Óláfr and the Queens

Gender, Queenship and Kingship Ideologies in the Separate saga of Saint Óláfr

Barbora Davídková

Master of Arts Thesis
Viking and Medieval Norse Studies

Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies
UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies
HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Supervisors:
Professor Karl Gunnar Johansson, Universitetet i Oslo
Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, Yale University/Háskoli Íslands

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Summary

This thesis explores the representations of royal women in the Separate saga of Saint Óláfr, namely Ásta Guðbrandsdóttir and Óláfr’s mother, Álfífa, the wife of king Knútr and mother of Sveinn, and the daughters of the Swedish king Óláfr, Ingigerðr and Ástríðr, involved in peace and wedding negotiations with the Norwegian ruler. The first part of the thesis focusses on their depictions in the oldest version of the saga, from the thirteenth century, and discusses their actions and roles from the point of view of gender norms, kingship, and continental queenship. The second part of the thesis analyses interpolations in later manuscripts of the Separate saga, from the fourteenth and fifteenth century, and discusses to which extent these variations can reveal either the evolution of gender and queenship norms, or changing attitudes and expectations of the narrator and his audience.

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Introduction

Konungasögur are a fascinating genre of medieval Scandinavian literature which portrays Norwegian kings from mythical ancestors to thirteenth century rulers. They reflect political and social ideas and norms present at their time of writing, projected on the background of an imagined past. They are both literary pieces and political works, as they present various Norwegian kings, all stemming from the almost legendary Haraldr hárfagri. Through these narratives about state foundation myths and histories, Norwegian monarchy is legitimated in a teleological manner. In this light, sagas dealing with kings who work as corner-stones for the establishment of the monarchy seem particularly likely of delivering an ideological subtext on kings, kingship and socio-political structures of power. Saint Óláfr, bearer of the title Rex perpetuus Norvegiae, is an especially promising candidate for telling a story about legitimate monarchical rule, as all the subsequent kings received their power from him. Sagas dealing with Óláfr thus offer the potential of reflecting ideas, expectations and fears about kings, kingship, international relations and local problems such as interactions between rulers and aristocrats. Yet, what would a king be without a queen?

In the description of kings, gender norms are a significant aspect of the model for ideal kingship intertwined with ideas about political leadership and the nature of monarchical power. Queens contribute to this construction, as they represent the king’s opposite in the binary gender-system, and other female characters with aristocratic status, such as kings’ mothers and daughters, play important roles in the events related in the saga; their interactions with the men around them can similarly contribute to a king’s portrayal. This thesis investigates representations of royal women connected to Saint Óláfr in several versions of the Separate saga of Saint Óláfr, namely the king’s mother Ásta, his wife Ástríðr and her sister Ingigerðr, and the politically active queen-mother Álfífa, whose connections to the narrative’s central themes are indirect yet significant. My aim is to discover which medieval Scandinavian ideas on gender roles and power these characters reflect in this saga centred on the eternal warrior-king.

The ways in which the narrators portray these royal women will be related to ideas and theories of contemporary continental queenship. Queens are intimately linked to kings and to their definitions, both on the continent and in Old Norse literature. Both continental queenship and Old Norse kingship are concepts rooted in European medieval conceptions of
masculinity, femininity and corresponding gender roles. Thus reading *Separate saga*’s queens through their lense allows also to question to which extent Old Norse queens reflect ideas of European society on kingship, female power and monarchy’s legitimacy. This in turns contributes to expand our knowledge on medieval queenship as well as *konungasögur* queens and their role in the institution of kingship.

Medieval manuscript culture has the fascinating aspect that each copy of a text is unique, and different from its source manuscript, as the text was adopted and adapted by different scribes and for new audiences. Topics as closely connected to socio-political structures as stories of the patron saint of Norway did not go through time untouched, and redactors of this saga often radically edited their material to fit their own ends, adding entirely new conversations or episodes to the narrative and giving characters different traits which contribute to their positive or negative image. This thesis, by focussing on queen-episodes in *the Separate saga*, will trace changes in ideas on gender, gender roles, queenship and kingship as they evolve in Icelandic manuscripts from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.

