to speculation, the case demonstrates some important points. Context and purpose cannot be projected directly into a text from its sources, and an author's interpretation of a source can differ from how the source is used.

1.4 Sources and Influence

As previously mentioned, the pre-Christian era constitutes a substantial part of the dynastic histories of Snorri Sturluson and Geoffrey of Monmouth. Both authors, however, seem to have been aware of problems connected to writing such early history.

in mirum contuli quod infra mentionem quam de eis Gildas et Beda luculento tractatu fecerant nichil de regibus qui ante incarnationem Christi inhabitauerant (...) cum et gesta eorum digna aeternitate laudis constarent et a multis populis quasi inscripta iocunde memoriter praedicentur.⁴³

En þótt vér vitim eigi sannendi á því, þa vitum vér dæmi til, at gamlir fræðimenn hafi slikt fyrir satt haft. (...) En þat er hátt skálða at lofa þann mest, er þá eru þeir fyrir, en engi myndi þat þora at segja sjálfum honum þau verk hans, er allir þeir, er heyrði, vissi, at hégómi væri ok skrök, ok svá sjálfr hann.⁴⁴

Concerns about the lack of written sources to the earliest history were clearly expressed by both authors, but this problem was resolved differently. Geoffrey invented another written source, a certain 'liber uetustissimus',⁴⁵ whereas Snorri justified his widespread use of oral sources by arguing for a tradition of trust in those sources, and the authority of the individuals who transmitted such histories. Moreover, both authors included reworked oral testimony, historicised mythology, and, in some cases, even deliberate construction in order to provide their patrons with a continuous narrative.

⁴³ *HRB*: 4-5 'I was surprised that, among the references to them in the fine works of Gildas and Bede, I had found nothing concerning the kings who lived here before Christ's incarnation, (...) even though their deeds were worthy of eternal praise and are proclaimed by many people as if they had been entertainingly and memorably written down.'

⁴⁴ *HKR I*: 4-5, 'And although we do not know for sure whether these accounts are true, yet we do know that old and learned men consider them to be so. (...) It is {to be sure} the habit of poets to give highest praise to those princes in whose presence they are; but no one would have dared to tell them to their faces about deeds which all who listened, as well as the prince himself, knew were only falsehoods and fabrications.' *HKRH*: 3-4.

⁴⁵ *HRB*: 4-5.

Such editorial manoeuvres challenge the modern empirical mind and restructure the discourse of history, as fiction and myth are intermingled with more factual history. The Trojan myth, for instance, had already become immensely popular in certain aristocratic and royal circles of Europe,⁴⁶ and as it was merged with dynastic histories the secular elite were given a cultural and genealogical link to antiquity. But pre-Christian histories were not completely fictional since factual pre-Christian historical events such as the expansion of the Roman Empire, the Saxon invasion of England, the Viking raids, and the settlement of Iceland, were also incorporated into the histories.

The influence on the authors of contemporary religious ideas and ideals must be taken into consideration because they can explain different approaches to, and interpretations of, pagans and paganism. If the main sources are read without a basic understanding of medieval theological concepts about pagans and paganism, there is a risk of misinterpreting the uses and descriptions of the pagan past.

Several scholars have tried to give an outline of the classical and medieval religious texts available in Scandinavia, and their influence on historical writing.⁴⁷ Annette Lassen has underlined the importance of patristic texts to understand pagans and paganism in a Scandinavian context.⁴⁸ There is, for instance, some disagreement on how to understand Snorri's description of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*. Annette Lassen argues that the apparently admirable qualities of the euhemerised gods in *Ynglinga saga* may be understood as dangerous and demonic if read in the correct theological context.

Geoffrey probably had access to more classical and patristic texts than Snorri;⁴⁹ at least it is easier to demonstrate a more detailed knowledge about Roman myth in Geoffrey's *Historia*. Both authors probably knew the *De excidio Trojae historia*, an early medieval text which purported to be an eyewitness account of the Trojan War.⁵⁰ It was available in Iceland in Old Norse translation as *Trójumanna saga*, probably as early as the year 1200.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Waswo, Richard. 'Our Ancestors, the Trojans. Inventing Cultural Identity in the Middle Ages' *Exemplaria* 7, 1995, 269–290.

⁴⁷ Mortensen, Lars Boje, 'The texts and contexts of ancient Roman history in twelfth-century western scholarship.' In *The perception of the past in twelfth-century Europe*, edited by Paul Magdalino. London: Hambledon, 1992, 99–116 ; Lassen 2011 ; Dronke, Ursula, and Peter Dronke. 'The Prologue of the prose Edda: explorations of a Latin background.' In *Sjötíu Ritgerðir Helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*, edited by Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson. 1977, 153–76.

⁴⁸ Lassen 2011.

⁴⁹ Piggott 1941: 272.

⁵⁰ Wright 1984: xviii.

⁵¹ Faulkes, Anthony, 'Genealogies and regnal lists in a manuscript in Resen's library' In *Sjötíu Ritgerðir Helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*, edited by Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson. 1977: 9.

The selection and use of sources by the two authors was not coincidental. To fully understand the differences, Snorri's and Geoffrey's use of insular histories must be discussed. Parallels between the Anglo-Saxon royal lineages from various pre-conquest, insular sources and the ancestors of Óðinn found in *Snorra Edda* demonstrate the influence of Anglo-Saxon histories on Snorri. There are also several parallels between approaches to paganism in Scandinavian, and pre-conquest insular sources, as remnants of a pre-Christian genealogical tradition still circulated in both England and Scandinavia, and were expressed in writing.⁵²

As mentioned, Geoffrey presents the *Historia* as a translation of an old manuscript, but several authors have demonstrated that Geoffrey used an array of different sources. Sections from Gildas, Bede, *Historia Brittonum*, were combined with elements from genealogies, Welsh and Breton legends, toponymic lore, and Latin literature, and transformed them into a unified, continuous history of the British people.⁵³ Indeed, the variation of influences on Geoffrey, and particularly of Celtic, oral history makes study of the influences on the *Historia* a formidable task. Brynley Roberts argues that this particular tradition was transmitted and controlled by court poets,⁵⁴ not unlike the skaldic poets of the Scandinavian courts. Contrary to the Scandinavian skaldic poetry, however, the conservation status of Welsh traditional oral history is poor. Attempts have been made, though, to demonstrate survivals of Celtic paganism in Geoffrey's *Historia*,⁵⁵ and this will be discussed briefly in Chapter 3.

The literature on the various sources which influenced Geoffrey and Snorri is substantial, but, because of the strict scope of this dissertation on the two authors, an exhaustive discussion of these sources and the related secondary literature is not possible. Secondary literature concerning the sources which influenced the two authors will still be used, but only where a demonstrable and relevant use of the classical, patristic, or insular sources can be identified.

1.5 Research Question

The research question for this dissertation is: How did Geoffrey of Monmouth's and Snorri Sturluson's descriptions of paganism and uses of pre-Christian history help construct a complete narrative of the past, acceptable to their contemporary societies, and what was the

⁵² North, Richard. *Heathen gods in Old English literature*. Cambridge studies in Anglo-Saxon England. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 ; Johnson, David F. 'Euhemerisation versus demonisation: the pagan Gods and Ælfric's De falsis diis.' In *Pagans and Christians: the interplay between Christian Latin and traditional Germanic cultures in early Medieval Europe*, T. Hofstra, L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald, eds. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995, 35-62.

⁵³ Wright 1984: xviii.

⁵⁴ Roberts 1976: 30-31.

⁵⁵ Darrah, John. *Paganism in Arthurian romance*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994.

function of this? The study aims to contribute to the scholarship of medieval approaches to pagans and paganism, which now clearly favours Scandinavian and pre-Conquest insular texts. Such texts frequently mention pagans and paganism and they have been thoroughly discussed, often using classical and patristic sources as an ideological background, or for direct comparison.

Approaches to paganism and uses of the pre-Christian past in Anglo-Norman historical writing, however, have not been given proper treatment by modern historians and the categories from the historiography of Christian approaches to paganism discussed above have therefore never been applied extensively to any Anglo-Norman author or historian. There is definitely a risk connected to such an endeavour, and there is no guarantee that the theoretical framework developed for analysing approaches to paganism in classical, patristic, pre-conquest insular, and Scandinavian sources will be applicable to the phenomena observed in Geoffrey's *Historia*. The tools and categories for analysing and describing approaches to paganism may therefore be further refined and explicated in communication with Geoffrey's approaches, which have never before been analysed extensively.

A comparative study of Snorri's and Geoffrey's will nonetheless broaden the outlook of the topic and contribute to the history historical writing and polemical use of history in the middle ages. By using comparative approaches, both common patterns and distinguishing features of the respective historical traditions can be demonstrated and queried. Comparison is also necessary because of the relationship between English and Scandinavian sources, discussed above. To determine the degree of influence and originality it is imperative to always consider the influence on the main sources of this dissertation, *Heimskringla*, *Snorra Edda* and *Historia Regum Britanniae*, by Classical, and early medieval, literature.

Chapter 2: The Myth of Origin

2.1 Composing a myth of origin

Snorri's and Geoffrey's histories are most similar in how they approach the problem of chronological gaps between their Medieval sources, and the sources from antiquity. Modern historians have shown that both authors at least partly fill these gaps with what can only be described as fiction exploiting textual silence.⁵⁶ The rejection of Geoffrey's *Historia* started soon after its publication when it was condemned by William of Newburgh as 'a pack of lies'.⁵⁷ But even though both Snorri and Geoffrey blur the boundaries between history and fiction, it is important to understand why and how these texts were constructed. Patterns of fiction, genre conventions, and authorial choices can indicate developments of historical mentalities, and can show how historical writing connects to the fields of theology and politics.

As a starting point and a cultural origin to their continuous historical narratives, Geoffrey and Snorri chose the Trojans. They were not the first medieval historians to claim such ancient and noble ancestors on behalf of their patrons, but the reintroduction of Troy into twelfth and thirteenth-century European historical discourse expressed a more secular historical consciousness, challenging the influential historical paradigm formulated by Augustine and his student Orosius, which can be observed in earlier and contemporary works of history.⁵⁸ Matthew Fisher articulates this difference as the competing historical models of Bede and Geoffrey in the English historiography of the twelfth century, Bede here representing the traditional Augustinian-Orosian historical paradigm. Post-conquest historians in the Bedan tradition, such as William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, presented a pre-conquest history that rationalised the rule of the Normans over the Island using the doctrines of Christianity. History was thus made into an 'economy of Christian salvation, ethnic sin and temporal power.'⁵⁹

Francis Ingledew has analysed Geoffrey's use of the Trojan myth and argues that the particular application of this myth of origin distinguishes the *Historia* from earlier works and contemporary works of history which also mentions Troy, because they only added the myth

⁵⁶ Faulkes 1977-78: 123, Finke & Shichtman: 43 ; Fisher, Matthew. 'Genealogy rewritten: inheriting the legendary in insular historiography'. In *Broken lines: genealogical literature in late-medieval Britain and France*, Raluca Radulescu and Edward Donald Kennedy, eds. Turnhout: Brepols, 2008: 136 ; Monika Otter 1996.

⁵⁷ Finke & Shichtman: 39.

⁵⁸ Ingledew 1994: 666.

⁵⁹ Matthew Fisher, 2008: 129.

to a wholly ecclesiastical understanding of history.⁶⁰ Ingledew claims further that Geoffrey appropriated a Virgilian understanding of history to the British historiographical tradition, and that Troy as a cultural origin, modelled after Virgil, reactivated the Virgilian issues of genealogy, prophecy, and eros.⁶¹

The use of a Trojan myth of origin in the works of Snorri and Geoffrey will be examined, questioning possible functions of the different elements conjectured to be introduced through Virgilian motifs into the pre-Christian historical narratives. If Snorri and Geoffrey indeed approached Trojan myth with a more pronounced secular thinking, than clearly religiously cautious historians, it might disclose some of Snorri's and Geoffrey's political intentions with their myth of origin.

Myths of origin occur frequently in European literature and historical writing of the Middle Ages, and they tend to follow four different patterns. One common type is euhemerisation, which was mentioned in the previous chapter as a way of interpreting paganism. Euhemerised gods are frequently described in medieval sources as great rulers, and founders of dynasties. As a myth of origin, euhemerisation is found in insular and Scandinavian histories, and will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 3.

The eponymous model involves a legendary hero or king, whose name is given to a territory or people. Notable examples include King Nórr of Norway found in the late twelfth-century *Chronicon Lethrense* and the early thirteenth-century *Orkneyinga Saga*,⁶² King Dan of Denmark, found in the same *Chronicon Lethrense* as well as the *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus, and Brutus King of Britain, who first appeared in seventh-century *Historia Brittonum*. In the Christian Universal approach dynastic history is connected genealogically to characters from the Old Testament, and thus ultimately to Noah and Adam. This approach can be found in insular histories such as *Historia Brittonum*, Asser's *Vita Ælfredi*, and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

Finally, there is the Roman myth of origin from Troy and Aeneas known to medieval Europe through the works of Virgil, Ovid, Livy, and *De Excidio Trojae Historia*. The first examples of Trojan refugees in the origin myths of European medieval dynastic historiography are the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Fredegar* from the mid-seventh century, and *Liber historiae Francorum* of the early eighth century.⁶³ Both provide the Carolingian dynasty

⁶⁰ Ingledew 1994: 674.

⁶¹ Ingledew 1994: 674.

⁶² Steinsland 2011: 49.

⁶³ Waswo 1995: 269-71.

with a Trojan genealogy from the family of Priam, through the Merovingian dynasty.⁶⁴ In Anglo-Saxon England, the *Historia Brittonum* from c. 830 provided a Trojan myth of origin to the Britons from the eponymous Brutus, but not to the Anglo-Saxon dynasties where the euhemeristic approach was used.⁶⁵

Dudo of St. Quentin and William of Jumiéges gave Rollo and hence the Norman Dukes, a Trojan ancestor with the royal advisor Antenor,⁶⁶ who in some versions of the Trojan myth also was Priam's brother. The first possible Scandinavian version of the Trojan origin myth can be found in *Langfeðgatal*, Ari Thorgilsson's appendix to his *Íslendingabók*. The text can be dated to the early twelfth century, and the list itself, which seems to be based on *Ynglingatal*,⁶⁷ presents 'Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr' as the first member of the Ynglingar-dynasty.⁶⁸ The word 'tyrkr' in Old Norse means 'Turk,' rather than 'Trojan,' but Anthony Faulkes demonstrates that these words were often confused in twelfth and thirteenth-century Scandinavia in works such as *Trójumanna saga*. Therefore it is possible to assert that Troy might have been what was implicitly meant by Ari, in any case, that is how Snorri interprets Ari, by using 'tyrkr' and 'trojar' as synonyms in *Snorra Edda*. Some historians suggest that Snorri might have been inspired by the now lost *Skjöldungasaga*, remaining fragments of which portray Óðinn as an 'Asian man' settling in Scandinavia, giving power to his sons Skjöldr in Denmark and Yngve in Sweden.⁶⁹

In the practical application of these myths of origin, one myth did not necessarily exclude another, as historians often connected the local national history to that of other cultures through stories of migration. Some historical works present not only genealogies that combine different traditions, such as the Christian and the Germanic pagan traditions, but even different versions of the same genealogies. *Historia Brittonum* includes three different genealogies for the ancestors of Brutus, and Richard Waswo argues that such inconsistencies seem to indicate the influence of various oral histories and an attempt of the historian to cope with the various versions transmitted from living oral tradition.⁷⁰

Snorri and Geoffrey thus had access to a variety of different traditions from which they could compose their perfect myth of origin. One of the genealogies in *Historia Brittonum*,

⁶⁴ Waswo 1995: 270-71.

⁶⁵ *Historia Brittonum*. Theodor Mommsen Ed., Berlin: MGH, 1898.

⁶⁶ Fulkes, 1978-79: 116 ; Ingledew 1995: 683 ; Searle, Elanor. 'Fact and pattern in heroic history: Dudo of St.-Quentin.' *Humanities Working Paper* 91 1983: 125.

⁶⁷ Faulkes 1978-79: 98.

⁶⁸ Steinsland 2011: 20.

⁶⁹ Lassen 2011: 159 ; *Skjöldungernes saga: Kong Skjold og hans slægt, Rolf Krake, Harald Hildetand, Ragnar Lodbrog*, Karsten Friis-Jensen and Claus Lund trans, København: Gad, 1984: 45-46.

⁷⁰ Waswo 1995: 284.

combines all of the different types of origin myth. Starting with Adam, it continues through Noah, euhemerised classical gods, and Trojan kings, until it ends up with the eponymous hero Brutus, the founder of Britain. Geoffrey attempted to construct a unified British identity,⁷¹ and he could not jeopardise the credibility of his work by presenting contradicting genealogies as *Historia Brittonum* did. Geoffrey chose one of the lineages which left out Adam and the euhemerised pagan gods. Geoffrey only kept the eponymous hero Brutus and his human, Trojan ancestors. The omission of the Christian universal genealogy from Adam strengthens the position of Geoffrey's *Historia* as a work of secular history, but it does not mean that Geoffrey did not believe in Adam as the ultimate ancestor of all people; rather it means this connection was not important for Geoffrey's overall narrative.

Genealogical parallels suggest that Snorri probably also knew the Christian myth of origin, found in *Vita Ælfredi* by Asser, and *the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.⁷² Further parallels between the early Frankish chronicles and the prologue of *Snorra Edda* have led Anthony Faulkes to suggest that these chronicles also were known on Iceland at Snorri's time.⁷³ Nonetheless, Snorri could also have been familiar with the Trojan myth of origin through various other sources such as *De Excidio Trojae Historia* in its Old Norse translation *Trójumanna saga*. This text, however, contains no motif of Trojans being the forefathers of any new nations.⁷⁴ Alternatively, Snorri could have known William of Jumièges' *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, which was probably present in Scandinavia at the time, and at least known by the twelfth-century Norwegian historian Theodoricus monachus.⁷⁵

Some scholars have even considered the possibility of Snorri knowing Geoffrey's *Historia*, and being inspired by Virgilian historical thinking indirectly, through reading about Brutus. *Breta saga* is an Icelandic translation of Geoffrey's *Historia*, but historians are unsure as to whether it was known in Iceland in Snorri's day. The earliest manuscript of *Breta saga* can be dated to between 1302 and 1310,⁷⁶ but a version of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae*, *Merlínússpá* in Icelandic, is extant from about 1218. Whether the *Prophetiae* from 1218 was extracted from a complete manuscript of Geoffrey's *Historia* or rather translated directly from

⁷¹ Warren, Michelle R. *History on the edge: Excalibur and the borders of Britain, 1100-1300*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000: 9.

⁷² See chapter 3, Table I, below.

⁷³ Faulkes, *Descent from Gods*: 116-7.

⁷⁴ Helenus and Andromache are briefly mentioned building an unnamed stronghold 'in the image of Troy' in Epirus. *Trójumanna saga*, Sigurðsson 1848, Chapter 35.

⁷⁵ Theodoricus Monachus: *The Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*, David and Ian McDougall, trans. and ed. London: Viking Society for Northern Research University College, 1998: 17.

⁷⁶ Tétrel, Hélène. 'Trojan Origins and the Use of the *Æneid* and Related Sources in the Old Icelandic Brut.' *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 109, 2010: 492.

a *Libellus Merlini* remains an unsolved question.⁷⁷ Henry Leach proposes a possible way of transmission between a manuscript of Geoffrey's *Historia* and Iceland. In 1160, the Icelandic clergyman Þorlákr, later Bishop of Skálholt, studied at Lincoln in England where Geoffrey's works would have been found, and he might have brought a copy back to Iceland.⁷⁸ There is a point of possible contact between Snorri and Þorlákr on Iceland, as both were educated at the same school at Oddi in Iceland, Þorlákr, however, approximately one generation before Snorri.⁷⁹ The exact circumstances of the arrival and translation *Breta saga* on Iceland is unlikely to be demonstrated with absolute certainty, but this link shows how easily Snorri could have come into possession of a manuscript of Geoffrey's *Historia*.