The present research draws on different scholarly approaches. The first body of secondary literature to consider is studies on women in medieval Scandinavian literature. Yet, Scandinavia was not an isolated region, and there was much interaction with the British Isles especially throughout the early and high medieval period; thus continental queenship will also be used to highlight aspects of the saga-queens which seem to carry southern influence.

Women and their representations in medieval Scandinavian literature have received increasing scholarly interest in the past thirty years. Different approaches and topics have been explored as the body of studies focussing on and including women has grown. A main difference found in the approaches to the sagas is between a more history-oriented approach, using the sources as reflection of actual women’s lives and roles, and a literary approach, reading the texts in search for social attitudes towards women and gender. Early research focussed mostly on *Íslendingasögur* and epic literature, with a strong emphasis on what was thought to be the archetypal heroine, the strong-willed woman from the family saga corpus. In this context, the ‘female inciter’ enjoyed a long-lasting success in the subsequent classifications of female characters (e.g. Jochens 1996a), yet this figure has recently been challenged in scholarship (Gos 2009; Anderson and Swenson 2002). With the influence of external disciplines, gender theory, and the investigation of other saga genres such as *fornaldarsögur*, *riddarasögur* and *konungasögur*, new female roles have been explored and less generalising categorisations have been developed (e.g. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir
Such work has uncovered how different saga-genres can have different depictions and literary purposes for the female characters they portray, depending on the ideological currents underlying the writing. The questions of female power, and its employment through subtler ways than incitement, have also been explored, with the use of careful definitions of power. Linked to the topic of female characters, questions of separate gender roles and thus of femininity and masculinity have also been investigated from early on (Sørensen 1983; Clover 1993) and up into the recent years (Ármann Jakobsson 2007; Phelpstead 2013), and the topic is frequently taken up in discussion about magic, and thus seiðr and níð (e.g. Price 2002).

A significant number of studies on both Íslendingasögur and konungasögur focus on women’s role in marriage (e.g. Jochens 1986) or concubinage (Auður Magnúsdóttir 2001), and women’s importance and role in dynastic and political strategies (Larrington 2009; Jochens 1987; Auður Magnúsdóttir 2013; Auður Magnúsdóttir 2012; Bandlien 2005), and motherhood has been discussed sporadically (Jochens 1996b; Grundy 1996). Analysis of women involved in politics on their own can also be found (Larrington 2015; Heinrichs 1999; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, chap. 4), as well as a few discussion of outstanding female queens such as Gunnhildr (Sayers 1995). It can be seen from this overview that women in the sagas receive an ongoing interest, and new perspectives are applied to them. With the development of gender studies, previous evaluations have been challenged and new interpretations are proposed, to reveal an increasingly complex understanding of the roles and portrayals of saga women. This thesis hopes to contribute to this developing knowledge about women in konungasögur.

Studies in medieval queenship in Europe started and evolved approximately in the same time period as studies on female saga characters, as gender theory was slowly adopted by medievalists.¹ Queens were not completely absent from history books before the advent of feminist scholarship; several of them were too unavoidable, and gained their place in the otherwise masculine discussion of medieval politics. Yet they were analysed by the same scale and with the same tools and expectations as kings (Earenfight 2015, 125–26).

Studies in queenship started by mapping the lives and deeds of ‘less’ outstanding queens, uncovering a part of history left aside by a discussion of monarchy and power dominated by

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¹ For a short overview of the developments of gender and feminist theory, and its main premises decade by decade, see Alison Jaggar’s chapter on Feminist theory in Just Methods. An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader (Jaggar 2008). For the beginnings and theoretical issues of using the concept of gender in history see Joan W. Scott “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” (Scott 1986).
the male king (e.g. Duggan 1997). By shifting the focus, queenship scholars showed the importance of queens for monarchy, and by discussing the extent, tools and mechanisms of a queens’ power(s), its definition has been explored and extended (e.g. Reinle 2014). Queens started to be seen as important to monarchy politically as well, and queenship came to be researched as an institution in itself, which developed in relationship with kingship in the same socio-political conditions. These works have contributed to insert queens alongside kings in discussions of medieval political theories (e.g. Delogu 2015) and thus broaden our understanding of its mechanisms.

Scholars also questioned the nature and social understanding of uncritical definitions of female roles of mother, daughter, wife, often used to talk about queens when mentioned by scholars who were not focussed on incorporating gender perspectives in their work, and showed how the definitions of these roles are neither self-evident nor stable (Earenfight 2015). This led to discussions on the power queens gained from specific roles, such as motherhood (Parsons and Wheeler 1996), but also how the ‘institution’ of motherhood carried an importance for members of the aristocracy, both women and men in late medieval Europe (L’Estrange 2008).

Although research on queenship has been growing and has come to include new regions, questions and conceptual approaches, early Scandinavian material has not received much attention in the broader field of medieval European history, as Earenfight observes in her one paragraph on Scandinavian queenship (Earenfight 2013, 176). ‘Shared queens’ as Emma or Álfífa/Aelfgifu received some more attention, but more as a result of their status as queen of England (e.g. Stafford 1997). An exception is a recent study, dealing with Agnes of Denmark (d. 1304), Euphemia of Norway (d. 1312) and Margareta of Denmark (d. 1412), and how they exercised their political agency and made their voices heard (Layher 2010).

As visible from the above survey, queenship studies and studies of queens from Scandinavian literature have evolved without much contact. This is due both the fact that queenship studies deal with medieval history, and thus do not frequently dive into literary sources, and that their effort is concentrated on the ‘central’ and ‘main’ regions of medieval monarchies, England, France, Germany and Spain, while regions considered as peripheral, such as Scandinavia, are

2 See for instance the collections of papers Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe (Duggan 1997) and Mächtige Frauen?: Königinnen und Fürstinnen im Europäischen Mittel Alter (Zey, Cafilsch, and Goridis 2014). For an overview of history of European Queenship from the early 300s to the 1500s, see Queenship in Medieval Europe (Earenfight 2013).
left out. On the other hand, the isolation of the saga-queens from their - historical or literary - continental colleagues and thus theoretical models which have been applied to these figures, can be an inheritance from the now fading tendency of the early Scandinavian scholarship to see medieval Icelandic sagas, especially Íslendinga- and konungasögur, as unconnected to European doctrinal, cultural, social or political influence.³

Regarding konungasögur, they received mostly attention relatively to the figures of the king and depiction of kingship (Ármann Jakobsson 1997; Andersson 1999; Ármann Jakobsson 2000; Bagge 2000; Andersson 2012; Ármann Jakobsson 2015). Queens in these sources, as already mentioned, have sometimes been investigated in wider research on female characters, but they have mostly not been studied as political agents per se, which reflects a problematic similar to that faced by continental queens before the rise of queenship studies.

Thus, in this thesis, I propose to discuss Scandinavian saga-queens in the light of the tendencies discussed in medieval ‘continental’⁴ queenship studies, and see if continental queens’ traits and treatments can be found as well in the portrayals of eleventh-century queens in thirteenth to fifteenth-century sources. By considering saga-queens not only in the light of literary studies, but also queenship theories, their interaction with, and contribution to the figure of the king will be highlighted, as well as the queens’ possible roles in the construction and perpetuation of monarchical power. Additionally, this will shed new light on the figure of the queen-mother, and more specifically, on the astonishingly under-researched Ásta Guðbrandsdóttir, Saint Óláfr’s progenitor.

I am conscious of the difficulties of simultaneously discussing historical theories, literary images, and the very nature of saga literature with its own problematics of production and reception. Yet, manuscripts and the narratives they contain were not written in a chronological and social void; they were written at a specific time, in a specific society, for a specific audience, and thus reflect at least a part of the contemporary worldview (Sørensen 1983, 12). As Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir has put it, sagas are “a rich source of information to uncover medieval Icelandic attitudes to their world, and the contemporary discourse regarding diverse topics, not the least important of which are (appropriate, heteronormative) gender roles and power differences based on those” (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 6). I find also

³ However, attitudes have been changing, as can be seen for instance in the light of the interest for the import and translation of courtly literature (see e.g. Johansson and Mundal 2014) or in studies on the influence of latin historiography on Old Norse sources (Bagge 2016).