In the *Prologue* of *Snorra Edda*, the Trojan myth of origin lacks its original context. In the majority of the manuscripts containing *Snorra Edda* there is no mention at all of the fall of Troy or the invading Greeks, and Óðinn's migration to the north takes place many generations later without a clear motivation.⁸⁰ Pieces of the story, such as the battle between Achilles and Hector, are described in a later chapter of *Snorra Edda*, namely *Skáldskaparmál*, but only because Snorri thought these corresponded to Norse myth. Anthony Faulkes calls Snorri's version of the Trojan myth, a 'strange mixture of genuine tradition and fantasy' and accuses Snorri of deliberate ignorance. Snorri, Faulkes says, 'had no excuse for ignorance of the Troy story. Even if he did not know Latin, and even if *Trójumanna saga* was not available, there was a perfectly good summary of the story in *Veraldar saga*.'⁸¹

But even though Snorri did not use the Trojan myth in the way Faulkes expects, it does not mean he did not know it properly. When Faulkes states that Snorri had no excuse for this ignorance, Faulkes presumes that Snorri wanted to give a fair and indiscriminate presentation of history as he found it in his sources, but, similarly to Geoffrey, Snorri was highly polemical and highly selective of the elements he included in his foundation myth. An extensive reciting of the Trojan myth as Snorri would find it in either *Trójumanna saga* or *Veraldar saga* must have served an overall purpose other than to just demonstrate his knowledge of classical learning.

⁷⁷ Tétrel 2011: 496.

⁷⁸ Leach, Henry Goddard. *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921: 139.

⁷⁹ Guðrún Nordal. *Tools of literacy: The role of skaldic verse in Icelandic textual culture of the twelfth and thirteenth Centuries*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2001: 29-30 .

⁸⁰ Faulkes 1978-79: 120.

⁸¹ Faulkes 1978-79: 123.

2.2 Genealogy

Genealogies structure history and in the cases of Snorri and Geoffrey, genealogies also construct history. Reduced to their most basic elements, both *Heimskringla* and *Historia Regum Britanniae* are genealogies which comment on the circumstances concerning the territorial inheritance of the various generations. The emphasis on kinship and genealogy reflects the concerns and anxieties of the twelfth and thirteenth-century aristocracy.⁸² Francis Ingledew argues that the return of Troy to European historiography coincided with ‘an age of genealogy’ in which aristocrats increasingly claimed power over land through their ‘relationship to time.’⁸³

An example of the political potency of Geoffrey’s *Historia* is the use of his genealogy as justification of political power during the Scottish succession crisis of the late thirteenth century. The English king Edward I wrote to the pope Boniface VIII, citing historiographical circumstances as justified reasons for his expansionist impulses.⁸⁴ In the letter, English primacy of England in the British Isles was asserted on the basis of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s legendary history:

Sub temporibus itaque Ely et Samuelis prophete vir quidam strenuus et insignis, Brutus nomine de genere Trojanorum post excidium Urbis Troje cum multis nobilibus Trojanorum applicuit in quandam insulam tunc Albion vocatam, a gigantibus inhabitatam quibus sua et suorum devictis potencia et occisis eam nomine suo Britanniam sociosque suos Britones appellavit.⁸⁵

The letter attests not only to how history was used to justify the aggressive expansionism of Edward I, but also to the political applicability of Geoffrey’s pre-Christian narratives. Brutus was the hero, by whose discovery, conquest, and genealogical connection to the royal family, the English kings could claim overlordship over the whole island. The letter was paraphrased directly from the first book of Geoffrey’s *Historia*, clearly demonstrating how its foundation

⁸² Radulescu, Raluca. ‘Genealogy in insular romance.’ In *Broken lines: genealogical literature in late-medieval Britain and France*, Raluca Radulescu and Edward Donald Kennedy, eds. Turnhout: Brepols, 2008: 10.

⁸³ Ingledew: 668.

⁸⁴ Fisher 2008: 125.

⁸⁵ ‘Thus, in the days of Eli and of Samuel the prophet, after the destruction of Troy, a certain valiant and illustrious man of the Trojan race called Brutus, landed with many noble Trojans, upon a certain island called, at that time, Albion. It was then inhabited by giants, and after he had defeated, and slain them, by his might and that of his followers, he called it, after his own name, Britain, and his people Britons.’ Stones, E.L.G. ed. *Anglo-Scottish relations, 1174-1328: some selected documents*, London: Nelson, 1965: 194-5.

myth, and genealogy played an important part in international political discourse more than 150 years after the completion of the *Historia*.

The work was tailor made for English expansionism, because it invented a new ethnic identity, the 'British race', and made them into the rightful possessors of the whole island.⁸⁶ By beginning the genealogical line of descent with the Trojans, Geoffrey did not give the original inhabitants of the Island a tainted ethnic identity, and the Norman rulers could safely use the Trojan myth of origin. However, Finke and Shichtman show that there is something ironic about the relationship between genealogy and expansionism in Ingledew, because invasion 'undermines the premises of lineal descent'.⁸⁷ If Geoffrey intended to legitimise the presence of the Normans through the use of ancient history, he needed to delegitimise the rule of the Saxons. This was done, as will be shown in Chapter 4, through the portrayal of the pagan Saxons as a 'nefandus populus,' (wicked people).⁸⁸

Snorri's Trojans, who were identified with the Old Norse gods, the Æsir, settled in eastern Sweden and were given a territorial right to the country in *Heimskringla* and *Snorra Edda*. When the Trojan Settlers encounter the native inhabitants, represented by the ruler Gylfi, the following happens: 'En er Óðinn spurði, at góðir landskostir váru austr at Gylfa, fór hann þannok, ok gerðu þeir Gylfi sætt sína, því at Gylfi þóttisk engi krapt til hafa til mótstöðu við Ásana. Mart áttusk þeir Óðinn við ok Gylfi í brögðum ok sjónhverfingum, ok urðu Æsir jafnan ríki.'⁸⁹ Snorri shows how the Æsir won the supremacy in the North through peace caused by obvious superiority over the local people. This right, initially established with the classical virtue of the Trojan conquerors, is inherited through the generations of the Ynglingar and the Háleygjar dynasties and reiterated through a number of important individuals such as King Haraldr hárfagri and Earl Hákon Grjótgartsson.

Peculiar to Snorri's genealogical legitimation, though, is exactly this merging of the classical and local traditions. The genealogies of the Ynglingar and Háleygjar were thus

⁸⁶ Tatlock, JSP, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's Motives for Writing His "Historia"'. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 79, 1938: 701 ; Niles, John D. 'The wasteland of Loegria: Geoffrey of Monmouth's reinvention of the Anglo-Saxon past'. *Reinventing the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: constructions of the medieval and early modern periods*. Vol. 1, Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, William F. Gentrup ed. Turnhout: Brepols, 1998: 14.

⁸⁷ Finke & Shichtman: 54.

⁸⁸ Busse, Wilhelm. 'Brutus in Albion, Englands Gründungssage'. In: *Herkunft und Ursprung: historische und mythische Formen der Legitimation: Akten des Gerda Henkel Kolloquiums veranstaltet vom Forschungsinstitut für Mittelalter und Renaissance der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, 13. bis 15. Oktober 1991* Peter Wunderli, ed. Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1994: 211.

⁸⁹ *HKR I*: 16 'But when Óðin learned that there was good land east in Gylfi's kingdom, he journeyed there; and Gylfi came to an agreement with him, because Gylfi did not consider himself strong enough to withstand the Æsir. Óðin and Gylfi vied much with each other in magic and spells, but the Æsir always had always the better of it. *HKRH*: 9-11. The same story is retold in the *SEF*: 4

reinforced with a pagan euhemeristic quality and antiquity of the Trojans. While Geoffrey made the Britons into Trojan refugees, anchoring his story well in classical tradition by mentioning Aeneas, the classical Gods, and the conflict between the Greeks and the surviving Trojans, Snorri did the exact opposite. He still legitimised the Norwegian royal and aristocratic dynasties by invoking the power and might of the classical tradition, but instead of projecting the classical onto the local, he projected the local onto the classical. Snorri did not import the classical culture into Scandinavia, making the local families descendants of antiquity; Snorri moved the origin of Scandinavian tradition into the classical world, making the Trojans into Scandinavians.

2.3 Prophecy as Legitimation

It is on a divine incentive that Brutus sets out on his quest to establish the ‘new Troy’ on the island Albion. After being exiled from Italy by his grandparents, and freeing fellow Trojan countrymen from the captivity of the Greek King Pandrasus, Brutus lands on an abandoned island and visits there the temple of Diana. Brutus performs a sacrificial ritual to the Goddess, whereupon she reveals herself to him in a dream with the following message:

Brute, sub occasu solis trans Gallica regna
insula in oceano est undique clausa mari;
insula in oceano est habitata gigantibus olim,
nunc deserta quidem, gentibus apta tuis.
Hanc pete; namque tibi sedes erit illa perhennis.
Hic fiet natis altera Troia tuis.
Hic de prole tua reges nascentur, et ipsis
toicus terrae subditus orbis erit.⁹⁰

The prophecy of Diana and the following settlement as an *ab initio* primacy serves as a justification for the territorial possession Britain.⁹¹ It also constructs an image of the Britons as an expansionist power of Roman proportions, because, just like the Romans, they are

⁹⁰ *HRB*: 20-21, ‘Brutus, to the west, beyond the kingdoms of Gaul, lies an island of the ocean, surrounded by the sea; an island of the ocean, where giants once lived, but now it is deserted and waiting for your people. Sail to it; it will be your home forever. It will furnish your children with a new Troy. From your descendants will arise kings, who will be masters of the whole world.’

⁹¹ Fisher: 129.

destined to become masters of the ‘whole world.’⁹² With this prophecy, Geoffrey indisputably introduces a Virgilian motif, similar to the grandiose prophecy that can be found in Book VII of the *Aeneid*, where the descendants of Aeneas are prophesied to ‘which by mighty deeds should win the world for kingdom.’⁹³ This exemplifies how easily motifs of present ambitions, such as those of the expansionist Normans, could be justified by prophecy of the Virgilian style. Another feature of Diana’s prophecy to Brutus is that she speaks in verse, namely elegiac couplets. This also invokes the similar to the metre found in poems by Ovid and Catullus. The French historian Faral has shown how Geoffrey borrowed imagery and elements of the ritual to Diana directly from classical writers such as Virgil and Statius.⁹⁴

There are also certain limitations to the use of pre-Christian history. Diana could certainly not be used to justify Edward I’s claim to pope Boniface VIII, and historians disagree on the importance of the divine prophecy for the foundation of Britain. It is true that the prophecy was not entirely correct, since the island of Albion was still inhabited by ‘gigantibus’ (giants),⁹⁵ which gave the Trojans considerable resistance, but it seems to suffice for Geoffrey that the Trojans simply want the land and thence take it.⁹⁶ On the other hand, the prophecy was the first step in a chain of actions which brought the Trojans to Britain, and it is used as a justification not only for possession of the island, but also for the Britain as a successful expansionist power similar to Rome, later in the *Historia*. Most importantly, though, the prophecy separates Geoffrey’s *Historia* from early works of history that did not include pagan divinities prophesying the foundation and future of kingdoms. Geoffrey does not only understand history in a strict, divine, teleological, Augustinian-Orosian sense alone.

The cause of the migration of the *Æsir* is more clearly defined in *Heimskringla* than in *Snorra Edda* and is given in *Ynglinga saga* to be the Roman conquests. This indicates at least that Snorri had at least a basic understanding of ancient history and, not unlike Virgil or Geoffrey, Snorri provided a divine prophecy to the *Æsir* in *Heimskringla* and *Snorra Edda*. But because Snorri had euhemerised his gods, Óðinn is only portrayed as a human having magical foreknowledge about the events which would bring him northwards.

Í þann tíma fóru Rómverjahöfðingjar víða um heiminn ok brutu undir sik allar þjóðir,
en margir höfðingjar flýðu fyrir þeim ófriði af eignum. En fyrir því at Óðinn var

⁹² Ingledew 1995: 677-8.

⁹³ Virgil's *Aeneid* Frederick M. Keener ed., John Dryden, trans. Penguin Classics 1997: Book VII 255-258

⁹⁴ Glowka, Arthur Wayne. 'Lazamon's heathens and the medieval Gravepine' In *Orality and literacy in early middle english*, Herbert Pilch ed. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1996: 134-5.

⁹⁵ *HRB*: 20-21.

⁹⁶ Waswo 1995: 282.

forspár ok fjölkunnigr, þá vissi hann, at hans afkvæmi myndi um norðrhálfu heimsins byggva.⁹⁷

This might seem paradoxical to the modern reader, but it is typical of Snorri to be ambiguous about the status of the euhemerised gods. Else Mundal argues that Snorri had a dual approach to the gods, because even though he explained them as humans, he still described them as gods.⁹⁸ Indeed, in the origin myth provided by Snorri, Óðinn functions as a god. He is Diana and Brutus in one. By magical foreknowledge, Snorri gave the migration and settlement in Scandinavia the same air of inevitability that can be observed in the example from Geoffrey above. The difference lies in the legitimation of the territorial claim, and in the expansionist ambitions. In Snorri, the Romans are mentioned specifically as enemies and the reason for the migration, whereas in Geoffrey, the Romans are implicitly alluded to through the Virgilian image of world domination. In *Snorra Edda*, the ambition is different since Óðinn travels north, not to build an empire, but to achieve personal glory.

Furthermore, it would be problematic for Snorri to connect Óðinn's prophecy to empire building, because of Óðinn's genealogical connection to the Swedish, royal Ynglingar-dynasty, whose purported descendants competed with the Norwegian royal dynasty for power and influence in Scandinavia. Prophetic visions of future glory in Snorri therefore had to be postponed to a point in time where the Norwegian branch of the Ynglingar-dynasty was well established as an individual power in Norway. In *Hálfðanar saga svarta* which immediately follows *Ynglinga saga* in *Heimskringla*, Háraldur hárfagri's parents, Ragnhildr, and Hálfðan both have strange dreams and on those dreams their royal advisor Þorleifr spaki gives Hálfðan a prophecy, with an addition by Snorri himself.

Þorleifi sagði hann þann draum, en Þorleifr þýddi svá, at mikill afspringr myndi koma af honum ok myndi sá löndum ráða með miklum veg, ok þó eigi allir með jafnmiklum,

⁹⁷ 'HKR I: 14, 'At that time the generals of the Romans moved about far and wide, subjugating all peoples, and many chieftains fled from their possessions because of these hostilities. And because Óðinn had the gift of prophecy and was skilled in magic, he knew that his offspring would inhabit the northern part of the world.' HKRH: 8-9. The passage in *Snorra Edda* is slightly different: 'Óðinn hafði spádóm ok svá kona hans, ok af þeim vísindum fann hann flat at nafn hans mundi uppi vera haft í norðrhálfu heimsins ok tignat um fram alla konunga. Fyrir þá sök fýstisk hann at byrja ferð sína af Tyrklandi ok hafði með sér mikinn fjölda liðs, unga menn ok gamla, karla ok konur.' SE: 5, 'Odin had the gift of prophecy and so did his wife, and from this science he discovered that his name would be remembered in the northern part of the world and honoured above all kings. For this reason he became eager to set off from Turkey, and took with him a very great following young people and old, men and women. SEF: 3-4.

⁹⁸ Else Mundal 2010: 236. See below for further discussion on this topic.

en einn myndi sá af hans ætt koma, er þóllum myndi meiri ok æðri, ok hafa menn þat fyrir satt, at sá lokkr jarategndi inn helga Ólaf konung.⁹⁹

Similarly to Geoffrey, Snorri used a prophecy given to a pagan to convey the future glory of the dynasty. The dream also underlines the historical importance of the royal Saint Óláfr Haraldson. Sverre Bagge argues that this may be understood against a secular background,¹⁰⁰ and would thus contribute to Snorri's secular model of history.

2.4 Conclusion

Snorri and Geoffrey certainly knew the same types of origin myths from the various sources discussed above, but Snorri constructed a variant quite different than Geoffrey's, by mixing Troy, not with an eponymous hero such as Brutus, but with the Æsir, the gods of the Scandinavian pantheon. Similar, though, is the genealogical lineage back to the Trojan family of Priam, and a migration initiated by divine prophecy as a central motif of the myth. The clear presence of such Virgilian issues in the historical narratives of Snorri and Geoffrey, however, does not exclude elements from the traditional Augustinian-Orosian model of history. Sverre Bagge has demonstrated clear references in *Heimskringla* to the presence of Christian divine providence in transferral of secular power.¹⁰¹

A tension between secular and ecclesiastical considerations is also evident in Geoffrey's *Historia*, where a Christian chronology is established parallel to the story, by alluding to simultaneous events from Old Testament in the pre-conversion parts of the *Historia*: 'Postquam igitur praedictus dux praedictam urbem condidit, dedicauit eam ciuibus iure uicturis deditque legem qua pacifice tractarentur. Regnabat tunc in Iudaea Heli sacerdos et archa testamenti capta erat a Philisteis.'¹⁰²

The differences between the two proposed models of history, therefore, seem to have been somewhat overemphasised by Fischer and . Fischer's Bedan historical characteristics, mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, also clearly apply to Geoffrey, and do not

⁹⁹ *HKR I*: 91, 'He [Hálfðan svarti] related this to Thorleif, and Thorleif interpreted it in this wise that a great line of descendants would come from him, and that they would govern the land with great distinction, though not all equally so; but that one would arise of his line who would be greater and nobler than all the rest. And it is the opinion of all that this lock betokened Holy King Ólaf.' *HKRH*: 56-7.

¹⁰⁰ Bagge 1991: 217.

¹⁰¹ Bagge 1991: 185, 221-22.

¹⁰² *HRB*:30-31, 'After Brutus had built his city, he furnished it with dwellers to inhabit it lawfully and established a code under which they could live in peace. At that time the priest Eli was ruling in Judea and the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines.'

exclude the elements proposed by Ingledew. What is important is that these are indeed political narratives as Ingledew notes, with a clear contextual function.

Snorri's personal motivations behind connecting Scandinavian pagan mythology to the Trojans, in *Snorra Edda* have been suggested by Kevin Wanner: Snorri wanted to attract the attention of the Norwegian aristocratic audience by flattering them with Trojan ancestors.¹⁰³ As skaldic verse became unfashionable and lost ground to written cultural products of the continent, something had to be done in order to counter the harsh competition of continental and ecclesiastical literature.¹⁰⁴ Snorri wanted to reinforce the influence of the native Scandinavian culture and its referential framework of pagan mythology to make Icelandic literature more attractive in the competition for the attention of the Norwegian audiences. Pagan myth remained a crucial point of reference for many of the skaldic poets, and Wanner claims that if the contemporary audience were to understand any of it, that they had to be provided with a guide to pagan culture such as *Gylfaginning*, which was a summary of the pagan mythology.¹⁰⁵

If this is true Snorri was an active proponent for the upholding of old skaldic tradition and may have contributed to prolonging a poetic tradition that was already in decline. Wanner argues that the argument for legitimacy based on Trojan descent, however, did not appeal to the Norwegian King Hákon IV who could not use that as ideological ammunition against royal contenders like Duke Skuli.¹⁰⁶ Because Skuli and Hákon were related, the Trojan legitimacy applied to them both and could therefore legitimise several claims to the Norwegian throne.