⁴ I will be using ‘continental’ as a synonym for Western European, as encompassing England as well.
inspiring the approach of the historian of religions Bruce Lincoln, who reads the different versions of the sagas of Hálfðan svarti and Haraldr hárfagri through the concepts of ‘origin myth’ or ‘history of foundation’, as stories about the past serving as instruments for building a legitimate and naturalised image of the nascent state (Lincoln 2014, esp. 1-2; 114-19). His discussion of the categories of myth, and official and revisionist history, and their categorisation as discourses is also relevant for the present thesis as I work within the political and ideological subtext of the saga, in order to dialogue with points from queenship and kingship theories.

Regarding my approach, I will start with a close reading of emblematic occurrences of four royal women in the Stockholm manuscript text-witness of the Separate saga. Each episode will be analysed using the same questions: what does the she do, how is it evaluated by the saga or the narrator, and why does this episode exist in the present shape, i.e. what is its ideological role in the text. The tentative answers will be supported with relevant secondary literature from Old Norse scholarship, as well as paralleled with continental queenship’s aspects if similarities occur.

Four main women will be considered. Ásta Guðbrandsdóttir, mother of Saint Óláfr, who allows us to explore ideas of motherhood and the political support a royal woman can display. Next Ingigerðr and Ástríðr Óláfsdóttir, the daughters of Saint Óláfr’s Swedish enemy and namesake, will be discussed together, as their story is intertwined and concerns peace-negotiations through wedding, marriage as an honour-related matter, and the intercessory role of royal women. Álfífa, the wife of king Knútr, will be discussed relatively to the power she gets through her son Sveinn’s nomination on the Norwegian throne, and how her negative portrayal highlights Saint Óláfr’s qualities will be a second point.

A final component of the thesis will be the discussion of the depiction of these queens in later interpolations; these differences will be analysed through the same questions as the ‘main’ manuscript. Furthermore, the differences between the successive versions of the Separate saga will be used tentatively to explore if, and how, they reflect broader societal, political and cultural changes.

5 In an earlier work, Lincoln explored how understanding myths as discourses enables to see their role as instruments wielded by groups or individuals to affect the “construction, deconstruction and reconstruction” of society and its norms (Lincoln 1989, 3).
The Stockholm Manuscript’s Queens

In this first part I will explore the representations of the selected royal women in the oldest extant manuscript of the Separate saga. The edition used for the present thesis bases its main text on the manuscript [Holm. Perg. 2 4to], from now on referred to as the Stockholm manuscript, which was chosen by the editors due to its completeness and age (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 890). The codex is dated to the second half of the thirteenth century, based on palaeographical analysis. It is written by two hands, and based on the fact that hand A starts and ends the manuscript, it has been proposed that the scribes were working simultaneously. I will now consider the royal women appearing in this manuscript, and how their portrayal can give indications on the opinions on queenship in the thirteenth century Icelandic elite circles who produced this text-witness.

Ásta

In the Stockholm manuscript’s version of the saga, Ásta starts by being yet another wife of a petty king, without much description or family background. However, after the death of her first husband, she remarries and seems to live a quite independent life. For instance, when her son Óláfr is old enough for his first Viking expedition, the narrator gives her the role of providing Óláfr with troops. From this point on, she appears more and more as a wealthy and imperious woman, and her image seems to be built in contrast to her second husband Sigurðr sýr, whose character is also a foil to Óláfr. She supports Óláfr from the beginning, and raises other children, for at least one of whom she has as great ambitions as she is supporting in her first born son.

Daughter, mother and wife

Ásta’s growing importance is bound to her being the mother of a man who eventually rises to great power. It is through this role that she obtains a high status and autonomy. Although she has valuable personal qualities, she derives little prestige from her family, as pointed out by her first husband Haraldr grenski, when he complains about her status to Sigríðr stórráða, the Swedish widowed queen whom he wants to marry: “segir at Asta er goð kona oc gaufug. en

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6 All the quotations of the Separate saga are from the aforementioned edition. Unless indicated otherwise, the translations are by myself.
7 Additional, non-interpolated manuscripts have also been consulted for the edition; however, as they provide no relevant changes for the subject of the thesis, they will not be discussed here in detail. The manuscript in question are AM 68 fol., AM 75 a, b, c fol., AM 321 4to, AM 325 V, 4to, AM 325 VI, 4to, AM 325 VII, 4to, and Perg. 4to nr.4. (For additional information see Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 890–970).
Also when Ásta is introduced in the saga, as Haraldr grenski’s wife, nothing is said about her kin more than that her father was a noble man: “Asto dottor Guðbrandr culo gauflugs mannz” (26), and her father is not further described, and he is even absent from Ásta’s marriage-decision makings, which, from the point of view of either tenth or thirteenth century Norwegian social norms, is peculiar. Consequently, Ásta did not have much social capital from her birth family, but she ‘upgraded’ her status by marrying a descendent of Haraldr hárfagri. However, although her official social status grew, it did not change her relation per se – the imbalance indirectly bringing about Haraldr’s death. A comment made by Sigríðr stórráða can support that a legitimate male child can change a woman’s status. When Haraldr asks for Sigríðr’s hand and complains about Ásta’s low origins, the Swedish widow answers that “Vera kann þat at þu ser þestøri en hon. hitt monda ec etla at með henni (Ásta) myndi nu vera becia yckur gefa” (29). This comment hints at Ásta’s pregnancy and at Óláfr’s glorious (and saintly) future, but additionally, Sigríðr’s remark underlines two things. First, the future son enhances Ásta’s importance. Second, her pregnancy is not presented as her fortune only, but as the couple’s jointly. By producing a legitimate male offspring, Ásta secures Haraldr’s dynastic line. Consequently, although her forefathers are not important men, it is through her body that Haraldr’s kin will be perpetuated, and will gain importance. Ásta’s status is thus secured by

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8 [(He) says: “that Ásta is a good woman and noble. But she is not as highborn as I am.”]

9 Even when looking outside the Separate saga, it seems that Haraldr grenski’s opinion can be justified, as nothing is known concerning any special deeds or titles attributed to Guðbrandr. He appears in few other texts, always relatively to his genealogical ties with saint Óláfr. In Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, and in the Landnámabók, he is mentioned as Önundr’s relative, and father of Ásta. In the Skárðsárbók manuscript of the Landnámabók (from the seventeenth century), Guðbrandr’s ancestry is traced to the hero Ragnar lóðbrók and to legendary warriors, sons of the king Vatnar. In Helgisaga Óláfs Haraldssonar, he is given a dark role, in that after his grandchild’s birth, he wants to expose him due to Haraldr grenski’s behaviour. He changes his mind only after supernatural light appears over the house the child is in. In this version of the saga, two Ásta’s sisters are also mentioned, in as much as they mothered Saint Hallvarðr and Steigar–Þórir. In the Heimskringla version of Óláfssaga Tryggvasonar, Guðbrandr is mentioned again only thrice, and only in his quality of Ásta’s father.

10 As shown by Bjørn Bandlien, marriage in medieval Scandinavia was a central social institution, which had social, political and economic implications. He notes how in sagas as well as mythological poems, the male kin’s control over their’ women was linked to honour (Bandlien 2005, e.g. 67-70) and thus how, even after the introduction of the Christian consent, marriages were still represented mostly as the giftarmenn’s decision, in sagas and laws (Bandlien 2005, 179; Jochens 1986, 144). It has been pointed out that widows had more freedom regarding the choice of their second husband, yet that kin’s opinion was still involved. Thus, Guðbrandr’s absence from his daughter’s betrothal-episodes is an additional sign of his lack of importance.

11 Bandlien discusses how in pre-Christian times, the man’s status affected the woman’s one, independently on the type or ‘degree of legitimacy’ of their relationship (Bandlien 2005, 89).

12 [It can be that you are of higher birth than she is. And yet I think that with her now must be the luck of both of you.]
combining the pedigree and upbringing of her legitimate son Óláfr, and by remarrying another petty king of the hárfagr kin, Sigurðr sýr. Much to Ásta’s displeasure, her second husband Sigurðr seems to lack all the familial ambitions, as will be discussed later, and Ásta’s effort in uplifting the family’s status and honour will focus on her son.

Thus, two points can be explored: first, how the narrator portrays the possibility of motherhood being instrumentalised by women to enhance their social status, without suffering much blame (which will be contrasted later with women who did not manage to avoid the blame-part of power). Second, Ásta’s interactions with her male kin will provide some clues about how the discourses of power and honour are intertwined with discourse on gender.