Regardless of its reception, the *Prologue of Snorra Edda* represented without doubt an attempt at legitimising the rule of the Norwegian royal dynasty with methods which were uncommon to the traditional ecclesiastical writing of history. Virgilian influence on Snorri, either directly, or through *Breta saga*, remains conjecture, although the prophetic motif is strikingly similar. Lars Lönnroth argues that parallels to Hálfðan's dream can be found in local pagan tradition such as Eddic poetry,¹⁰⁷ and even though it is difficult to prove, such an interpretation cannot be excluded as a possibility.

¹⁰³ Wanner 2008: 149.

¹⁰⁴ Wanner 2007: 146.

¹⁰⁵ Wanner 2008: 145.

¹⁰⁶ Wanner 2008: 153.

¹⁰⁷ Lönnroth 1969: 17-18.

In England, Geoffrey's *Historia* won tremendous acclaim despite being famously ambiguous in its dedication to both sides in the civil war.¹⁰⁸ This ambiguity allowed the *Historia* to become a piece of 'symbolical capital',¹⁰⁹ a complete narrative of legitimacy which could be applied to both parties of the civil war. With the magnificent Trojan past, Geoffrey brought an illusion of glory and structure to into the fragmented Island by attempting to naturalise the Norman rule. The Trojan myth can be interpreted as a part of an ideological campaign to counter the fragmentation and decentralisation that had developed in France,¹¹⁰ and seemed to be developing in England in the late 1130s.

¹⁰⁸ Coote 2008: 35

¹⁰⁹ Finke & Shichtman 2004: 51-52

¹¹⁰ Finke and Shichtman, *King Arthur and the Myth of History*, 2004: 37-8

Chapter 3: Pagan Gods

3.1 Introduction

A principal difference between Snorri's and Geoffrey's approaches to paganism can possibly be found in their explanation of the pagan gods. In the vast number of sources shared by the two authors, both descent from pagan gods and euhemerisation occur fairly frequently and this chapter will investigate the two authors' selection and appropriation of ideas from different sources and possible approaches that might be unique to them.

Some obvious differences, however, may be stated directly. Snorri clearly demonstrates a greater need to justify and explain the pagan Gods than Geoffrey, and *Heimskringla* and *Snorra Edda* adhere largely to a traditional Christian model of euhemerisation and demonisation. The gods of pre-Christian religion, such as Óðinn, Njǫrðr, and Yngvifreyr were described as mortal kings and heroes of the past, retaining and transforming Scandinavian pagan tradition of divine descent. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Snorri's gods are not only human, but historical individuals, ancestors and progenitors of the Christian royal dynasties of medieval Scandinavia.

Geoffrey clearly has a less active relationship to the pagan gods, although some historians have suggested that there are traces of euhemerisation in the pre-conversion chapters of Geoffrey's *Historia* as well.¹¹¹ John Darrah attempts to demonstrate that traces of Celtic paganism in Arthurian romance of the Middle Ages, and argues that several characters from the *Historia* are in fact euhemerised pagan gods. This is based on name likeness, and Darrah argues that the Briton King Belinus is the Celtic god Belenus, King Leir corresponds to the presumed deity Llŷr, and the Saxon princess Renwein to Branwen, the daughter of Llŷr.¹¹² However, because of the poor source situation of Celtic mythology, it is problematic to determine these connections, or even if the mythical characters in question were ever considered to be gods. Indeed, Darrah's only argument seems to be the similarities in naming, and is not a new one. The spurious connection between individuals in Geoffrey's *Historia* and presumed Celtic gods was suggested in 1837, and has been rejected several times, most famously perhaps by J.S.P. Tatlock in 1950.¹¹³ This dissertation supports Tatlock's view and will therefore not speculate more Darrahs suggestions.

¹¹¹ John Darrah 1994: Paganism in Arthurian Romance.

¹¹² Darrah 1994: 137-39 .

¹¹³ Tatlock, JSP *The Legendary History of Britain. Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and Its Early Vernacular Versions*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950: 168-69.

The purpose of euhemerisation will be discussed thoroughly in this chapter, connected to its presence in Snorri and absence in Geoffrey. If Snorri indeed was a proponent of pagan mythology as Kevin Wanner suggests, and as the discussion in the previous chapter indicates euhemerisation was probably applied to the pagan genealogies not primarily to condemn or refute paganism, as would be consistent with an ecclesiastical model of history, but rather to absolve a pre-Christian, legitimising framework from its idolatrous and demonic stigma, in order to use it for legitimising purposes in a Christian world. This hypothesis necessarily excludes demonisation of the euhemerised gods, since it would compromise the legitimising function of euhemerisation in Snorri. Demonisation and its use by both authors will be discussed and some alternative interpretations will be proposed.

3.2 Euhemerisation

3.2.1 Theological and Historical Euhemerisation

Euhemerisation was initially used by the church as a rhetorical strategy in conversion efforts against the pagans. One example of this is the West Saxon Bishop Daniel of Winchester's letter to the German missionary St. Boniface from the 720s, where the concept and purpose of euhemerisation is clearly stated.¹¹⁴ Historians Annette Lassen and David Johnson have demonstrated that euhemerisation with a missionary or anti-pagan polemical purpose is frequently collocated with demonisation.¹¹⁵ The involvement of demonisation in euhemerisation tends to manifest itself in different ways and in different areas in the description of pre-Christian religion. The gods themselves can be described as demonic, the instigation of worship could have been inspired by demons, demons could inhabit the symbols of worship, or demons could assume the shape of the pagan gods and interact with the worshippers. While the degree of demonisation varies from author to author, its collocation with euhemerisation in patristic and theological works is close to universal. Chroniclers and historians adopted euhemerisation into their works as a strategy to interpret pre-Christian past and pagan mythology, but without sharing the patristic objective of fighting paganism directly.

¹¹⁴ 'You should not try to alter the faith they have in their own - certainly false - divine genealogies, but let them in accordance to their own beliefs claim that some gods descend from other gods through the union of man and woman. Then you can at least demonstrate that gods and goddesses, who are born like humans, have rather not been gods or began to be gods, when they were not gods before' My own translation based on Krag, Claus. 'Kirkens forkynnelse i tidlig middelalder og nordmennenes kristendom'. In *Møtet mellom hedendom og kristendom i Norge*. Hans Emil Lidén, ed., Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995, 28-57.

¹¹⁵ Lassen 2006: 125; Johnson, David F. 'Euhemerisation versus demonisation: the pagan Gods and Ælfric's De falsis diis.' In *Pagans and Christians: the interplay between Christian Latin and traditional Germanic cultures in early Medieval Europe*, T. Hofstra, L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald, eds. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995: 37.

It is therefore essential to distinguish between two different types of euhemerisation before moving on with the discussion.

Theological euhemerisation can be observed in the writings of patristic authors such as Augustine of Hippo and Isidore of Seville, missionaries such as St. Boniface and Daniel of Winchester, and theological literature such as the Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon abbot Ælfric of Eynesham. The other type of euhemerisation can be termed historical or genealogical euhemerisation, and was employed by a number of continental, insular and Scandinavian chroniclers and historians. The use of theological euhemerisation as a weapon to combat paganism is evident from Daniel's letter, and from the Christian dichotomy of good and evil by the involvement of demons. Demonisation could be applied to the pagan gods, the religious rituals, or symbols of worship.

Ælfric of Eynesham's demonisation was mixed with anti-Scandinavian polemic, further attesting to the purpose of euhemerisation in this genre as a weapon against what was perceived as a real political and religious threat posed by the pagan Scandinavian settlers in England.¹¹⁶ In historical euhemerisation, however, demonisation and anti-pagan polemic were significantly toned down. Sometimes, the gods were described with admiration and praise in place of the condemnation found in theological euhemerisation. Most importantly, they were placed within a specific historical context and connected genealogically to prominent aristocratic contemporary families. Historical euhemerisation also appeared later in time than theological euhemerisation, well after the completion of the conversion process.

However, only in rare cases was demonisation completely omitted from works of history where pagan religion and pagan gods are described, but its frequent collocation with euhemerisation may also be regarded as a genre convention rather than an active component used by the author against pagan religion. Because of the timing, the purpose of historicising the gods must have been something other than converting pagans to Christianity, as with Daniel of Winchester, and something more than just avoiding clerical backlash.¹¹⁷ By interpreting the idea of descent from the gods, historical euhemerisation conserved what was originally a pagan tradition, and if the motivations were merely religious or at least primarily anti-pagan, omission of theological euhemerisation would have been more effective. The connection between gods such as Óðinn, Yngvifreyr, and Njörðr, and a great number of insular and Scandinavian royal dynasties strongly suggests a connection between power and pre-Christian religion to these particular dynasties. But because the conversion process had

¹¹⁶ Johnson 1995: 47.

¹¹⁷ Wanner 2008: 146-7.

challenged their traditional methods of legitimation, historians and chroniclers needed a new model of interpreting their traditional myths in relation to their power, such as euhemerisation.

3.2.2 Anglo-Saxon Euhemerisation and Authorial Choice

Descent from gods was certainly a well-known idea in the insular world and many scholars have demonstrated the importance of gods in the genealogy, especially of Óðinn to the Anglo-Saxon royal houses.¹¹⁸ However, no divine ancestors were provided for the Norman royal family by Geoffrey, and the *Historia Regum Britanniae* is completely devoid of euhemerisation. In this, Geoffrey stands out from previous and contemporary insular historians as well as the classical authors on whom he models his history. In this section it will be demonstrated that even though Snorri and Geoffrey shared many of their sources, they made different choices. Indeed, although euhemerisation was a well-established motive in insular historiography, which gave Geoffrey plenty of opportunity to provide divine ancestors to many of his characters in the *Historia*, he chose to leave the gods out from the genealogy.

Aeneas is, according to Geoffrey, the paternal great grandfather of Brutus, the founder of Britain. Aeneas' mother is famously the Roman goddess Venus, who communicates directly with him in the *Aeneid* by Virgil. Geoffrey, however, omitted Aeneas' divine ancestry when he related the story about Troy and the founding of Rome in the first book of *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Later, when Brutus writes to the Greek King, he invokes the name and honour of his family in order to claim better treatment without mentioning the divine ancestry for which his family was reputed.

‘Pandraso regi Graecorum Brutus dux reliquiarum Troiae salutem. Quia indignum fuerat gentem praeclaro genere Dardani ortam aliter in regno tuo tractari quam serenitas nobilitatis eius expeteret (...)’¹¹⁹

Dardanus is a human character from Greek mythology and the son of the god Saturn. By using a human character rather than a divine for the purpose of assigning honour and nobility to Brutus, Geoffrey discredits and diminishes the influence of the tradition of euhemerisation and the idea of descent from pagan gods. In the *Historia Brittonum*, which Geoffrey certainly

¹¹⁸ Sisam, K. 'Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies.' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 39, 1953. ; Dumville, D. 'The Anglian collection of royal genealogies and regnal lists.' *Anglo-Saxon England* 5, 1976, 23–50; Johnson 1995; North 1997.

¹¹⁹ *HRB*: 8-9 “Brutus, leader of the survivors from Troy, sends greetings to Pandrasus, king of the Greeks. It was unjust that people descended from the famous stock of Dardanus should be treated in your kingdom otherwise than their serene nobility demanded.”

knew and used as a source for the *Historia*,¹²⁰ the following is said about the family of Dardanus: ‘Dardanus (...) was the son of Saturn, king of the Greeks, (...) Dardanus was the father of Troius, who was the father of Priam and Anchises; Anchises was the father of Aeneas (...).’¹²¹ The line continues through Aeneas’ son Ascanius and his son Silvius, resembling Geoffrey’s line in every detail except in the very first generations. The euhemerised and historicised Saturn of the *Historia Brittonum* has thus been left out of Geoffrey’s line, and Venus, Aeneas’ mother, has been omitted from both sources.

But Geoffrey is given yet another opportunity with the arrival of the Saxons to Britain. Horsa and Hengeist are two brothers whom Anglo-Saxon historiography portrays as the first Saxon settlers on the British Isles. The following pedigree is given by the *Historia Brittonum*:

Hors et Hengist, qui et ipsi fratres erant, filii Guictglis, filii Guigta, filii Guectha, filii VVoden, filii Frealaf, filii Fredulf, filii Finn, filii Fodepald, filii Geta, qui fuit, ut aiunt, filius dei. non ipse est deus deorum, amen, deus exercituum, sed unus est ab idolis eorum, quod ipsi colebant.¹²²

This claim of descent frequently surfaced in Anglo-Saxon histories, but in spite of Óðinn’s notoriety as ancestor of Horsa and Hengeist and thus the Anglo-Saxon royal dynasties in insular historiography, Geoffrey refuses to mention their ancestry. He had no reservations, however, against mentioning the Saxons’ religion, and he even mentioned Óðinn among their gods: ‘Deos patrios Saturnum, Iouem atque ceteros qui mundum istum gubemant colimus, maxime autem Mercurium, quem Woden lingua nostra appellamus.’¹²³ In Anglo-Saxon literature Óðinn appears as something other than an ancestor of the Anglo-Saxon royal dynasties by rare exception only. By mentioning him as a god but not as an ancestor, Geoffrey deliberately eliminated euhemerisation and divine descent from his model of approaching paganism and using the pagan past.

In an article by Valerie Flint, Geoffrey is shown to be parodying contemporary historians such as William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon. These two authors had a much more ‘loyal’ relationship to their Anglo-Saxon sources. Geoffrey, however, played with

¹²⁰ *HRB*: lvii.

¹²¹ *HB* III.10-11.

¹²² *HB* III.31 ‘Horsa and Hengist, brothers and sons of Wihtgils. Wihtgils was the son of Witta; Witta of Wecta; Wecta of Woden; Woden of Frithowald; Frithowald of Frithuwulf; Frithuwulf of Finn; Finn of Godwulf; Godwulf of Geat, who, as they say was the son of a god, not of the omnipotent God and the god of hosts (...), but the offspring of one of their idols.’

¹²³ *HRB*: 124-25 ‘We worship our native gods, Saturn, Jupiter and the others who rule this world, and especially Mercury, whom in our tongue we call Woden.’

such information and used innuendo and humour. He also had a desire to demonstrate his intellectual superiority and make ‘telling points’ about other historical traditions, to diminish their authority.¹²⁴ This would correspond well to the omission of Óðinn as an ancestor, but inclusion as a god in the *Historia*. Geoffrey recognised the existence of euhemerisation as it was found in earlier insular sources, but still decides omits it.

Snorri also demonstrates knowledge about the Anglo-Saxon historiographical tradition and its genealogies. In Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, believed to have been completed in 731, the arrival of the Saxons to Britain is described similarly to the account in *Historia Brittonum*:

Duces fuisse perhibentur eorum primi duo fratres Hengist et Horsa; e quibus Horsa postea occisus in bello a Brettonibus, hactenus in orientalibus Cantiae partibus monumentum habet suo nomine insigne. Erant autem filii Uictgils, cuius pater Uitta, cuius pater Uecta, cuius pater Uoden, de cuius stirpe multarum prouinciarum regium genus originem duxit.¹²⁵

The same line of descent can be found in *Snorra Edda*, where Snorri attests to Óðinn’s conquests in central and northern Europe. Although the generations are in a different order, there is no mistaking the obvious parallel between the lineages of Snorri and Bede. ‘Þar setr Óðinn til lands gæzlu þrjá sonu sína; er einn nefndr Veggdegg, var hann ríkr konungr ok réð fyrir Austr Saxalandi; hans sonr var Vitrgils, hans synir váru fleir Vitta faðir Heingests.’¹²⁶ Snorri might not necessarily have obtained his information from Bede alone. The same line of descendants from Óðinn is repeated in *Historia Brittonum*, and various versions of Óðinn’s ancestor list are given by various insular sources. But it is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and Asser’s *Vita Ælfredi*, both from the late ninth century, that show the greatest similarity to *Snorra Edda*, as shown in Table 1. It is typical of Snorri to give more than one name for the individuals from the legendary generations, and the Scandinavian correspondences are given here in brackets. Such correspondences indicate a certain degree of loyalty on Snorri’s behalf

¹²⁴ Flint 1979: 449.

¹²⁵ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* I.15, ‘The first commanders are said to have been the two brothers Hengist and Horsa. Of these Horsa was afterwards slain in battle by the Britons, and a monument, bearing his name, is still in existence in the eastern parts of Kent. They were the sons of Victgilsus, whose father was Vitta, son of Vecta, son of Woden. from whose stock the royal race of many provinces trace their descent.’, A.M. Sellar, Trans 1907: ch. 15.

¹²⁶ *SE*: 5 ‘There Odin put in charge of the country three of his sons; one’s name was Veggdegg, he was a powerful king and ruled over East Saxony; his son was Vitrgils, his sons were Vitta, father of Hengest (...)’ *SEF*: 4.

Table 1: Genealogical parallels between insular Sources and *Snorra Edda*

<i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i>	<i>Asser's Vita Ælfredi</i>	<i>Snorra Edda</i>
Sceaf	Seth	Sescef
Bedwig	Beduuig	Beðvig
Hwala	Huala	
Hratha	Hathra	Athra (Annan)
Itermon	Itermod	Ítrmann
Heremod	Heremod	Heremóð
Sceldwa	Sceldwea	Scialdun (Skjöld)
Beaw	Beauu	Biaf (Bjár)
Tætwa	Taetuua	
Geat	Geata	Jat
Godwulf	Godwulf	Guðólfr
Finn	Finn	Finn
Frithuwulf	Frithuwulf	
Freawine	Frealaf	Friallaf (Friðleif)
Frithuwald	Frithowald	
Woden	Uuoden	Voden (Óðin)

to the sources he is using, and an effort to demonstrate that the tradition he wrote about is not limited to Scandinavia.

Anthony Faulkes argues that the Anglo-Saxon, insular genealogies might have inspired Snorri's use of euhemerisation,¹²⁷ and the genealogical parallels certainly demonstrate the influence of this tradition on Snorri. The Insular texts, however, are somewhat inconsistent not only about the generations, but also about which of the individuals that were later venerated as gods. As shown above, *Historia Brittonum* argues that the unnamed father of Geat was an idol worshipped by the pagans. In Bede and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, neither of the individuals in the pedigree are mentioned as pagan gods, but in Asser's *Vita Ælfredi* Geat is the euhemerised god: 'Uuoden; qui fuit Frithowald; qui fuit Frealaf; qui fuit Frithuwulf; qui fuit Finn Godwulf; qui fuit Geata, quem Getam iamdudum pagani pro deo

¹²⁷ Faulkes 1978-79: 94.

venerabantur.¹²⁸ In *Chronicon Æthelweardi*, from the late tenth century, Óðinn is described as the individual being worshipped.¹²⁹ However, the description in *Chronicon Æthelweardi* might have been influenced by the Scandinavian presence in England, and Æthelweard's rhetoric is certainly inspired by anti-Scandinavian sentiment. 'Vuothen, qui et rex multitudinis barbarorum. In tanta etenim seductione oppressi aquilonales increduli ut deum colunt usque in hodiernam diem, viz. Dani, Northmanni quouque et Sueui.'¹³⁰

Both Snorri and Geoffrey interacted with ideas about pagan gods from Anglo-Saxon historiography. Geoffrey dismissed the strategy of euhemerisation and divine descent and distanced himself from the Anglo-Saxon historical practice, but not without elegantly alluding to this tradition. In the *Historia*, the gods of the Saxons remain gods, and, deprived of their humanity, they could not serve the same purpose. Óðinn as an ancestor was an indicator of royalty in the Anglo-Saxon world, common to all pre-conquest royal dynasties. Geoffrey consciously removed this claim to legitimacy from the invading Saxons, and put the British Trojans in their place. By also removing the classical references to divine descent interpreted as euhemerisation by patristic writers, Geoffrey's strategy was systematically doing so. Not only did he separate the legitimising pagan gods from the invading Saxons, Geoffrey seemed to redefine legitimacy by removing it entirely from the pagan gods. Geoffrey's Óðinn is not explained as some ancestor who by innocent misinterpretation was worshipped as a god, excusing the Saxon paganism. Óðinn and the Saxon gods were as divine as the classical gods, making the Saxons a villainous people who rejected Christian truth (see below).

Snorri's emphasis on Óðinn as a cultural hero, founder of the Scandinavian civilisation, and royal ancestor in *Snorra Edda*, corresponds to Óðinn's importance in ideas about the Anglo-Saxon kingship.¹³¹ By making Óðinn into the more important euhemerised god, Snorri adapted euhemerisation to fit Scandinavian circumstances, where Óðinn's importance to skaldic and eddic poetry was unquestioned. Snorri was not the first Scandinavian historian to euhemerise Óðinn. Annette Lassen argues that an episode from the late twelfth-century

¹²⁸ 'Asserius, 'De rebus gestis Ælfredi'. In *Asser's Life of King Alfred: together with the Annals of Saint Neots erroneously ascribed to Asser*, Oxford: Clarendon press, 1904: 2-3.

¹²⁹ CÆ I.3.

¹³⁰ 'Woden was king of a multitude of the barbarians. The heathen northern peoples are overwhelmed in so great a seduction that they worship [him] as a god to the present day, that is to say the Danes, Norwegians and also the Svebi.' CÆ: IV.8.

¹³¹ Sisam 1953.

Skjoldungasaga implies that Óðinn had a ‘human form’.¹³² But Snorri made Óðinn more explicitly into a historical person, as did the Anglo-Saxon historians, and connected him with one of the most prominent royal families in Scandinavia, the Ynglingar.

3.2.3 Legitimation of Succession

Most scholars recognise that the purpose of using historical euhemerisation to explain the pagan gods was to legitimise the power of the ruling royal dynasty. With *Ynglinga saga*, the first chapter of Snorri’s *Heimskringla*, the Norwegian royal dynasty is given the details of an unbroken male line of thirty generations from the euhemerised Yngve-Freyr and his father Njǫrðr to Halfdan svarti and his son King Haraldr hárfagri. The long genealogy of the Ynglingar dynasty was unique in Icelandic saga literature, and this long history gave the members of the royal dynasty more prestige than other families who could claim a mere four to five generations of ancestors.¹³³

Historians disagree about the perceived status of the earliest generations of Yngingars in *Heimskringla*. Anthony Faulkes states the obvious. Euhemerisation allowed contemporary rulers to claim nobility from successful *men* and *women*, whereas heathen gods would hardly have been regarded with anything but abhorrence¹³⁴ The euhemerised pagan gods were indeed praised for their human qualities in *Ynglinga saga* and *Snorra Edda*. One example is Óðinn’s prowess in battle. ‘Óðinn var hermaðr mikill ok mjök víðförlur ok eignaðisk mörg ríki. Hann var svá sigrsæll, at í hverri orrostu fekk hann gagn, ok svá kom, at hans menn trúðu því, at hann ætti heimilan sigr í hverri orrostu’¹³⁵ And in *Snorra Edda* the Æsir are described as unusually beautiful and wise. ‘þeir váru ólíkir öðrum mönnum þeim er þeir höfðu sét at fegrð ok at viti.’¹³⁶ Such great people would indeed contribute to legitimise the rule of their descendants in Norway, but there are indications that Snorri’s historical Æsir might be interpreted as something more than just powerful people, which in turn could influence their role as a legitimising force for the royal dynasties in Norway.

The widespread use of magic by the Æsir might suggest that their powers surpass what would be possible to achieve for human beings. However, as will be discussed below, such

¹³² Lassen 2011: 161.

¹³³ Else Mundal 2010: 236.

¹³⁴ Anthony Faulkes 1978-9: 93.

¹³⁵ *HKR I*: 11, ‘Óðinn was a great warrior and fared widely conquering many countries. He was so victorious that he won the upper hand in every battle; as a result, his men believed that it was granted to him to be victorious in every battle.’ *HKRH*: 7.

¹³⁶ *SE*: 6 ‘(...) they were unlike other people they had seen in beauty and wisdom.’ *SEF*: 4.

powers are quite similar to those of the *Finnar*,¹³⁷ and appear in contexts that are purely historical, such as the battle of Stiklestad. Sverre Bagge argues that there is no reason to doubt that Snorri believed in magical phenomena,¹³⁸ and Snorri's portrayal of the Æsir's magical abilities are thus better understood historically, as a rationalisation of the mythology and their later deification (see chapter 4), and possibly as demonisation (see next section). However, Snorri is still somewhat inconsistent in his portrayal of the Æsir. Such inconsistencies would be expected between such historical genres as *Heimskringla* and the prologue of *Snorra Edda* and outright mythology such as *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál*, and *Hattatal*. But Snorri's inconsistencies can also be found within the historical works. In *Ynglinga saga*, Freya is the last surviving of the Æsir: 'Freyja hélt þá upp blótum, því at hon ein lifði þá eptir goðanna'¹³⁹ Even within the strict frame of euhemerisation, Freya is still called a 'godhead'. Else Mundal calls this a dual approach to the pagan gods. They are explained as humans but in beauty and skill, they still appear to be gods; thus the system of pagan legitimation can work while simultaneously being rendered harmless.¹⁴⁰ To make the gods powerful and persuasive forces in the legitimising process, Snorri needed to be deliberately inconsistent. Walter Baetke has commented on this showing that the Æsir in *Ynglinga saga* participated in religious sacrifices and rituals, which would imply that the gods themselves worshipped gods. Snorri could easily have avoided mentioning such rituals, Baetke argues, and this breach in logic seems to cancel the effect of the euhemerisation.¹⁴¹ Claus Krag suggests that this is not necessarily an inconsistency if Snorri assumed these practices to be demonic.¹⁴²

Gro Steinsland has examined another mythological trait of the Ynglingar which they shared with their mythological cousins the Háleygja-dynasty, whose descendants were the historical Earls of Hlaðir. This trait is *hieros gamos*, the holy marriage, which seems to have been important to the pagan ideology of rulership, and relevant for the perception of the metaphysical status of the ancestor of these two houses. By analysing Eddic and Skaldic poetry, Steinsland shows that both of these houses claimed descent from a sexual union

¹³⁷ Sipra Aalto has shown that the word *Finnar* describes both Finnish and Saami people in *Heimskringla*, Aalto, Sirpa. 'Alienness in Heimskringla: Special Emphasis on the Finnar' In *Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference Bonn/Germany, 28th July – 2nd August 2003*. R. Simek and J. Meurer, eds. Bonn: Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn, 2003, 1-7

¹³⁸ Bagge 1991: 217

¹³⁹ *HKR I*: 24 'Freya kept up the sacrifices for she was the only one among the godheads who survived.' *HKRH*: 14.

¹⁴⁰ Mundal 2010: 236.

¹⁴¹ Baetke, W. *Yngvi und die Ynglinger eine quellenkritische Untersuchung über das nordische "Sakralkönigtum"*. Sitzungsberichte der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. philologisch-historische Klasse. Vol. 109, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964: 28.

¹⁴² Krag 1991: 76.

between a male god and a female mountain-giant.¹⁴³ This myth has been repeated by Snorri in *Heimskringla*, where Sæmingr, ancestor of the Háleygjar, is the son of Óðinn and Skáði, whereas Fjölfnir, ancestor of the Ynglingar, is the son of Freyr and Gerðr. Steinsland claims this erotic alliance is a metaphor for an alliance between the royal dynasty and the land, so that the sexual conquest is a symbol of the territorial conquest.¹⁴⁴

But in *Heimskringla* Snorri appears to be legitimising the Norwegian rulers of the Ynglingar and Háleygjar by using skaldic poetry referring to their descent from their divine forefathers, rather than their giant foremothers. Except for the skaldic poetry and the self-evident lineage from Yngvi, Snorri is not explicitly stating the kings' lineage in *Heimskringla*. The skaldic poetry he uses, though, reminds his audience about the mythical origins of the royal dynasty. Snorri chose to use these poems in *Heimskringla* and thus also applied the same legitimising framework to the perceived ancestors of the contemporary Norwegian kings.

Ynglinga saga itself concludes with the emigration of a branch of the Ynglingar to Norway. Quoting *Ynglingatal* Snorri says that the Norwegian branch of the family 'þröttar þrós niðkvísl'.¹⁴⁵ *Háleygjatal* is quoted in *Haralds saga hins hárfagra*, where Haraldr hárfagri's ally Earl Hákon Grjótgarðsson is called 'Frey's ǫttungr'.¹⁴⁶ Haraldr's lineage to the pagan gods is not referred to explicitly, but in a skaldic poem by Hornklofi he is called 'goðvarðr'.¹⁴⁷ The pagan Earl Hákon Sigurðarson of the Háleygjar-dynasty is called 'Týs ǫttungr' in the skaldic poem *Vellekla*, quoted by Snorri in *Haralds saga gráfeldar*.¹⁴⁸

One of the more striking examples can be found in *Saga Hákonar góða* where the ancestry from Yngve is mentioned in the skaldic poem *Hákonarmál*. The poem was composed by Eyvindr Skaldaspillir after the death of King Hákon. In Eyvindr's poem King Hákon is well received by Óðinn and the other Æsir in Valhalla,¹⁴⁹ even though Snorri tells us that Hákon was a faithful Christian after being raised in the court of King Athelstan of England. The euhemerised pagan gods thus transgress the boundaries of religion since they were used to state the legitimacy both of pagan and Christian rulers. Even the most illustrious Christian Saint, King Óláfr Haraldson is called 'Yngvi' referring to his euhemerised ancestor

¹⁴³ Steinsland 2000: 62.

¹⁴⁴ Steinsland 2011: 30-32.

¹⁴⁵ *HKR I*: 82, 'Othinn's offspring, of Yngling kin' *HKRH*: 50.

¹⁴⁶ *HKR I*: 108, 'Frey's offspring' *HKRH*: 69.

¹⁴⁷ *HKR I*: 113 'loved and kept by the gods' *HKRH*: 72.

¹⁴⁸ *HKR I*: 208 The meaning of this kenning has been lost in Hollanders translation, but is 'the descendant of the deity' according to Sundquist 2002: 159, 164.

¹⁴⁹ *HKRH*: 107-109.

Yngvifreyr.¹⁵⁰ The last of the kings in *Heimskringla* to be explicitly attributed with euhemerised ancestors, is Harald harðráði, who is also called a ‘Yngvi-scion’.¹⁵¹

The references to the *hieros gamos* myth in *Heimskringla* and *Snorra Edda* are certainly less explicit than the descent from gods. Skaði is referred to as a giant woman ‘járnviðju’¹⁵² and only once when Snorri quotes *Háleygjatal* in *Ynglinga saga*. Gerðr is not mentioned as a giant in *Heimskringla*, but can be understood as one in the context of *Snorra Edda*, where she is portrayed as the daughter of Aurboða, a mountain giant.¹⁵³ Her father Gymir is counted among the giants, ‘jötunar’ in *Skáldskaparmál*,¹⁵⁴ but he is called a man, ‘maðr’, in *Gylfaginning*.¹⁵⁵ The inclusion of these mythical female ancestors in *Heimskringla* is certainly more downplayed than the descent from the euhemerised gods, but it still represents an important aspect of the legitimising processes which Snorri adopts from the pagan past. The myth of this sexual union is made historical in *Heimskringla* and with the mythical references to Skáði’s and Gerðr’s non-human status in skaldic poetry and in *Snorra Edda*, the female giants are in a way also euhemerised. As historical individuals, they do indeed play a part in the overall narrative of *Heimskringla*. Steinsland’s claim that the giant woman’s body in the holy marriage myth represents the subjugated territory can be observed as an allegory used by Snorri, even with Christian kings. In *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* from *Heimskringla*, Haraldr harðráði’s failed invasion of England is foreshadowed by signs and ill omens. In a dream, one of Haraldr’s men sees a giant woman leading the English army and prophesying the defeat of Haraldr.¹⁵⁶ Even though this is the opposite of the *hieros gamos* subjugation argued by Gro Steinsland, a giant woman is still representing the physical territory and the defeat of the Norwegian army by this mythical figure *delegitimises* Haraldr’s claim to the English kingdom.

Gro Steinsland discusses a less explicit reference in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* to what can be called euhemerised giants with a legitimising force. King Haraldr marries Snæfriðr, a woman of the Finnar, a people which in some Icelandic medieval texts is identified with giants.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, Snæfriðr’s father Svasi is called both ‘finnr’ and ‘jötunn’ which strengthens

¹⁵⁰ *HKRH II*: 208 ‘Ynglings’ scion’ *HKRH*: 389.

¹⁵¹ *HKRH*: 591.

¹⁵² Hollander Translates it as ‘etin maid’ which means ‘giant maid’ *HKRH*: 12.

¹⁵³ *SEF*: 31.

¹⁵⁴ *SEF*: 155.

¹⁵⁵ *SEF*: 31.

¹⁵⁶ *HKRH*: 646.

¹⁵⁷ Coexistence of Saami and Norse culture – reflected in and interpreted by Old Norse myths’ University of Bergen, 11th Saga Conference Sydney 2000: 348.

the mythic pattern¹⁵⁸ Furthermore Sigurðr, one of the sons from the marriage between Haraldr and Snæfriðr, is nicknamed ‘risi’, which can also mean giant.¹⁵⁹ Mundal and Steinsland claim that this marriage is a parallel to the sexual union between the gods Óðinn and Freyr, and the giants Skaði and Gerðr. Their sons are vilified by Christian historiography,¹⁶⁰ and even Snorri has one of them murdered by Haraldr’s eldest son Eiríkr for practicing sorcery.¹⁶¹

The legitimising aspect of this, is subtly expressed in *Heimskringla*. The Norwegian royal dynasty in Snorri’s day was not attributed with descent from the royal saint, Óláfr Haraldsson as might be expected from a highly polemical author such as Snorri. Snorri argued, along with a number of other historians, that the Norwegian King Hákon IV, his patron, descended King Haraldr harðráði, who descended from Snæfriðr and Haraldr hárfagri. It appears that Snorri through this genealogy attempts to legitimise the rule of Hákon IV, by giving him a lineage from the euhemerised giant woman Snæfriðr.

Snorri exploits the perception of the Finns as a pagan people connected to pre-Christian myth and rituals, to euhemerise them into the ancestors of the contemporary royal dynasty. Mundal argues convincingly that the sexual union between the perceived unifier of Norway Haraldr hárfagri and the Finn girl Snæfriðr is a part of a unification myth.¹⁶² The succession is thus subtly legitimised through a branch of the Harfagri-dynasty involving a genealogy with two historicised ‘holy marriages’, Freyr and Gerðr and Haraldr and Snæfriðr, the latter being a mythological echo of the former.

Snorri’s use of pagan symbolism, myth and kennings as legitimation to the successors of the Norwegians kingdom corresponds to the development of Scandinavian poetry as surveyed by Bjarne Fidjestøl. Fidjestøl shows that the percentage of kennings referring to pagan myths drops significantly following the conversion process from 30.2% in the years 975-99 to c. 10% in the eleventh century and c. 5% in the twelfth century.¹⁶³ The reason Harald Harðráði was the last king to whom pagan genealogical legitimacy was attributed in the *Heimskringla* could have been that Snorri’s sources no longer referred to the old pagan framework of royal legitimation. *Heimskringla*, however, represents what Christopher Abram calls a *Mythological Renaissance* in Icelandic literature. Fidjestøl’s survey shows indeed that the percentage of pagan kennings in poetry increased in this period (1200-50) to more than

¹⁵⁸ Mundal 2000: 351.

¹⁵⁹ Steinsland 2011: 47 ; *HN*: 86-7.

¹⁶⁰ Steinsland 2011: 46-7.

¹⁶¹ *HKRH*: 88-89.

¹⁶² Steinsland 2000:133 paraphrasing Mundal 1997: 51.

¹⁶³ Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Dating of Eddic poetry: a historical survey and methodological investigation*, 1999.

10%.¹⁶⁴ Through the various references to divine and mythical ancestors, Snorri attempts to legitimise the rule of King Hákon IV using his predecessors, and the framework by which his ancestors were legitimised.

3.3 Demonisation

3.3.1 Diana's Prophecy

The famous prophecy inspiring the foundation of Britain according to Geoffrey was communicated to Brutus through a dream by the goddess Diana, without any further explanation of the metaphysical origins of this dream vision. Since the prophecy turned out to be right Geoffrey must have intended this to be perceived as a supernatural occurrence, but how did Geoffrey intend this episode to be interpreted by his Christian contemporaries?

A.W. Glowka suggests that Diana must be understood as demonic because of qualities and symbols communicated implicitly by Geoffrey.¹⁶⁵ Glowka shows how several theological authorities such as Augustine of Hippo, Isidore of Seville, Tertullian, and even the Anglo-Saxon abbot Ælfric propose circumstances under which demons have the power to predict the future. Lazamon, who composed his vernacular *Brut* on the basis of Geoffrey's *History*, appears to readily accept this explanation, but Glowka notes that Geoffrey does not engage in as explicit a demonisation as Lazamon.¹⁶⁶

Indeed, if Geoffrey knew Ælfric well, he is not adopting any of his condemning or demonising rhetoric as it can be read in 'De falsis Diis' which is mentioned above. However, Geoffrey had good reason not to condemn or demonise the vision of Diana. As discussed in the previous chapter, Diana's prophecy had an important impact as legitimisation to the royal dynasty and demonisation of such legitimising forces could potentially cancel the legitimisation provided. Glowka's argument rests only on one of many possible interpretations of supernatural phenomena.

However, G.W. Weber argues that a seemingly neutral approach to the pagan gods in the pre-conversion historical narratives should be understood as demonisation, because the author takes the 'standpoint of the heathen protagonists.'¹⁶⁷ Such a theory could explain why Geoffrey changes so abruptly in his approach to paganism after his protagonists convert to Christianity. But Weber's argument is problematic. If a neutral description of the pagan gods is proof of demonisation, how would one then prove the presence of a neutral approach?

¹⁶⁴ Fidjestøl 1999.

¹⁶⁵ Glowka 1996: 123.

¹⁶⁶ Glowka 1996: 122-3.

¹⁶⁷ Weber 1987: 107.

Indeed, a lack of ‘qualification’ of the pagan Gods is proving no more and no less than a lack of qualification. Weber may be right in asserting that authors such as Geoffrey did in fact believe his pagan gods to be demons, but in the text there is no direct evidence for this in the description of the pagan gods or in the interaction between them and their devotees in Geoffrey’s pre-conversion histories.