A good starting point for the discussion of the relationship between Ásta and Sigurðr is their marriage. The choice of vocabulary is worth pointing out, the formulation “giptiz Asta Sigurði sýr” (31), ‘she marries him’, and not ‘is given to him’, is quite unusual, and indeed in the Stockholm version of the Separate saga the phrase is in minority,\(^\text{13}\) while hann átti or hann fekk is the usual way of referring to a marriage.\(^\text{14}\) Thus, already the first ‘interaction’ in the couple gives some agency to Ásta, as she is the subject of the action in a situation in which women usually are the objects.\(^\text{15}\)

This imbalance of gender roles is noticeable throughout the later interactions Ásta has with her husband, but also in their individual descriptions or actions. For instance, when Óláfr is twelve years old he goes on his first expedition: “hann steig a herscip fyrsta sinn. Asta módir hans fecc til Hrana er kallaðr var konungs fostri til foraða fire lító oc faur þeirtra með Olafí” (35).\(^\text{16}\) She is portrayed as able to provide for material support for her son’s ambitions, having the means and liberty to do so. When studying a patriarchal society, the expectation is that the military support would be provided by the male parent – of which Ásta seems to take the role. This is astonishing as the manuscript states that “Olaf Harallz son föddiz upp með Sigurði

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\(^{13}\) The formulation ‘giptiz’ one other time, for Ingigerðr marrying Jarizleifr (209).

\(^{14}\) The use of giptask is also intriguing if replaced in a broader context; thus, Jenny Jochens had commented about women’s passivity towards marriage decisions in konungasögur, especially in Heimskringla: “Most often a man átti or fekk (had or got) his wife. If a woman is mentioned first, she is gipt (given) to her husband.” (Jochens 1986, 151).

\(^{15}\) Ásta’s agency could also be read in the light of the arriving theological doctrine of consent in marriage, as in Scandinavia too churchmen tried to enforce the woman’s consent as necessary for the ceremony from the end of the twelfth century (Jochens 1987, 332–33).

\(^{16}\) [He boarded a warship for the first time. His mother Ásta called upon Hrani who was called king’s foster-father, and asked him to lead troops and head the expedition with Óláf.]
In this context, *fœðask* can have the meaning of ‘bringing up’ (Zoëga 2015, 156) – thus it can be inferred that Sigurðr was not a mere bystander in Óláfr’s upbringing, as his status of step-father only could have implied.

The ‘buck-saddling’ episode throws further light on Sigurðr’s and Ásta’s involvement in Óláfr’s upbringing. As all his servants are away, Sigurðr asks the young Óláfr to saddle him a horse – but the boy prepares him a buck instead. Sigurðr reacts by commenting that he can now see why Ásta told him not to give Óláfr orders (32). He also comments on their difference of character, and that Óláfr will be much more proud-minded than he is. This lack of respect for his stepfather, the unbalanced relationship that results from it, but mostly the different values the two men have could explain in part the absence of Sigurðr’s involvement in Óláfr’s first expedition. The remark about Ásta’s attitude towards Sigurðr’s authority on Óláfr sheds light on a mother’s upbringing methods; she is supportive of her son’s arrogance and right to disobey – which seem to be qualities appreciated, or at least expected, in kings and heroes. Thus, whereas Sigurðr asks Óláfr for a service seen as unworthy for a future king, Ásta ensures that he gets the ‘king’s character’ – pride, assertiveness – and provides for his Viking expedition. Ásta appears as the parent interested in and dealing with ‘public’, traditionally more masculine matters, such as the welcoming feast to start Óláfr’s political career, as I will demonstrate.

Sigurðr and Óláfr could not be less alike. Before the buck-saddling episode, Sigurðr has been described as “busyslum að r mikill”, a skilled husbandman, straight after the mention of Óláfr’s valiance and eloquence (“gerviligr maðr … oc orðsniallr”) (32), underlining their difference. Sigurðr, although from high birth, is repeatedly described as a farmer. This occurs also as Ásta organises the feast, and he is supervising the fieldwork:

> “Hann (Sigurðr) var syslumaðr mikill. oc bunadarmaðr um fe sitt oc bv. oc reð sialfr bunaði. Engi var hann scarzmaðr oc helldr famalugr. hann var allra manna vitrastr

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17 [Óláfr Haraldsson grew up with/was raised by his stepfather Sigurðr and his mother Ásta.]
18 A parallel can be drawn with an episode from Egill Skallagrimsson’s childhood, when after killing one of his comrades, his mother had an astonishingly positive reaction: “en Bera kvað Egil vera víkingsefni ok kvað flat mundu fyrir <honum>-a liggja flegrar hann hefi aldri til at honum væri fengin herskip.” (Bjarni Einarsson and Phelpstead 2003, 54) [but Bera said Egil was likely to become a great Viking, and that it would be well, so soon as he were old enough, that he would be given a long-ship.] A similar idea is also expressed later in the Separate saga regarding the upbringing of Ásta’s son Haraldr (156-7). When she brings him to his half-brother Óláfr, Haraldr proves his strong character and warrior qualities although he is only three years old.
Sigurðr’s description starts in a positive way, but ends on a negative note; he is a great worker, a successful farmer, independent in his counsel, chary of words, the smartest and richest man in Norway and peaceful, not interested in vain display – yet he is also ‘veggjarn’, ambitious or vain-glorious (Zoëga 2015, 478). This depiction is consistent with his first introduction in the saga, where it is said of him that he is a descendant from Haraldr hárfagri, noble man, wise, wealthy, but also no warlord (31). This, linked with the disrespect Óláfr has for him when he is a child, or Sigurðr’s lack of involvement in Óláfr’s earliest warrior undertakings, creates an impression of a lack of manliness - and if Sigurðr is compared to his stepson or to Ásta’s first husband, both involved in Viking adventures, he indeed appears as a ‘stay at home husband’ and not a warrior king of the hárfagri kin.

Ásta’s feast

Now, a close reading of the aforementioned feast Ásta organises on Óláfr’s honour further supports the idea of a gender imbalance between Sigurðr and his wife, and how it affects their image. The main aim of this section will be to see what is Ásta expressing by organising this feast, and in which light the saga-author presents it to his audience?

Óláfr is coming back from his abroad adventures, a young man of noble birth, experienced in battle. His mother Ásta invites all the important men to welcome him back. In pre-state societies, the feasting habits presented similar rules as gift-giving processes; one showed something (wealth, power), or obliged someone, and with itinerant kingship, organising a feast for a king was a sign of subordination (e.g. Viðar Pálsson 2010, 46–60).

First, when the news of Óláfr’s arrival is known, Sigurðr is not present, and Ásta takes all the decisions as to the supervision of the situation. She is the house-mistress, and thus gives the orders to the household people regarding the arrangements. This is a quite traditional, non-controversial role (Earenfight 2013, 39; Enright 1996). Then she sends messengers to invite important people, which implies that she has contacts, and that she expects these contacts to

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19 [He was a great worker, and a successful farmer, and he organised the husbandry himself. He was not a man given to vain display, and he was rather reticent. He was the smartest of all men who were then in Norway and the richest of movable assets. He was peaceful and vain-glorious.]

20 Feasts, in Scandinavian medieval context, are an important political tool a way the aristocracy stated and managed bonds and hierarchy (Viðar Pálsson 2010, 44). A feast is the occasion to display and (re)state social hierarchies, through “the politics of giving, receiving and sharing” (Viðar Pálsson 2010, 64). See also Marcel Mauss’ “Essai sur le don” (Mauss 1923).
answer positively to her invitation. Thus, Ásta’s feast becomes a display for Óláfr and a reminder of the backing his family provides him with. A mother is very well placed to play this role. A father could be jealous or afraid of his son’s ascension – but a mother, in a patriarchal society, has everything to win from her children’s achievements. Ásta’s feast, more than a mere sign of motherly joy, seems to be a political act to ensure visibility for her son (and to a certain extent support) in the land.

If one goes beyond the ‘form’ of Ásta’s action (the feast summons) to its significance (the public enactment of support from the family), the situation can be interpreted in the light of medieval kingship and queenship theories. If monarchy is conceptualised as the reign of a kin or dynasty, family has an important role to play. Here, by providing a proof of the support, and an example of how a family member can act on behalf of its ‘head’, Ásta can be understood as a representation of the role (women of the) royal family are expected to play. Her action conforms to a role that is expected from her, on two points: first, as mistress of the household, “hospitality and gift exchange were vitally important aspects of a queen’s duty” (Earenfight 2013, 39), and second, as a supportive mother who, through the organisation of the feast, plays a key role in Óláfr’s return to Norway, setting up the stage for Óláfr to be reminded to important people’s mind.