3.3.2 Óðinn’s Magic

The principal function of historical euhemerisation seems to have been to absolve the pagan legitimising framework of its irreligious stigma, so that it could be used to legitimise the power of Christian aristocratic and royal dynasties. The properties and application of demonisation, however, may be critical to understanding the purpose of euhemerisation and its collocation with demonisation. This dissertation argues that demonisation in historical euhemerisation must be significantly toned down, so that the legitimising force of the euhemerised gods for the power of the royal dynasty would not be diminished. David Johnson argues that Snorri’s approach to the pagan gods constitutes a humanistic application of euhemerism, entirely devoid of any suggestion of demonisation.¹⁶⁸ That interpretation would be consistent with the hypothesis of historical euhemerisation as a legitimising force, absolved of the traditional religious stigma that sticks to the pagan gods when they are described in theological euhemerisation. However, some historians dispute this interpretation.¹⁶⁹

In *Ynglinga Saga* and *Snorra Edda*, Óðinn is portrayed with a number of supernatural characteristics but these skills are not explicitly attributed to anything demonic. Yngvifreyr and Njǫrðr are described as kings ruling over prolonged periods of good harvests and dying peacefully of old age without any involvement of supernatural forces or demons. Snorri appears to approach the pagan gods without Christian prejudices and without a moralist condemnation of their conduct, however supernatural Óðinn’s qualities are. Not unlike Glowka, Annette Lassen argues that such qualities may have been understood as dangerous and demonic if read in the correct theological context.¹⁷⁰ According to *Ynglinga Saga* and *Snorra Edda*, Óðinn was a powerful magician, whose abilities included prophesying the future, transforming into an animal, finding hidden treasure, speaking to the dead, raising the dead, walking through mountains, and speaking supernaturally persuasively.¹⁷¹ Lassen

¹⁶⁸ Johnson 1995: 43.

¹⁶⁹ Wanner, 2008: 154-55.

¹⁷⁰ Lassen, 2010: 216, 223-28 ; Lassen 2011: 253.

¹⁷¹ *HKRH*: 10-11 ; *SEF*: 3-4.

demonstrates that many of these abilities are categorised as demonic, by theological literature. Snorri's intentions for doing so remain debatable.

In Isidore's *Etymologies*, parts of which were known in Iceland from *Veraldar Saga* written about 1200,¹⁷² demons have the power of prophesying the future.¹⁷³ In the Icelandic translation of *Elucidarius*, the Antichrist is a persuasive man who also finds hidden treasure and raises the dead:¹⁷⁴ 'hann veit öll folgin fé (...) svíkr hann kennimenn meðh speki ok mælsku, því at hann (kann) allar ithróttir. (...) lætr hann upp rísa daudha men ok bera sér vitni.'¹⁷⁵ These skills are indeed similar to those of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*: 'ok af honum námu þeir allir íþróttirnar, því at hann kunni fyrst allar (...) hann talaði svá snjallt ok slétt, at qllum er á heyrðu, þótti þat eina satt. (...) stundum vakði hann upp dauða menn ór jörðu (...) Óðinn vissi um alt jarðfé, hvar fólgt var.'¹⁷⁶

In the Icelandic translation of *Clements saga*, the magician Simon magus can by the power of the devil, speak to the dead, change into an animal shape, and walk through mountains,¹⁷⁷ and in *Pétr's saga postula*, Simon magus can raise the dead, and find hidden treasure.¹⁷⁸ According to Lactanius' *Divina Institutiones* demons were the source of all magic such as astrology, necromancy, and prophesying the future.¹⁷⁹ The theological reading of these particular magical abilities described found in these religious texts sheds a grim light on Snorri's Óðinn.

In *Historia Norwegie*, however, there is a passage where the magicians of the Sami people are said to have the ability to find hidden treasure, not unlike Óðinn: 'Et de longinquis prouinciis res concupiscibiles miro modo sibi alliciunt, nec non absconditos thesauros longe remoti mirifice produunt.'¹⁸⁰ Based on this and certain other passages in the *Historia Norwegie*, John Lindow poses another possibility for interpreting Óðinn's supernatural powers.¹⁸¹

¹⁷² Lassen 2011: 115.

¹⁷³ Lassen 2011: 253.

¹⁷⁴ Lassen 2011: 253.

¹⁷⁵ 'He knows of all hidden treasure (...) he tricks all clerics with wisdom and eloquence, because he (knows) all these skills. (...) he lets dead men rise and bear witness.' *Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation*, Evelyn Scherabon Firchow and Kaaren Grimstad eds., Reykjavik: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi: Rit 36, 1989: 127-8.

¹⁷⁶ *HKR I*: 17-19, 'and from him [Óðinn] they learned all the skills, because he was the first to know them. (...) he spoke so well and so smoothly that all who heard him believed all he said was true. (...) and at times he could call to life dead men out of the ground (...) Óðinn knew about all hidden treasures' *HKRH*: 10-11.

¹⁷⁷ Lassen 2011: 256-7.

¹⁷⁸ Lassen 2011: 258.

¹⁷⁹ Lassen 2011: 258.

¹⁸⁰ Lassen 2011: 253 ; 'Furthermore they attract to themselves desirable objects from distant parts in an astounding fashion and miraculously reveal hidden treasures, even though they are situated a vast distance away.' *HN*: 60-1.

¹⁸¹ Lindow, John. 'Cultures in Contact'. In *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*. Margaret Clunies Ross, ed. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003: 89-109.

Originally Lindow wanted to demonstrate the influence of Sami shamanism on the euhemerisation of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga*, and that this perspective can show that Óðinn's supernatural abilities, do not require him to be perceived a god.¹⁸² He argues that if we just assume that Snorri was familiar with Sami shamanism, like the author of an earlier work of Scandinavian history, the *Historia Norwegie*, his mythical or godlike powers, do not seem as fantastic.¹⁸³ Unwittingly Lindow thus creates an opposing hypothesis to Lassen's 'implicit demonisation' of Óðinn's supernatural abilities. If Snorri got his description of Óðinn's abilities from what he and other Scandinavians knew about Sami shamanistic rituals, Johnson might still be right about the complete lack of demonisation of the pagan gods in Snorri's writings.

Medieval Scandinavians had frequent contact with the Sami people¹⁸⁴ and they would therefore have known about religious practices that would be called shamanistic today.¹⁸⁵ One particular episode in the *Historia Norwegie* is mentioned by Lindow, where a Christian merchant observes a Sami ritual involving spirit journeys in animal shape, and resurrecting the dead.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the clerical author of the *Historia Norwegie* did not refrain from condemning as 'profanas' (unholy) calling spirit journey 'diabolicus' (diabolical), indeed, the practice of magic in itself by the Sami people was utterly condemned: 'Horum itaque intollerabilis perfidia uix cuiquam credibilis uidebitur, quantumue diabolice supersticionis in magica arte excerceant.'¹⁸⁷

This creates a problem. Even if Snorri used what he knew about the Sami people to describe Óðinn's supernatural abilities, there are no extant sources describing such abilities that do not connect them with the same kind of demonising condemnation Lassen claims Snorri adopted from other sources. Because it is outside the scope of this dissertation to discuss whether the author of the *Historia Norwegie* described actual Sami rituals, or himself projected ideas from the same demonising sources that Lassen claims were used by Snorri, it is not possible to determine if Snorri indeed had Sami rituals in mind when he described the abilities of Óðinn which would challenge Lassen's claim, or if the collocation of demons to the Sami abilities in *Historia Norwegie* is another episode from medieval literature that

¹⁸² Lindow 2003: 103.

¹⁸³ Lindow 2003: 105.

¹⁸⁴ Lindow 2003: 91-94.

¹⁸⁵ Lassen 2011: 250.

¹⁸⁶ Lindow 2003: 101 ; *HN*: 62-3 ; Ghosh 2011.

¹⁸⁷ *HN*: 60-1, 'A person will scarcely believe their unendurable impiety and the extent to which they practise heathen devilry in their magic arts.'

supports Lassen's claim. Snorri could possibly have been influenced by oral or unknown sources where Sami rituals are not collocated with demonisation, but that remains speculation.

However, the abilities of Óðinn which Lassen shows to be collocated with demonisation represent only a small selection of the qualities attributed to Óðinn by Snorri. Many others are described that would not necessarily be understood as demonic, or even as phenomena within a Christian good/evil dichotomy. Lassen mentions some relevant parallels between Snorri and earlier sources that deviate from the pattern. In *Trójumanna saga*, a thirteenth-century Icelandic translation of Dares Phrygius *De Excidio Troianum*, Hector is described similarly to Óðinn.¹⁸⁸ 'Hans höfuð var it ógurligasta óvinum, en it þekkiligasta ok it tígulgasta hans vinum.'¹⁸⁹ The parallel can be found in *Ynglinga Saga*: 'Hann var svá fagr ok gøfugligr álitum, þá er hann sat með vinum sínum, at öllum hló hugr við. En þá er hann var í her, þá sýndisk hann grimmligr sínum óvinum.'¹⁹⁰ This example from Hector in *Trójumanna saga* has the potential to contradict Lassen's claim that Óðinn's supernatural qualities should solely be interpreted as Christian demonisation, but Lassen dismisses the idea of Snorri borrowing this from *Trójumanna saga* since the words are not entirely similar.¹⁹¹ Lassen argues convincingly that supernatural abilities understood as demonic were one topos well-known by certain authors and some readers in the Scandinavian literary environment, but this was obviously not an uncontested idea.

Lassen and a number of other authors have attempted to demonstrate the presence of patristic, insular and classical texts on Iceland at Snorri's time,¹⁹² and Snorri himself was undoubtedly a learned man. From an Icelandic translation of 'De Falsis Diis' by the Anglo-Saxon abbot Ælfric of Eynsham, Snorri probably knew about theological euhemerisation and its collocation with demonisation, and it might have inspired his implicit portrayal of the pagan gods as demons. The work can be found in the fourteenth-century manuscript *Hauksbók*, but Anthony Faulkes claims that the translation might have been done as early as the twelfth century.¹⁹³ Lassen makes a poor case for the presence in Iceland of Lactanius' *Divina Institutiones* on which she bases part of her argument. That the Danish author Saxo Grammaticus probably knew Lactanius,¹⁹⁴ cannot be generalised and applied to Snorri, as a

¹⁸⁸ Lassen 2011: 262.

¹⁸⁹ 'His head was terrifying to his enemies, but attractive and handsome to his friends.' *Trójumanna saga* Louis-Jensen 1963: 111.

¹⁹⁰ *HKR I*: 17, 'he was so handsome and noble to look at when he sat among his friends that it gladdened the hearts of all. But when he was engaged in warfare he showed his enemies a grim aspect.' *HKRH*: 10.

¹⁹¹ Lassen 2011: 262-3.

¹⁹² Lassen 2011 ; Mortensen, 1992 ; Tértrel 2011.

¹⁹³ Faulkes 1982: 107.

¹⁹⁴ Lassen 2011: 200-201.

source to his portrayal of Óðinn. Even though it is difficult to prove exactly how well known such texts were, at least those members of Snorri's audience who was highly educated, and had knowledge of particular genres of religious texts would have understood the implicit references to Óðinn's abilities as demonic and dangerous. This challenges Johnson's view on Snorri's portrayal of Óðinn, as innocent and humanistic.

Indeed, some of the parallels demonstrated by Lassen are so strikingly similar that it is difficult not to read them as directly alluding to the religious texts from which they came, Snorri probably had two audiences in mind when he wrote about Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga* and *Snorra Edda*. It is also typical of Snorri's narrative style, Lassen mentions, to leave out explicit information.¹⁹⁵ The result is that Snorri did not specifically define his audience, in contrast to other authors who, by writing in Latin, and applying a Christian dichotomous, theological discourse on pagan myth directed their works specifically to a learned and ecclesiastical audience. By only implying the demonic qualities of Óðinn, Snorri could communicate two different interpretations of the pagan gods at the same time. The layman, such as the members of the aristocratic Scandinavian dynasties he wrote about, would understand Óðinn purely euhemeristically, as a glorious human king with certain supernatural abilities, whereas the cleric would read Óðinn's abilities more in the terms of the kind of theological euhemerisation they knew from patristic and hagiographic texts, as a demon or as a human with certain demonic, condemnable qualities.

The reason for this double communication was that Snorri's antiquarian interest in traditional culture. Paganism as a system of reference for skaldic poetry, was still important, and such interests could be problematic. Snorri took precautions to avoid being labelled as an actual supporter of pagan idolatry,¹⁹⁶ and the implicit communication of the true nature of Óðinn, which would only be understood by clerics or other highly learned men, was probably such a precaution.

3.3.3 Naturalisation

Carl Watkins has recently suggested an alternative interpretation on magic in *History and the supernatural*, which deserves some attention. Watkins shows that demonic influence was only one possible medieval interpretation of the supernatural, another was nature.¹⁹⁷ Because magic is relevant to the interpretation of Diana in the *Historia* the discussion might

¹⁹⁵ Lassen 2010: 220.

¹⁹⁶ Lönnroth 1969: 4.

¹⁹⁷ Watkins, C. S. *History and the supernatural in medieval England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 133-4.

reveal a means of understanding the pagan religion in Geoffrey as something arising from the interpretation of nature, rather than deluding demons.

Nature was increasingly being accepted as a morally neutral category and source of supernatural phenomena by authors in Geoffrey's time, such as Gerald of Wales and John of Salisbury.¹⁹⁸ Prophecy was a phenomenon of particular interest and Gerald of Wales noted that pre-Christian prophecies, such as those of Calchas or Cassandra, had come true in spite of their 'pagan taint', and that non-Christians would therefore be able to prophesy.¹⁹⁹ Of particular interest to English authors were Geoffrey's prophecies of Merlin, who according to Geoffrey was the son of a human female and a male demon.²⁰⁰ John of Salisbury, who was frequently critical of divination and astrology, did not morally condemn Merlin's prophecies, but stated instead that he was unsure what sort of spirit had inspired Merlin.

Not all agreed with these interpretations, however. William of Newburgh, was one of Geoffrey's most ardent critics, and he overtly labelled the prophecies in the *Historia* as utterly demonic.²⁰¹ But Richard Waswo shows that William of Newburgh's criticism was probably motivated by the politics of his own historical project, and that he therefore sought to discredit Geoffrey and his praise of the Brittonic tradition.²⁰² By his criticism William of Newburgh presented a less morally neutral interpretation of the events in the *Historia* than Geoffrey himself who neither condemns nor explains the prophecies of Diana. Indeed, there are no indications that Geoffrey ever attempted to present the phenomenon implicating pagan gods as natural phenomena, or other than a relative tendency towards the morally neutral, and a complete lack of both explicit demonisation and euhemerisation. This lack of explanation, however, cannot be understood, however as anything else than a lack of explanation.

In Snorri, though, paganism is explained as a natural occurrence arising from the pagans' observation of nature, using the reason granted to them by the Christian God. Snorri also moved closer to moral neutrality, by omitting the explicit demonisation of Óðinn in one particular episode of *Heimskringla*. The episode is described in an earlier version of *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar* written by the monk Oddr Snorrasson between 1180 and 1206,²⁰³ which Snorri used as a source. In the passage, Óláfr is visited by a strange man who keeps him awake in the night by telling him stories of old pagan times. Óláfr is ultimately persuaded to go to bed by his bishop, and in the morning, the man has gone but did leave some meat in the

¹⁹⁸ Watkins, 2007: 140.

¹⁹⁹ Watkins, 2007: 151.

²⁰⁰ *HRB*: 138-9.

²⁰¹ Watkins 2007: 147.

²⁰² Waswo 1995: 284.

²⁰³ Lassen 2011: 140-1.

kitchen to prepare for the king. Two fairly complete versions of Oddr Snorrason's saga are extant. In the A version, Óláfr then exclaims: 'Þat hygg ec at sia diofull havi verit með asionu Oðins.'²⁰⁴ In the S version Óláfr says: 'Miok hefir guð leys toss af miklom haska en avðsett er at fiandin hefir brvgðiz i like Oðens. ok villidi blekia oss.'²⁰⁵ Where Oddr Snorrason explicitly describes Óðinn as the devil, taking his form, he uses the words 'diofull' (devil) and 'fiandi' (lit. enemy, opponent), Snorri omits these words from his story.²⁰⁶ Snorri completely rephrases Óláfr's exclamation: 'þetta myndi engi maðr verit hafa ok þar myndi verit hafa Óðinn, sá er heiðnir menn hofðu lengi á trúat (...) engu áleiðis koma at svíkja þá'.²⁰⁷ In doing this, Snorri differs from contemporary and later texts. Snorri's Óðinn is still a tempter of the missionary King Óláfr Tryggvason, but he is lacking the explicit condemnation and demonisation that can be observed in other contemporary and later texts.

3.4 Conclusion

On the topic of pagan gods Geoffrey's main strategy was omission. Clear traces of euhemerisation, the idea of divine descent, and pre-conversion demonisation of pagan gods are completely lacking in Geoffrey's historical narratives. From his extensive use of insular and classical sources where such ideas were central, it seems obvious to conclude that Geoffrey consciously and systematically omitted all references to such elements from his works. Quite unlike Snorri, Geoffrey characterised the pre-Christian gods as gods, and before the conversion they appear as real, legitimate entities, who interfered in the lives of their followers by helping the devout and punishing the negligent and he thus made a clear distinction between the human and the divine. Similar to Snorri, however, is Geoffrey's lack of effort in consolidating the metaphysical phenomenon of pagan origin with a Christian world view. Only after the rise of Christianity and the religion of the pre-Christian past in his writings, and only after the initial British conversion to Christianity is paganism described using a Christian vocabulary which includes words such as demonic and idolatrous.²⁰⁸

Why, then, did Geoffrey not use euhemerisation in the *Historia*? Parts of the answer to this question can be found in the next chapter because it relates to Geoffrey's attitude towards the Anglo-Saxons. As demonstrated above, euhemerisation in the insular world was strongly

²⁰⁴ *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk*, Finnur Jónsson (ed.): København 1932: 134, 'I imagine that this devil was in the shape of Óðinn. translation Anne Heinrichs: 1993: 57

²⁰⁵ *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, 1932: 155 ; Wanner 2008: 155

²⁰⁶ Lassen 2010: 220, Lassen 2011: 140-1

²⁰⁷ *HRK II*: 'this had probably not been any human but Óðinn, the god heathen men had long worshipped, (...) he was not going to succeed in deceiving them' *HKRH*: 204.

²⁰⁸ *HRB*: Book V

connected to the Anglo-Saxon royal dynasties, and if Geoffrey reminded his readers about this unifying Anglo-Saxon, legitimising tradition he could risk undermining against his overall narrative which favour of the Normans and the Britons. Omitting euhemerisation of the classical gods or mention of the divine ancestry of heroes such as Aeneas seem to be unrelated to Geoffrey's antipathy towards the Anglo-Saxons, and he did not clearly indicate any reasons for these omissions. Since, however, the Classical gods and the Germanic gods are the same, in Geoffrey's eyes, the Saxons and the pagan Britons belonged to the same non-Christian religious tradition.²⁰⁹ It is possible to assert that Geoffrey wanted to avoid the tainting of the pre-conversion Britons with traditions associated with the nefarious Saxons.

Snorri's awareness of theology genre conventions, pagan mythology and insular historical writing successfully allowed him clear the pagan gods of their irreligious stigma and use them for legitimising purposes. Snorri seemed to have established a precedence for this since euhemerised gods are still being used as legitimation in later works such as *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* about Snorri's patron King Hákon IV, from the 1260s. The work was commissioned by Hákon's son King Magnus and written by Snorri Sturluson's nephew Sturla Þórðarson. The saga alludes to pagan gods such as Óðinn and Yngvi, the latter in connection with royal legitimation. In Hákon's childhood, Norway was in a state of civil war, and some parties questioned Hákon's royal origins. In one particular skaldic poem, *Hákonarkviða*, composed and quoted by Sturla Þórðarson himself, an episode from King Hákon's childhood is depicted where he is compared to the missionary king Óláfr Tryggvason and simultaneously reminded about his own euhemerised ancestors, being called 'ynglings barn'.²¹⁰

This explicit allusion to the pagan divine origins of the dynasty, its connection to a King whose parentage was questioned, and the fact that it was presented in a historical work commissioned by the son of that same king, show how powerful pagan legitimation was through the strategy of euhemerisation. Historians such as Snorri, who participated in the Icelandic 'mythological renaissance' of the thirteenth century, displayed a tremendous amount of creativity in their use of pre-Christian history to serve contemporary purposes. Gro Steinsland writes: 'In medieval Icelandic scriptoria older myths were extensively re-used:

²⁰⁹ *HRB*: 124-25

²¹⁰ 'The child of Yngve', Own translation, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar: Hakonar Saga and a Fragment of Magnús Saga*, Guðbrandur Vigfússon ed., *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Ævi Scriptores* 88. Icelandic Sagas 2. London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1887:5.

they were incorporated, euhemerised, transformed, and adapted to new contexts wherever positions of power needed to be legitimised.²¹¹

Explicit condemnation of pagan gods, seems to have been another established practice both in historical and religious writings of medieval Scandinavia. Snorri, however, omitted the explicit demonisation from the euhemerised pagan gods, while simultaneously assigning certain supernatural qualities to them that certainly theological and literary colleagues would only have understood as demonic. Snorri both praised and condemned the euhemerised gods.

This attests to the sophistication and audience awareness of Snorri's style. As an aristocratic and royal ancestor Óðinn could not be entirely demonised, but to avoid clerical backlash, neither could he be entirely applauded. The result is that in the episode discussed above, Óláfr Tryggvason is visited by one of his deceased ancestors, whose metaphysical origin is not harmonised with the religiously logical world Snorri tries to create. Óðinn is an unexplainable paradox, because it would be impossible for Snorri to explain his presence in the era of Óláfr Tryggvason. If Óðinn was a human king who died peacefully in his bed as Snorri himself stated in *Ynglinga Saga*, he could not possibly have been able to visit Óláfr Tryggvason hundreds of years later. If Óðinn was a demon who had assumed the appearance of Óðinn, that would undermine his role as aristocratic ancestor and cultural hero and thus also the foundation myth which established the chain of legitimate succession given to the royal dynasty of the twelfth and thirteenth century by merging Scandinavian and classical tradition. For the monk Oddr Snorrasson, who was not trying to construct a complete narrative from the foundation myth of the 'Trojan' Ynglinga-dynasty until the time of writing, it was entirely appropriate to make Óðinn into a demon.

²¹¹ Steinsland 2011: 58.

Chapter 4: The virtuous pagan and the villainous pagan

4.1 Introduction

The complex portrayal of the pagan gods discussed in the chapter above is in some ways reflected in Snorri's and Geoffrey's portrayal of the people worshipping these gods. In spite of the fact that the pagans described in *Heimskringla*, *Snorra Edda*, and the *Historia* participated in explicitly pagan rituals, involving animal sacrifice, these individuals were in some cases praised or had their paganism excused, and some of the pagans were clearly intended as virtuous *exempla* to be imitated by the audience of the works. In other instances, the pagans or their practices were as thoroughly condemned as would be expected from twelfth and thirteenth-century literature. The characteristics assigned to pagans of both kinds follow the Christian dichotomy of good and evil, and Snorri and Geoffrey contribute to the construction of two pagan archetypes: the 'virtuous pagan' and 'the villainous pagan'.

The virtuous pagan is a topos with theological and historiographical roots in late antiquity. Patristic authors argued that those who for reasons of chronology or geography lacked the opportunity to join the Church, but otherwise lived as virtuously as possible, such as the Old Testament patriarchs, and classical poets and philosophers of Greece and Rome, would not necessarily be eternally damned.²¹² The virtuous pagan would be a sort of 'precursor' or 'herald' of Christianity, while simultaneously retaining enough of their pagan ethics to still be considered pagans.²¹³ Hence, patristic writers such as Justin, Clement, and Origen tried to demonstrate parallels between Christianity and the positions of classical philosophers, such as the Platonists.²¹⁴

In the Middle Ages, theologians Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas extended the possibility of salvation to pagans arguing that god could not withhold his grace to those who 'did their best.'²¹⁵ The issue was a controversial one, and authorities such as St. Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux opposed the ideas of pagan salvation. Common to those arguing in favour of pagan salvation, however, was the emphasis on human reason,²¹⁶ something Abelard considered a prerequisite for faith.²¹⁷ Nevertheless, most theologians regarded both faith and baptism as prerequisites for salvation, and reason alone was thus not enough to achieve

²¹² Vitto C.L. 1989 'The Virtuous Pagan. In Middle English Literature'. *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 79, 1989: 1.

²¹³ Lönnroth 'The Noble Heathen' 1969: 2.

²¹⁴ Vitto 1989: 9.

²¹⁵ Vitto 1989: 17.

²¹⁶ Vitto 1989: 2, 10, 17.

²¹⁷ Vitto 1989: 23.

salvation, though maybe enough to escape the horrors of hell. It is important to stress that the virtuous pagans did not live in a Christian world, since that would necessarily imply that they had chosen to remain pagan even when faced with the truth.

One of the more famous examples of an individual considered a virtuous pagan is the Roman Emperor Trajan, who is lauded by the English author and clergyman John of Salisbury,²¹⁸ only decades after the completion of Geoffrey's *Historia*. Because of his virtue, compassion, and justice Trajan were according to John of Salisbury spared the penalty of hell.²¹⁹

The anti-thesis of the virtuous pagan can be called the villainous pagan, and was another category of pagans, a topos defined by those who had been offered the Christian faith but rejected it.²²⁰ Since Christianity was regarded an absolute and irrefutable truth, the pagans rejecting Christianity must either be evil or deluded, since reason would lead to accepting Christianity as the one true religion. Even though pre-conversion pagans could be wicked, the villainous pagan as a topos exists in a world of Christianity, as an invented enemy to the Christian heroes of the historical narratives. A recurring characteristic of the villainous pagan was the involvement of demons or the devil, which would serve as one explanation to his or her villainy.

This chapter will not engage in a prolonged theological debate, but this background is essential for the discussion on how the ideas of the virtuous pagan and the villainous pagan could be used by Christian historians such as Geoffrey and Snorri, in political ideology. Historical writing adopting this idea unequivocally demonstrates how pre-Christian history could be used, invented, and constructed to express contemporary concerns with the ideology and vocabulary of Christian theology. This chapter will analyse Geoffrey's and Snorri's purposes and context in using these two archetypes, and how they applied this, to what is presented as pre-Christian history.

4.2 The Virtuous Pagan

4.2.1 Early Pagans – Reason or Delusion

The degree of demonisation in the descriptions of paganism, and in the explanations of the origins of pagan practices as delusions is normally indicative of the application of the two stereotypes. The traditional, theological model of euhemerisation, discussed in the last chapter,

²¹⁸ Minnis, A.J., *Chaucer and pagan Antiquity*, Chaucer Studies 8, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982 : 53.

²¹⁹ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, Cary J. Nederman trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1990: V.9.

²²⁰ Vitto 1989:1.

normally also involves a degree of demonisation, particularly in what can be called ‘the process of deification’. Most medieval authors explained this transformation from deceased human to pagan god, in accordance with Isidore of Seville.²²¹ In his *Etymologies*, Isidore made a distinction between the euhemerised pagan gods and the idols being worshipped and claimed that demons, not the pagan gods themselves were responsible for paganism as a religious delusion.²²² A pagan could certainly not be virtuous if his or her activities were inspired by demons or the devil, nor could a deluded pagan be virtuous, because faith required rationality.

Christian historians writing about the pre-Christian past, certainly did not doubt the truth of Christianity and the falsehood of pagan religion, as Snorri stated explicitly in his advice to young skalds in *Snorra Edda*: ‘En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa á heiðin goð ok eigi á sannynði flessar sagnar annan veg en svá sem hér finnsk í upphafi bókar (...)’²²³ Even so, if mythology were to be interpreted as history, and the Æsir were to be perceived as honourably as possible to legitimise the ruling dynasties in contemporary Scandinavia, then the introduction of the false religion had to be depicted as innocently as possible.²²⁴

Historians disagree, however, on whether the origin of paganism in *Heimskringla* and *Snorra Edda* is depicted as a deliberate delusion or not. Regarding Snorri’s view on this, Christopher Abram argues: ‘belief in the pagan gods grew out of the mistaken idea that the heroes of Troy were superhuman and possessed the ability to make the world bend to their will - power which in fact only god possesses.’²²⁵ But as the analysis above undoubtedly shows, supernatural powers was a contested issue in the middle ages, and cannot alone define the wielder as either demonic or divine.

Snorri’s account of the origin of pagan ritual is given in the the *Prologue* to *Snorra Edda* and the first few chapters of *Ynglinga saga*. Common to both accounts is Snorri’s emphasis on human reason rather than demonic delusion. In *Snorra Edda* this is stated explicitly in the passage on the origin of paganism. ‘Miðlaði hann ok spekina svá at fleir skilðu alla jarðliga hluti ok allar greinir flær er sjá mátti loptsins ok jarðarinnar’.²²⁶ The

²²¹ Johnson 1995: 43.

²²² Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, S.A. Barney et.al trans Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006: 183-4,

²²³ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, 2 vols, Anthony Faulkes, ed. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998: 5 ‘Yet Christian people must not believe in heathen gods, nor in the truth of this account in any other way than that which it is presented at the beginning of this book [i.e. the prologue] (...)’ translation, *SEF*: 64.

²²⁴ Wanner 2007: 154.

²²⁵ Abram 2011: 210.

²²⁶ *SE*: 1, ‘He [God] also gave them a portion of wisdom so that they could understand all earthly things and the details of everything they could see in the sky and on earth.’ *SEF*: 1.

‘wisdom’ with which God equips man, was a crucial element leading to a greater understanding of an all-powerful creator, and ruler of the universe, although the pagans lacked precise knowledge of his kingdom or ‘spiritual wisdom’.²²⁷ This world view was an attempt by Snorri to demonstrate similarities between Christianity and a proto-pagan religion based on rationality and observation of the world. He seems to have claimed that the only thing lacking from their understanding were the proper spiritual names, since the pagans had already grasped what they could using the reason granted to them by God.

In Snorri’s works, the typical justification for belief in pagan gods was exactly this innocent lack of spiritual understanding, along with the Æsir as marvellous, beautiful and gifted men and women, who impressed all whom they encountered.²²⁸ Moreover, Snorri was evidently aware that Óðinn and the other Æsir had not only been worshipped in Scandinavia, and posed an explanation based on the Æsir’s journey through Europe. ‘En hvar sem þeir fóru yfir lǫnd, þa var ágæti mikit frá þeim sagt, svá at þeir þóttu líkari goðum en mǫnnum.’²²⁹ *The Prologue* does not elaborate on the qualities of the Æsir, but in *Ynglinga saga* the early pagans observed these supernatural abilities and used their reason to conclude that the Æsir were gods. Óðinn was worshipped because his followers were comforted by calling his name and because they believed that he showed himself to them before battle offering supernatural assistance.²³⁰ Njǫrðr and Yngvifreyr were called gods because their reigns were long periods of prosperity and good seasons, which the people of Swithiod believed was the doing of their godlike kings.²³¹

A reason to argue in favour of Snorri’s portrayal of paganism as a demonic delusion, relates this to the ritualistic practices instigated by Óðinn himself in *Ynglinga saga*.

Óðinn varð sótt dauður í Svíþjóð. Ok er hann var at kominn dauða, lét hann marka sik geirsoddi ok eignaði sér alla vǫpndauða menn. Sagði hann sik mundu fara í Goðheim ok fagna þar vinum sínum. Nú hugðu Svíar at hann væri kominn í inn forna Ásgarð ok myndi þar lifa at eilífu. Hófsk þá að nýju átrúnaðr við Óðin og áheit. Oft þótti Svíum

²²⁷ SEF: 2.

²²⁸ Johnson 1995: 43.

²²⁹ SE: 5 ‘And whatever countries they passed through, great glory was spoken of them, so that they seemed more like gods than men.’ SEF: 10.

²³⁰ HKRH: 13.

²³¹ HKRH: 13-14.

hann vitrask sér áðr stórar orrustur yrði. Gaf hann þá sumum sigr en sumum bauð hann til sín.²³²

But it would be wrong to say that Snorri blamed Óðinn for the pagan worship. Snorri's Óðinn only expressed his own religious beliefs and did not call himself god. Lassen argues in favour of this view and emphasises that Snorri makes Óðinn into a ritualistic leader who performs sacrifices himself.²³³ If Óðinn makes sacrifices, and teaches his followers to do the same, Snorri is implying that Óðinn also worshipped gods and cannot therefore himself be a god. However, the deliberate ambiguity Snorri applied in describing the qualities of the pagan gods may apply here as well. Those who would interpret Óðinn as a demon would probably understand the origins of paganism as deliberate delusions.

In one instance in the *Historia*, Geoffrey seems to have provided to the Britons the same kind of justification of the worship of the classical gods, similar to that Snorri provided to the Norse worshippers of the Scandinavian gods. As discussed in chapter 2, it is because of a divine prophecy that Brutus sets out on his quest to establish the 'new Troy'. Landing on an abandoned island he visits there the temple of Diana seeking her advice:

'Diua potens nemorum, terror siluestribus apris, cui licet amfractus ire per aethereos infemasque domos, terrestria iura reuolue et die quas terras nos habitare uelis. Die certam sedem qua te uenerabor in aeuum, qua tibi uirgineis templa dicabo choris'²³⁴

Brutus and the Trojans thence follow Diana's prophetic answer, and establish Britain. Taking appropriate actions in response to how they experienced the world, the Trojans must also be said to do their best, given the situation. Geoffrey made no attempt to demonise the early British pagans or the rituals they performed, and since these rituals did indeed produce the desired response. One example of this is the celebration of the British victory over Caesar,

²³² *HKR I*: 22, 'Óthin died in his bed in Sweden. But when he felt death approaching he had himself marked with the point of a spear, and he declared as his own all men who fell in battle. He said he was about to depart to the abode of the gods and would there welcome his friends. So then the Swedes believed that he had gone to the old Ásgarh and would live there forever. Then the belief in Óthin arose anew, and they called on him. Often the Swedes thought, he revealed himself before great battles were fought, when he would give victory to some and invite others to come to his abode. *HKRH*: 13.

²³³ Lassen 2006: 215-6.

²³⁴ *HRB*: 18-21 Mighty goddess of the forest, terror of woodland boars, you who can travel through celestial orbits and through the halls of death, unfold your earthly powers and say in which lands you wish us to dwell. Prophesy a sure home where I can worship you forever, and where I can dedicate to you temples and choirs of virgins.

effected by the British leader Casibellanus, where thousands of animals were sacrificed to ‘native gods’ the pagan gods, for granting the Britons their victory.²³⁵

Geoffrey did not justify or excuse the paganism of the early Britons in any explicit way but he also abandoned the outright demonisation of paganism observed in some insular and continental sources. Ritual, belief, and reality seem to correspond in the *Historia* and that, indeed, would be the opposite of delusion.

The idea of paganism as a delusion brought about by demons can be found in many of the sources that Snorri and Geoffrey used. The Anglo-Saxon abbot Ælfric of Eynsham certainly did not apply the idea of the virtuous pagan onto the pagans described in his homily ‘De Falsis Diis,’ even though Ælfric is demonising the origins of paganism to a lesser extent than the early medieval missionary Martin of Braga who wrote the original text on which Ælfric based his homily. But in ‘De Falsis Diis’ demons are still responsible for the origin of paganism.²³⁶ Although Ælfric cannot be shown to have influenced Geoffrey directly he was certainly known in both England and Iceland, and probably also by Snorri.²³⁷

In one of the versions of the *Historia Brittonum*, demons are blamed for ‘blinding the pagans’ into worshipping their ancestor Geat.²³⁸ The late tenth-century historian Æthelweard notes that the pagan Danes seem to be seduced by Óðinn, as shown above, although he admits the delusion affected his own ancestors as well.²³⁹

In Scandinavian historiography there were only a few historians who treated the issue of the origins of paganism. In one of them, the *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensum* by the Norwegian monk Theodoricus monachus, pagan practices are so harshly condemned and demonised that their origins by necessity must have involved demonic delusions. Paganism is overtly declared to be ‘idolatriam et dæmonum cultum’ (idolatry and devil-worship),²⁴⁰ and pagans practicing rituals are described as ‘arctiori vincula diabolicarum falsitarum irretiti fuerant’ (ensnared in the fetter of the devil’s falsehoods).²⁴¹

In the early fourteenth-century *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, there is an account of the life and deeds of the royal skald Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld. Written well after Snorri’s time, the saga itself did not influence Snorri’s narrative, but the group of skaldic poems by Hallfreðr included in the saga, are regarded by most scholars to be genuine tenth-century

²³⁵ *HRB*: 74-5.

²³⁶ Johnson 1995: 50.

²³⁷ Faulkes 1982: 107.

²³⁸ *HB*: Ch. 31.

²³⁹ Johnson 1995: 60.

²⁴⁰ *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensum*, Theodoricus monachus: 14.

²⁴¹ *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensum*, Theodoricus monachus: 15.

skaldic poems.²⁴² This group of poems describes Hallfreðr's conversion from pagan to Christian, and are therefore called the 'conversion poems'. The conversion poems provide an important insight into the way conversion affected Scandinavian culture and skaldic poetry.²⁴³ Many of the poems are metaphorical confrontations between Hallfreðr and the pagan gods, in which he rejects his former source of poetical inspiration, but also laments that the Christian religious lore is unsuitable as poetry: 'eru þau fræði ekki skáldlegri'.²⁴⁴ Even though he does not explicitly identify the pagan gods as demons, he strongly suggests that the gods deliberately misled people into believing in falsehoods,²⁴⁵ by using the expression 'the delusion of Njörðr'²⁴⁶ as a 'kenning' for paganism, and further suggesting that Óðinn deceived people into worship. 'Gratifier of men [Ólafur], we renounce the name of the priest of raven sacrifice [Óðinn] from heathendom, who fomented deceit in exchange for people's praise'²⁴⁷

Thus the idea of paganism as a deliberate delusion, demonic or not, was certainly circulating in Scandinavian history and poetry both before and after Snorri's day. That Snorri deliberately chooses to leave out Hallfreðr's conversion poems which explicitly define the origin of paganism as a delusion, and are composed by a well-known skald who is actually depicted and quoted several times in both *Snorra Edda* and in *Heimskringla*, suggests that Snorri did not intend to make the connection between paganism and delusions obvious.

Snorri was not the only historian to avoid this connection, though. Earlier and contemporary works of history in Norway and Iceland, such as the *Historia Norwegie*, *Ágrip*, and *Fagrskinna* all contain episodes involving pagan rituals and belief without explicitly claiming that they were all delusional or inspired by demons. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Historia Norwegie* even gives an account of the earliest euhemerised generations of the Ynglingars, but does not include an Isidorian explanation of the demonic origins of pagan worship. Unlike Snorri, *Historia Norwegie* does explicitly demonise certain cases of pagan ritual, and Snorri's lack of explicit demonisation in either *Snorra Edda* or *Heimskringla* is quite exceptional. Snorri's works reflect a development towards greater sympathy and recognition of pagan mythology as an important basis for Scandinavian cultural life,²⁴⁸ mentioned as 'a mythological renaissance' in the previous chapter.²⁴⁹ In contrast to these sympathies, there is a more dogmatic, and damning tradition expressed through the poems of

²⁴² Abram 2011: 175.

²⁴³ Abram 2011: 181.

²⁴⁴ Clunies Ross 2000: 127, 'Your [Christian] learning is no more poetic' translated by Dr Bjørn Bandlien.

²⁴⁵ Abram 2011: 178.

²⁴⁶ Abram 2011: 178.

²⁴⁷ Abram 2011: 177.

²⁴⁸ Dronke and Dronke 1977: 153.

²⁴⁹ Abram 2011: 195.

Hallfreðr and Theodoricus monachus. No less could be expected from the Benedictine monk Theodoricus or the newly converted Hallfreðr. Both were rejected by Snorri.

Geoffrey's and Snorri's approaches to pre-Conversion pagan worship resonate with the virtuous pagan topos. Neither the Scandinavians nor the Britons appear to have been deluded by demonic entities towards idolatry or devil-worship. The people of Swithiod were doing the best they could, performing rituals and worshipping their ancestors because this seemed to produce desirable results. Similarly, Brutus and his Trojans follow the advice of a Goddess statue that seemed to be communicating to them, and whose prophecies were eventually shown to be true.

The question of why Snorri and Geoffrey justified the worship of pagan gods remains, but as mentioned above, Weber has suggested that medieval historiographers adopted the 'unenlightened' point of view of their heroes,²⁵⁰ to whom pagan worship would seem to make sense. But Weber also recognises that there is a greater purpose of the virtuous pagan, and that kings and queens of the pagan past could play an important role in the Christian present.²⁵¹

4.2.2 Good Kings and Queens

One common use of historical writing in Middle Ages was the emphasis on the personal narratives of individuals who by their virtues and exemplary lifestyle provided ideals for decision-makers to imitate in the present.²⁵² Historians could also influence the powerful by constructing political circumstances of the past which alluded to the present. Such personal interpretations of current situations constructed or projected onto pagan history, or pagan mythology presented as history, would protect the historian against potential criticism (except maybe from other historians) by being firmly placed in the past and therefore being defined as something 'other' than the present political situation.²⁵³ Politics disguised as history could be quite specific in paralleling qualities, characteristics, or actions of historical individuals in the narratives, whose successes or failures demonstrated the potential or desirability of the specific qualities, characteristics and actions mentioned.

To use the pagan past in such a way was not theologically unproblematic for Christian medieval authors such as Geoffrey and Snorri, but the stereotype of the 'virtuous pagan' made the appropriation of the past for typological purposes simpler. In their pre-Christian narratives,

²⁵⁰ Weber 1987: 107

²⁵¹ Weber 1987: 110-12

²⁵² Radulescu 2008: 3

²⁵³ Ghosh 2011: 178

Snorri and Geoffrey both described pagan individuals, who by virtue and wisdom exemplify Christian ideals. This would correspond to the theological idea of the virtuous pagan as a model for the two authors' use of pre-Christian history. As discussed below, there are several examples of Christian anachronisms being projected onto individuals who historically would have no knowledge of such ideas.

In Geoffrey's *Historia*, virtue is sometimes closely connected with expressions of religious piety. Gorbonianus is one of Geoffrey's good kings, who is described as fair, diligent and a promoter of justice. Moreover he is described as pious to the gods and a builder and rebuilder of pagan temples: 'Mos eius continuus erat debitum honorem diis primum impendere et rectam plebi iusticiam. Per cunctas regni Britanniae ciuitates templa deorum renouabat et plura noua aedificabat.'²⁵⁴ The brief passage describing King Gorobonianus does not contain any explicit expressions of Christian faith and is in keeping with Geoffrey's lack of pagan condemnation. However, these qualities are all hallmarks of a good Christian king, and Geoffrey clearly makes Gorobonianus into a 'virtuous pagan' by transposing traditional Christian virtues onto what he presents as a pagan past.

Fiona Tolhurst and J.S.P. Tatlock have analysed Geoffrey's description of female rulership and shown that there are no fewer than four ruling queens in the *Historia*: Guendolena, Cordeilla, Marcia, and Helena, the former three ruling prior to the conversion event. Tolhurst and Tatlock suggest that Geoffrey deliberately described such virtuous ruling queens of Britain to establish a precedent for the potential reign of Empress Matilda, thus demonstrating to the aristocratic audience of civil war or pre-civil war England that a queen could rule successfully, and indeed had already done so.²⁵⁵

Guendolena is described as a military leader, who rebels against her husband's infidelity. Upon her victory, Guendolena quickly disposes of her husband, her rival and their daughter. Then she ruled for fifteen years before abdicating in favour of her son who had reached maturity.²⁵⁶ Cordeilla is the only one of Geoffrey's female pagan monarchs who rules in her own name, and not during a son's minority. She assumes power after the death of her father, King Leir, whose reign she restores after helping him defeat her evil sisters. Cordeilla rules for five years until the political unity is ruined by her power-hungry nephews.²⁵⁷ Marcia is described as 'nobilis' and 'omnibus artibus erudita', ruling the island with 'consilio et sensu'

²⁵⁴ *HRB*: 62-3, 'He never failed to show above all the honour due to the gods and then justice and equity to his people. In every city of Britain he repaired the gods' temples and built many new ones.'

²⁵⁵ Tatlock 1938: 702.

²⁵⁶ *HRB*: 32-35.

²⁵⁷ *HRB*: 36-45.

until her son reaches maturity.²⁵⁸ Marcia is also portrayed as a prudent law-giver, and Geoffrey claims that the laws given by Marcia were the same Mercian laws that Alfred the Great incorporated in his legal collection.

Tolhurst is indeed correct when she claims that these queens represent strong models of female leadership to the Anglo-Norman dynasty of England. However, Tollhurst also claims that they all are uncorrupted by pagan influence, which is not completely true. Cordeilla buries King Leir in a temple that he had constructed in honour of the god Janus.

‘Cordeilla ergo filia, regni gubernaculum adepta, sepeliuit patrem in quodam subterraneo quod sub Sora fluuio infra Legecestriarn fieri praeceperat. Brat autem subterraneum illud conditum in honore bifrontis Iani. Ibi omnes operarii urbis, adueniente sollempnitate dei, opera quae per annum acturi erant incipiebant.’²⁵⁹

Cordeilla therefore participates in pagan rituals, and Geoffrey did not try to hide the fact that she and her father were pagans. This, however, does not seem to influence the portrayal of Cordeilla as a good queen, or indeed a virtuous pagan. The queens are unambiguously praised for their prudence and ability, and, in Guendolena’s case, even military prowess. There are also some remarkable similarities between the pagan queens and the situation in the English Kingdom of the 1130s. Guendolena and Marcia, are like ‘Empress’ Matilda, mothers who were too young to assume power. Like Matilda, Guendolena commands armies, and, like Cordeilla and Guendolena, Matilda is challenged by male relatives who refuse to accept a female monarch.²⁶⁰

Familial strife, and the suffering brought about by political division were among the recurring themes in Geoffrey’s *Historia*. There is a constant tension between civil war and long lasting peace. Hanning interprets this as peace propaganda because the long lasting peace is often accompanied by military victories against neighbouring countries.²⁶¹ An example of this is two brothers Belinus and Brennius, who succeeded the long and exceptionally peaceful reign of their father Dunuallo. The brothers engaged in a prolonged struggle over the succession. But when they reconcile and join forces they manage to conquer both France and

²⁵⁸ *HRB*: 60-61, ‘noble’, ‘skilled in the arts’ ‘with intelligence and ability’

²⁵⁹ *HRB*: 44-5, ‘Leir’s daughter Cordeilla therefore took over the kingdom and buried her father in an underground chamber which he had commanded be built under the river Soar in Leicester. The chamber had been constructed in honour of Janus, the god with two faces. During Janus’ festival, all the builders of the city used to inaugurate in the chamber all the projects on which they were going to work in the coming year.’

²⁶⁰ Tolhurst 1998: 78.

²⁶¹ Hanning, Robert W. *The vision of history in early Britain: from Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth*. New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1966: 145.

Rome. In the words of Hanning: ‘The episode as Geoffrey presents it is exemplary: the end of fraternal strife restores civil harmony and paves the way for the conquest of foreign lands.’²⁶²

Geoffrey brings about the reconciliation between the two brothers through a passionate appeal from their mother, Tonwenna, to Brennius, the younger of the two brothers. ‘Memento, fili, memento uberum istorum quae suxisti matrisque tuae ueteri, quo te opifex rerum in hominem ex non homine creauit, unde te in mundum produxit angustiis mea uiscera cruciantibus.’²⁶³ The expression ‘opifex rerum’, literally ‘the creator of things’, bears strong Christian connotations, and would indicate that the concept of the virtuous pagan was being applied.

In *Heimskringla*, Snorri’s portrayal of the various pagan rulers is generally unpolemical and non-condemning and is typically sympathetic to the rulers that give their names to the sagas. One exception is the sons of Eiríkr, who are described as ruthless and vile tyrants.²⁶⁴ King Haraldr hárfagri, however, stands out in prominence and influence among Snorri’s pagan kings. He is portrayed as the unifier of Norway, and by this achievement he transfers the legitimation of power given to him by the Ynglinga-dynasty, as discussed above. Royal power and succession to the throne are firmly based on descent from Haraldr hárfagri, in what has been called the Hárfagri-dynasty by modern historians. One instance of such legitimation is when Óláfr Haraldsson promotes his candidacy as king of Norway.

En yfir þeim eignum sitja útlendir menn, er átti minn faðir ok hans faðir og hverr eptir annan várara frænda, ok em ek óðalborinn til. Ok láta þeir sér eigi þat einhlítt heldr hafa þeir undir sik tekit eigur allra várara frænda er at langfeðgatali erum komnir frá Haraldi inum hárfagra.²⁶⁵

A descendant from Haraldr hárfagri thus has a right to inherit the royal title which Haraldr won through conquest, that is, the perceived unification. The territory of Norway is Óláfr’s ‘óðal’, a legal concept which in today’s Norway still describes an inherited piece of land. Harald hárfagri as legitimation to royal power can be found throughout *Heimskringla*,

²⁶² Hanning 1966: 145.

²⁶³ *HRB*: 54-5 ‘Do not forget, my son, do not forget these breasts which gave you suck nor your mother’s womb, in which the Creator gave you life and brought you forth into the world while your birth-pangs wracked my body.’

²⁶⁴ Weber 1987: 112.

²⁶⁵ *HKR I*: 43-44, ‘(...) foreigners dispose of the possessions which my father, and his father, and one after the other of our kinsmen owned, and to which I am entitled. Nor are they satisfied with that, but have appropriated what has belonged to our kinsmen who in direct line are descended from Haraldr hárfagri, *HKRH*: 269.

especially in the cases of the missionary kings Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson.²⁶⁶ The use of such a pagan king to legitimise the reigns of the two Óláfrs could be problematic, since they were both venerated by the church in Norway, the latter was even officially canonised and venerated far outside Norway.

There are several instances where Snorri attributes explicitly anachronistic Christian virtues to King Haraldr. These anachronisms are not mistakenly inserted by Snorri, as suggested by some scholars.²⁶⁷ Snorri clearly indicates which kings are pagan, and which are Christian. The anachronisms are rather a conscious projection of a Christian doctrine and a Christian world-view upon a pagan king, making him a virtuous pagan. Harald hárfagri's famous vow of unification,²⁶⁸ which gave him his nick name, is referring to an all-powerful creator God: 'Þess strengi ek heit, ok því skýt ek til guðs, þess er mik skóp ok ǫllu ræðr, at aldri skal skera hár mitt né kember, fyrr en ek hefi eignazk allan Nóreg með skottum ok skyldum ok forráði, en deyja at ǫðrum kosti.'²⁶⁹

Another Christian trait attributed to Haraldr and other pagans is the ritual of name giving. The ritual involves sprinkling of water on an infant and the one who leads the ritual is often a person of importance. 'Sá var siðr um gǫfugra manna börn at vanda menn mjök til at ausa vatni eða gefa nafn.'²⁷⁰ There are eight instances of such pagan name giving rituals in *Heimskringla*. The first one of these is the sprinkling of water on Haraldr hárfagri 'Ragnhildr dróttning ól son, ok var sá sveinn vatni ausinn ok kallaðr Haraldr.'²⁷¹ Comparison to the Christian ritual of baptism seems obvious, and it would therefore correspond to the idea of the virtuous pagan. However, Gro Steinsland shows that the water sprinkling has pagan roots and is described in pagan poetry such as *Hávamál* and *Rígstula*. Indeed, even the words used are different. Pagan name-giving is called *ausa barn vatni*, which means 'to sprinkle water', whereas Christian baptism is called *skrín* which is related to the verb *skíra* which means 'to baptise' or 'to cleanse'.²⁷²

Even though water sprinkling was a pagan tradition, what is important is how Snorri interpreted and used this tradition. Geoffrey used the pagan concept of 'opifex rerum', to

²⁶⁶ HKRH: 188, 193, 200, 269, 270.

²⁶⁷ HKRH: 61n.

²⁶⁸ Weber 1987: 110.

²⁶⁹ HKR I: 97 'I make this vow, and call God to witness, him who created me and governs all, that I shall neither cut nor comb my hair before I have conquered all of Norway, with all its taxes and revenues, and govern it altogether, or else die' HKRH: 61-2.

²⁷⁰ HKR I: 143 'It was the custom to choose most carefully the persons who were to sprinkle with water and to give a name to the children of noble birth' HKRH: 91.

²⁷¹ HKR I: 91 'Queen Ragnhild bore a son. He was sprinkled with water and named Harald.' HKRH: 57.

²⁷² Steinsland 2005: 329.

convey an idea that was shared between pagans and Christians and Snorri seems to have been emphasising the ritual of name-giving and sprinkling water on infants because it agreed with the Christian tradition of infant baptism. Water sprinkling is not portrayed as having the same religious stigma as other pagan rituals. According to Snorri, the first Christian King of Norway, Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, who was forced by the pagan chiefs in Norway to partake in the pagan winter sacrifices, nonetheless voluntarily sprinkles water on the son of Earl Sigurðr of Hlaðir. ‘Eptir um daginn jós Hákon konungr svein þann vatni ok gaf nafn sitt (...)’²⁷³ This ritual did not make Earl Sigurðr, or his son Hákon Christians, indeed they are both explicitly mentioned as performing great, pagan sacrifices later on in *Heimskringla*, but the name giving ceremony is emphasised by Snorri as something resembling Christianity and therefore safe.

The eight children being sprinkled with water in *Heimskringla* seem to have been carefully chosen by Snorri, since they were all either members of the Ynglingar-dynasty, or the Háleygjar-dynasty. Five were kings of Norway, two were Earls of Hlaðir, and one was a local king of Hrankriki.²⁷⁴ Three of the Kings, Hákon Adalsteinsfostre, Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson later received Christian baptism.

4.3 The Villainous Pagan

4.3.1 Impact of Conversion

The conversion changes everything. The virtuous pagan remains virtuous only as long as there is the reasonable excuse of ignorance. Those who had heard the truth and rejected it could not possibly be virtuous in the eyes of the Christian historians.²⁷⁵ They were the villainous pagans.

Before the conversion, Geoffrey is consistently describing pagan rituals and worship neutrally. There is one exception, though, which describes the birth of Christ: ‘In diebus illis natus est dominus noster Iesus Christus, cuius precioso sanguine redemptum est humanum genus, quod anteacto tempore daemonum catena obligabatur.’²⁷⁶ The description of pagans before the birth of Christ as being in the ‘chains of demons’, however, is not consistent with Geoffrey’s earlier application of the virtuous pagan model to the good queens and kings of England, as described in the previous section. When missionaries start preaching Christianity

²⁷³ *HKR I*: 165; ‘On the day after, King Hákon sprinkled that boy with water, giving him his own name’ *HKRH*: 104.

²⁷⁴ The eight cases of infant name-giving is described in *HKRH*: 57, 77, 91, 94, 104, 137, 144 and 187.

²⁷⁵ Vitto 1989: 1.

²⁷⁶ *HRB*: 80-81 ‘In his reign was born Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose precious blood redeemed the human race, bound beforehand in the chains of idolatry.’ Even though *daemonum* has been translated as idolatry, the literal meaning is demons.

in Britain, though, the people are swiftly converted after the baptism of the king: ‘Nec mora, concurrentes undique nationum populi exemplum regis insecuntur eodemque lauacro mundati caelesti regno restituuntur.’²⁷⁷ Paganism is further condemned, but only as idolatry, and not as harshly as in the previous example.

Fuerant tunc in Britannia .xx. et .viii. flamines nec non et tres archiflamines, quorum potestati ceteri indices morum atque phanatici submittebantur. Hos etiam ex praecepto apostolici idolatriae eripuerunt et ubi erant flamines episcopos, ubi archiflarnines archiepiscopos posuerunt.²⁷⁸

Geoffrey confirms his use of the model of the virtuous pagan by promoting the idea that the ecclesiastical organisation of the pagans was similar to that of the the Christian, an idea he got from Bede.²⁷⁹

While Óðinn, the Æsir and their supernatural powers were purposely portrayed as ambiguous by Snorri, the continued worship of pagan gods is thoroughly condemned after the conversion of the Ynglingar-dynasty to Christianity. Sacrifice and ritual occurs in *Ynglinga saga*, and when a Christian king encounters pagans in missionary efforts, where as idols are exclusively mentioned in the conversion narratives. Snorri thus seems to be in agreement with the idea that paganism can be excused, unless ‘the truth’, understood as Christianity, was present and made paganism and idol worship into a rejection of the truth.

The conversion of Scandinavia is known to have been long and problematic,²⁸⁰ and Snorri’s narrative reflects these difficulties. Snorri’s literary style, however, is less polemical and more open to interpretation than Geoffrey’s in the *Historia*. Snorri is careful never to connect the devil or demons with pre-conversion Scandinavian paganism in *Heimskringla*, even though this was very common in his sources. What changes in Snorri, are the descriptive aspects of paganism. Virtuous pagan kings such as Halfdan svarti and Haraldr hárfagri remained pagans, in spite of their natural Christian understanding, but Halfdan and Haraldr

²⁷⁷ HRB: 88 ‘The people of his country immediately flocked from all quarters to follow their king's example, and were cleansed from the same font and restored to the kingdom of heaven.’

²⁷⁸ HRB: 88 At that time there were in Britain twenty-eight priests and three high priests, who were responsible for the remaining spiritual advisors and temple-servants. Following the command of the pope, they converted them from idolatry and set up bishops in place of priests, and archbishops in place of high priests.’

²⁷⁹ Wright, Neil ‘Geoffrey of Monmouth and Bede’, *Arthurian Literature* 6, 1986: 27-59

²⁸⁰ Bagge, Sverre and Nordeiede, Sæbjørg W., ‘The kingdom of Norway’ in Nora Berend, ed. *Christianization and the rise of Christian monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200*. 2007 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 121-166

are never described as sacrificing or worshipping idols.²⁸¹ Two of the Earls of Hlaðir are mentioned as sacrificing to idols or the pagan gods, however, namely Earl Sigurðr Hákonarson and Earl Hákon Sigurðrson.²⁸²

4.3.2 Enemies and apostates

Sverre Bagge has argued that these conversion narratives are mainly expressions of political power since they resemble how the powerful changed allegiances.²⁸³ This approach can also be observed in Geoffrey's historia, where the pagan Saxons mainly serve the purpose of being the political and military enemies of British protagonists and heroes such as Arthur.

The relationship between demonisation as a religious strategy to explain pagans and paganism and political allegiance is clearly visible in Snorri's description of encounters between Christian kings and pagan subjects. In such descriptions, Snorri abandoned the rationalisation of pagan worship and the ambiguous demonisation which could be observed in *Snorra Edda* and the early sagas of *Heimskringla*. There were no excuses for paganism when the true faith was being preached. In one particular episode, one of King Óláfr Haraldson's men destroys idols of pagan gods on a farm in Gudbrandsdalen. 'En í því bili laust Kolbeinn svá goð þeira svá at þat brast allt í sundr og hljópu þar út mýss svá stórar sem kettir væri ok eðlur ok ormar.'²⁸⁴ Margaret Clunies Ross and Annette Lassen argue that the symbolism of these animals must be interpreted as explicit demonisation of the idols, since idols were inhabited by demons.²⁸⁵ Such an expulsion of evil from the once venerated idols appears to break the magic over the farmers worshipping them.

Only now, is Snorri really in agreement with the traditional, Isidorian explanation of the pagan gods, which states that demons inhabited the symbols of worship and deluded their worshippers into the religious error.

However, it was not only Christian kings who were exposed to demonic magic. King Haraldr hárfagri marries Snæfríðr, a woman of the *finnar* people mentioned in the previous chapter. Her death brings about mysterious events. 'Síðan dó Snæfríðr, en litr hennar skipaðisk á engan veg; var hon jafnrjóð sem þá er hon var kvik. Konungr sat æ yfir henni ok

²⁸¹ Weber 1987: 111.

²⁸² *HKRH*: 107, 167.

²⁸³ Bagge 1991: 105-106.

²⁸⁴ '*HKR I*: 189 And at that moment Kolbein struck at their god so he fell to pieces, and out jumped mice as big as cats, and adders, and snakes.' *HKRH*: 374.

²⁸⁵ Clunies Ross 2010: 78 ; Lassen 2011: 253.

hugði, at hon myndi lifna'²⁸⁶ Haraldr remained by Snæfriðr's side for three years, mourning over her, and when his advisors manages to persuade him to change her bedclothes, the following happens:

‘Ok þegar er hon var hrærð or rekkjunni, þá slær ýldu ok óþefani ok hvers kyns illum fnyk af líkamanum. Var þá hvatat at báli ok var hon brend. Blánaði áðr allr líkaminn, ok ullu ór ormar ok eðlur, froskar ok pøddur ok alls kyns illyrmi. Seig hon svá í øsku, en konungrinn, steig til vizku ok hugði af heimsku, (...)’²⁸⁷

The two instances of more explicit demonisation in Snorri's *Heimskringla*, are directed towards the idols of the pagan farmers, and the magic of the Finnar, which demonstrates that the political considerations are at least as important as question of religion. Snorri demonises Snæfriðr and the pagan idols, not only because they represent pagan culture against the Christians, because they oppose the dynastic heroes Haraldr hárfagri and Óláfr Haraldson.

An extraordinary parallel in Snorri's and Geoffrey's narratives is the marital tragedies of the two couples Haraldr hárfagri and Snæfriðr, and Vortigern and Renwein, both relationships brought about by demonic magic. Snæfriðr is the daughter of Svási, who was called king of the finnar, and, unannounced, they visit Haraldr during the Yule celebration. Haraldr is invited into the tent of Snæfriðr where the cup of mead she serves him, incites an uncontrollable passion. ‘Þar stóð upp Snæfriðr, dóttir Svása, kvinna fríðust, ok byrлаði konungi ker fullt mjaðar, en han tók allt saman ok hønd hennar, ok þegar var sem eldshiti kvæmi í hørund hans ok vilði þegar hafa hana á þeiri nótt.’²⁸⁸

King Vortigern is one of Geoffrey's villains, although he does not start out that way. It is he who, according to Geoffrey, allies with the pagan Saxons and invites them to settle in Britain. By this time in Geoffrey's narrative, the Britons had been Christians for centuries, but the Saxons were pagans. During a royal banquet, Vortigern meets Renwein, the daughter of the Saxon chief Hengest, whereupon he drinks from a cup she serves him:

²⁸⁶ *HKR I*: 126-27 ‘Therafter Snæfriðr died, but her color changed in no-wise, so she was as ruddy as when she was alive. The king kept sitting by her side, imagining that she would come to life again.’ *HKRH*: 80

²⁸⁷ *HKR I*: 126-27 ‘And no sooner did they raise her body from the bed than stench and foul smell and all kinds of odors of corruption rose from the corpse. They hastened to make a funeral pile and to burn her. But before that her antire body became livid, and all kinds of worms and adders, frogs and toads and vipers crawled out of it. So her body was reduced to ashes, and the king was brought back to his senses and reason, and swore off this folly.’ *HKRH*: 80-81.

²⁸⁸ *HKR I*: 126, ‘When he [Haraldr] got there, Snæfrith, Svási's daughter, and a most beautiful woman arose to meet him. She poured a cup of mead for the king and ha took both the cup and her hand; and immediately it was as if a hot fire coursed through his body, and he desired to lie with her that same night.’ *HKRH*: 80

‘Vt ergo regiis epulis refectus fuit, egressa est puella de thalamo, aureum ciphum plenum uino ferens. Accedens deinde propius regi, flexis genibus dixit: ‘Lauerd king, wasseil’ (...) Respondens deinde Vortegirnus ‘drincheil’, iussit puellam potare cepitque ciphum de manu ipsius et osculatus est eam et potauit. (...) Vortegirnus autem, diuerso genere potus inebriatus, intrante Sathanain corde suo, amauit puellam et postulauit eam a patre suo. Intrauerat, inquam, Sathanas in corde suo quia cum Christianus esset cum pagana coire desiderabat.’²⁸⁹

Similarly to Snorri, then, Geoffrey is directly connecting a pagan ‘other group’ with Satan magic inciting passionate sexual desire. Both relationships lead the kings to neglect their kingdoms but Snorri conveniently lets Snæfrið die, and the spell is broken before Haraldr’s legacy suffers.

Finke, Shichtmann, and Warren argue that Ronwein reflects Anglo-Norman anxieties about exogamy,²⁹⁰ in what Finke and Shichtmann call ‘the biopolitics of imperialism’.²⁹¹ As a member of an ‘other group’, Ronwein is a threat to the Britons both ethnically and religiously. Warren argues, however, that initially, the religious threat is far greater than the ethnic threat a concern which is also expressed in Merlin’s prophecies, which say: ‘Delebitur iterum religio’.²⁹² The political aspect, however, should not be ignored. Unable to rule Britain uncorrupted by his wife’s evil influence, Vortigern is deposed by the people and his son Vortimer is chosen king. However, Ronwein plots and murders Vortimer, thus reinstating Vortigern and she influences him to not resist the further Saxon settlement. This eventually brings about the downfall of the entire British people.

The poisoning of the British king Vortigern by the magical wine has a ritualistic air to it, and the symbolism of the dangerous drink given to the Bretons by the Saxons continues in a series of regicides.²⁹³ Renwein poisons Vortimer, who ruled Britain as the people’s chosen king, after the deposition of his father Vortigern.²⁹⁴ Eopa kills King Aurelius Ambrosius by

²⁸⁹ *HRB*: 128-31, ‘After he had been refreshed by a royal banquet, the girl came out of her chamber, carrying a golden goblet full of wine. Going up to the king, she curtsied and said: ‘Lauerd king, wasseil’. At the sight of the girl’s face he was amazed by her beauty and inflamed with desire. (...)Then Vortigern, giving the reply ‘drincheil’, told the girl to drink, took the goblet from her hand with a kiss and drank. Vortigern became drunk on various kinds of liquor and, as Satan entered into his heart, asked her father for the girl he loved. Satan, I repeat, had entered into his heart, for despite being a Christian he wanted to sleep with a pagan woman.’

²⁹⁰ Warren 2000: 47-48.

²⁹¹ Finke & Shichtmann 2004: 59.

²⁹² *HRB*: 144-5 ‘Religion will be destroyed’

²⁹³ Pattern demonstrated by Dr Neil Wright during a supervision session.

²⁹⁴ *HRB*: 132-33.

administering poison to him under the guise of medicine,²⁹⁵ and Saxon spies disguised as beggars poisons the Uther Pendragon's well, killing him.²⁹⁶

Villainous sorcery, poisoning and the 'other group' seem to be connected in *Heimskringla* as well. Other than Snæfiðr, the notorious villain Gunnhildr was reputed to have poisoned Halfðan Svarti, a son of Haraldr hárfagri, and contender for the Norwegian throne.²⁹⁷ 'Tveim vetrum síðar varð Hálfðan svarti bráðdauðr inn í Þrándheimi at veizlu nokkurri, ok var þat mál manna, at Gunnhildr konungamóðir hefði keypt at fjölkunnigri konu at gera honum banadrykk.'²⁹⁸ According to Snorri, Gunnhildr herself had been taught magic by the Finnar, and she is a recurring villain and opponent to Christian heroes such as Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, and Óláfr Tryggvason in *Heimskringla*.

The Finnar was indeed an 'other group' which was closely connected to pagan mythology, as discussed above. One major concern was that the Finnar were still pagan in Snorri's day. Indeed, the local laws of Eastern Norway, the Borgarthing law and Eidsivathing law prohibit contact between Christians and Finnar and prohibit Christians from requesting their magical aid in different matters.²⁹⁹

Steinsland and others have argued convincingly on the legitimising power of the marriage between Haraldr and Snæfriðr, exactly because she as a 'finnkona' (finnish wife) echos the *hieros gamos* myth, discussed above. Haraldr's and Snæfriðr's eventually became ancestors of the ruling kings of Norway. One major difference then is that the exogamy of Vortigern to a demonic wife produces the eventual downfall of his entire kingdom, whereas the Ynglingar-dynasty and the ambiguous expression of Snæfriðr as both a mythological representation of something genuinely pagan, and simultaneously an expression of something demonic in a Christian dichotomous discourse, legitimises and confirms the special status of the royal dynasty.

Another difference between Snorri and Geoffrey is how the downfall of the dynasty is brought about. Similar to Vortigern, King Óláfr Tryggvason proposes marriage to a pagan woman, the Swedish Queen Sigríð storrada, and a prerequisite is that she will undergo baptism, and when she refuses Óláfr insults her and breaks off the engagement. Sigríð then allies with the Danish king, and Óláfr is killed fighting the joint Swedish and Danish forces.

²⁹⁵ HRB: 177-79.

²⁹⁶ HRB: 192-93.

²⁹⁷ Samplonius, Kees, 2001 'Sibylla borealis: Notes on the structure of Völuspá'. In *Germanic Texts and Latin Models: Medieval Reconstructions*. K.E. Olsen, A. Harbus and T. Hofstra, eds. Leuven: Peeters, 2001 : 187-228.
²⁹⁸ HKR I: 146-47 'Two years later Hálfðan the Black died suddenly at a banquet in the Trondheim District, and people said that Gunnhild Kingsmother had suborned a witch to prepare a poisoned drink for him.' HKRH: 94 .

²⁹⁹ Mundal 2000: 347.

Vortigern is a feeble king who, influenced by his pagan wife, allows the pagan Saxons to settle in Britain.

Two apostates who receive Christian baptism, but then relapse into paganism, are described in Snorri's *Heimskringla* in a way which separates Snorri from contemporary authors. As mentioned above, King Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri is raised a Christian in the Anglo-Saxon court of King Athelstan, but are, according to Snorri, forced to partake in pagan rituals.³⁰⁰ The tenth-century Earl Hákon of Hlaðir is an ally of the Danish king and receives baptism from the German Emperor Otto. Upon leaving Denmark, Hákon almost immediately relapses into paganism. 'En er hann kom austr fyrir Gautasker, þá lagði hann at landi. Gerði hann þá blót mikit. Þá kómu þar fljúgandi hrafnar tveir ok gullu hátt. Þá þykkist jarl vita, at Óðinn hefir þegit blótit (...)'³⁰¹ Both Hákons had committed actions that made them apostates, although only one did so voluntarily. Snorri, though, is typically not condemning either of them, quite unlike some contemporary authors.

According to *Fagrskinna*, Gunnhildr and her sons, who eventually killed King Hákon, were the vengeance of an angry God on Hákon for having sacrificed.³⁰² *Historia Norwegie* communicates a similar position:

Hacon a maritimis Norwegie gentibus rex assumitur. Hic a christianissimo rege in Anglia officiosissime educatus in tantum errorem incurrit, ut miserrima commutacione eterno transitorium preponeret regnum ac detinende dignitatis cura — proh dolor — appostata factus, ydolorum seruituti subactus, diis et non Deo deseruiret.³⁰³

Snorri, however, deliberately removes these references to King Hákon, and excuses him, even though Hákon has partaken in pagan rituals. Upon his assumption of power in Norway, Earl Hákon is described by Theodoricus Monachus: 'Confirmatus igitur Hocon in regno coepit

³⁰⁰ *HKRH*: 110.

³⁰¹ *HKR I*: 260 'And when he arrived at the Gauta Skerries in the east, he anchored and made a great sacrifice. Then two ravens came flying, coraking loudly. Then the earl believed that Óthin had accepted the sacrifice (...)' *HKRH*: 167.

³⁰² *Fagrskinna, a Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, Alison Finlay, ed. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2004: 61.

³⁰³ *HN*: 82-3 'Håkon was accepted as their ruler by the coastal dwellers of Norway. He had been brought up in the most dutiful manner by that peerless Christian, the sovereign of England, but fell into such serious delusion that he underwent a wretched change and valued his temporal monarchy before the eternal kingdom; and in his concern to hold on to royal grandeur, sad to say, he turned apostate and submitted himself to the bondage of idolatry, serving gods instead of God.'

dæmonum esse præcipuus servus et frequentibus sacrificiis illos in auxilium assciscere.’³⁰⁴

These descriptions clearly communicate the archetype of the villainous pagan, deluded by demons to worship idols and do wicked deeds. Snorri does not deny Earl Hákon’s paganism, and he is not explicitly vilified but as mentioned, Earl Hákon is one of the few protagonists in *Heimskringla*, who performs pagan sacrifices.

³⁰⁴ ‘Once secure in his control of the kingdom, Hákon soon became pre-eminent as a slave of demons and constantly made sacrifices to call upon them for help.’ *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensum*, Theodoricus monachus: 9

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The research question of this dissertation concentrated on two related elements of Snorri and Geoffrey's historical writing, namely their descriptions of paganism and their uses of the pre-Christian past. The dissertation intended to investigate the overall purpose of these two elements, as well as their ability to create an acceptable historical narrative of the past. There is one simple answer to the research question which is that Snorri and Geoffrey had political purposes with their pre-Christian historical narratives, which normally corresponded to or supported the purpose of the entire work and in their descriptions of paganism, which relates to these political purposes, Snorri and Geoffrey both glorifies, rejects and modifies pagans and paganism.

Snorri's glorification consists of the construction of a celebrated pagan civilisation of Swithiod and Uppsala, based on a merging of Norse and Classical tradition and mythology. Their glory is genealogically transferred upon the Ynglingar and Háleygjar dynasties and repeated through prophetic visions thus serves as a legitimisation of their descendants in Snorri's contemporary era. Snorri was a powerful man and a politician who with the historical work of *Heimskringla* and the mytographic *Snorra Edda* attempts to invest cultural and symbolic capital into the two greatest power ventures in Norway, King Hákon IV and Duke Skúli.

Geoffrey's glorification is based on the prophecy of the pagan goddess Diana, pointing towards the strength, order and magnificence of the Britons and their expansionism under kings such as Belinus and Brennius. Indeed, as independent cultures, the pre-conversion civilisations portrayed in Snorri's and Geoffrey's histories were glorious, happy and strong. By their wisdom, honour, and great deeds, individuals from these civilisations were worthy of praise, in spite of their religious shortcomings, and the two authors' lack of explicit demonisation prior to the conversion served to make the image of the glorious pagan civilisations even stronger.

Brutus, Yngvifreyr, and Haraldr hárfagri seemed to be perfectly acceptable as means of legitimisation even for generations well into Christian times, in spite of their apparent exoticism. Snorri's proposes a pagan legitimising framework which includes a myth of origin in a foreign country thousands of years in the past, descent from non-human individuals like gods or mountain-giants interpreted through the Christian filter of historical euhemerisation, and the idea of the unification of Norway as a single event completed by a virtuous pagan King who nonetheless had a natural understanding of basic Christianity.

Geoffrey's construction of power and stability had a tremendous impact on the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, who was torn apart by instability and civil strife. Geoffrey offered what they desperately needed: a glorious past pointing towards an even more glorious future of conquest and territorial expansion, a genealogical connection to the original inhabitants of the island legitimising the presence of the uneasy conquerors, an historical precedence of female rulership, and narratives of war and peace which offered simple solutions to highly problematic contemporary problems.

Snorri's modification of paganism consists of historical euhemerisation of the pagan gods into ancestors for the aristocratic and royal houses, and an anachronistic Christianisation of certain pagan kings, so that their historical influence should not be undermined. The virtuous pagan, however, is also clearly present in Geoffrey's writings but he systematically omitted any reference to both Classical and Germanic euhemerisation for reasons one can only speculate on. The lack of a phenomena is difficult to study, but deserves more attention in galfredian scholarship. The systematic elision of certain phenomena attests to the impression of Geoffrey as an historian consistently making telling points to his audience.

It is only with the introduction of Christianity that Snorri and Geoffrey condemns pagans as deluded worshippers of demons. Coinciding with this shift of religion is a shift of perspective in the historians' narratives. The pagans are no longer the protagonists of the stories, but 'the other group,' indeed enemies. In the analysis of Geoffrey's use of the villainous pagan stereotype, it is evident that it is strongly connected to the Saxons. The traditional view of Geoffrey's purposes behind his *Historia* as either political propaganda for the Celts, or the Normans, should therefore be revised. By his vigorous vilification of the Saxons in the *Historia*, Geoffrey could make both the Celts and the Normans happy. The Celts for sake of vengeance, since they according to Geoffrey himself were deprived of the possession of the island of Britain, and the Normans for the sake of justification, because they replaced the barbarians.

Authors such as Baetke, Glowka, and Weber have suggested that demonisation of pagans or pagan gods are applied to pre-conversion narratives, but in Snorri's and Geoffrey's Histories, such claims are unfounded or exaggerated. One problem is the dependence on the argument from supernatural abilities as proof of demonic influence, when such abilities cannot be exclusively attributed to any one tradition. Sverre Bagge shows that some supernatural abilities indeed could even be understood as holy by Christians.³⁰⁵ In an episode

³⁰⁵ Bagge 1991: 216-17 ; HKRH: 169-171

from *Heimskringla*, Óláfr Tryggvason meets a ‘perfectly respectable’ Christian hermit, living on the Scilly Islands. The hermit demonstrates his abilities of foreseeing the future and the demonstration by the Christian magician persuades Óláfr into converting to Christianity. This example demonstrates the absurdity in arguing for demonisation from magical abilities, since certain powers could mean the complete opposite. Indeed, because of the variety of possible interpretations, arguments in favour of demonisation should concentrate less upon the magical abilities, unless there is clear correlations that connects demons to the particular abilities in question.

Annette Lassen’s argument about ‘implicit demonisation’ of Óðinn, is such a compelling one, but it is unlikely that many would have understood the subtle allusions Snorri made to ecclesiastical works, such as *Elucidarius*. Even so, the parallels seem so deliberate, that it is difficult to disregard it as a coincidence. It is more likely that Snorri attempted to address two audiences at once, which demonstrates the sophistication of Snorri’s Histories. A perceived ethnic and political continuity in Norway enabled Snorri to use the euhemerised gods as legitimisation for the Norwegian royal dynasty.

The use of categories such as rejection, modification and glorification have been useful to organise and understand the overall purposes of the different descriptions of and approaches to paganism. They should not, however, unquestioningly replace the refined categories outlined by the modern scholars referred to in chapter 1, since the new categories in this study are constantly used in combination and remains mutually unexclusive.

Geoffrey of Monmouth approaches to paganism is still understudied, and many questions relating to his reading of Classical literature and understanding of supernatural phenomena, remains unanswered. This dissertation, however, seeks to provide a basic understanding of the paganism in the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s and of Snorri Sturlusson, who both manages to remain enigmatic and endlessly fascinating.

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