One can also wonder if Ásta’s welcome for her son can be understood as a clever manipulation to give Óláfr a ‘taste of power’. This can be inferred from Sigurðr sýr’s comment on Ásta’s feast: “œc tekr hon þetta með miclom acafa, ef hon þær suða ut leitt son sinn at þat er með þuicri stormenzco sem kv leiþir hon hann inn” (69). In both Europe and Scandinavia, a woman’s status was linked to that of her male kin, and a queen gained power by marrying a king, but even more by being the mother of one (Larrington 2009, 511). Thus, Ásta’s upbringing of Óláfr, from her tolerance of his attitude towards Sigurðr to her financial

21 Bruce Lincoln discusses Haraldr hárfagri’s parents’ dreams with a similar idea. He points that the mother’s dream focusses on the imminent birth of ‘the state founding hero’, whereas his father’s dream emphasises the story of the dynasty as a whole, ignoring the future might of his son – which points out the competition that can happen between the king and his heir (Lincoln 2014, 57–58).
22 On mothers promoting sons see for instance the discussion of Emma of Normandy in Queenship in Medieval Europe (Earenfight 2013, 108–12) or on the self-promotion through son’s promotion in medieval Scandinavia, see “The Politics of Reproduction” (Jochens 1987, 342–43).
23 The importance of lineage can be seen both in continental kingship (Earenfight 2013, 10–15) and in Scandinavia, as exemplified for instance by the existence of poems as Ynglingatal.
24 [And she will have to give this a lot of energy, if she manages that her son goes out with the same munificence as she receives him with now.]
support of his expedition, and culminating in this reception, can be as well understood as self-interest.

Now to the details of the feast; when Ásta hears about Óláfr’s arrival, she sends messengers to invite people, and she requires them to be well dressed: “Alla menn er fire varu let hon taca enn bezta bunat er tíl attv. en þeim fecc hon goð kleði er eigi attv sialfír” (68). Her focus on appearance and thus display of status concerns also her husband, as she sends him messengers with his ‘robes of state’. His previously mentioned description as a man not interested in vain display (engi … skartsmadr) thus appears in contrast to his wife, and the narrator emphasises this by describing the dark and grey clothes Sigurðr was wearing while in the fields. On the opposite of his dark working clothes, Ásta sends him a golden saddle and a bridle decorated with gold and gems, and clothing that is called tignarkleði ‘robes of state’ (67), which again points to her willingness to impress the invited people at her son’s reception.

By sending to him the clothes he should wear at the feast, Ásta highlights that her husband’s usual clothes are not noble enough and appropriate to display his status at the political event. It also shows her contempt for his ability or interest to make the proper choice by himself. She demonstrates a similar distrust in his social abilities, and along with the royal equipment, she sends him also instruction regarding his behaviour:

“þau orð bað Asta at vit scyldim bera þer at nv þotti henne almiclo mal scipta at þer tøkiz stormanliga. oc bað þess at þu scyldir nu meir liciaž í ëtt Harallz ens harfagra um scaplyndi en Hrana mionef modorfaður þinum eða nereið iarli enom gamla. þott þeir hafi verit spekingar miclir. konungr svarar. Tiðindi mikil segit er. enda berit er

25 [She asked all men to put on the best attire they had. And she got good clothes for those of them who did not possess some by themselves.]

26 “Hann (Sigurðr) hafði kyrtl blán oc blar hósor hafa seva oc bvhndna at lén. gra kapv. hautt grám víðan oc url lvm andlit. stað í hendi. oc a ofan silfrholer gylltr. oc silfrhringr í.” (68) [He had a blue shirt and blue trousers and shoes tied around his legs, a grey cloak and a large grey hood, and a kind of hood over his face. He had a staff in his hand, on top of which was a silver cap and a silver ring.] Kristen Wolf discussed that a blue cape can foreshadow killing in the sagas, and she also pointed out Pastoureau’s research on the colour blue as possibly perceived as lacking aesthetical value due to its widespread use as a dye (Wolf 2006, 70). On the other hand, Ármann Jakobsson has argued that blue needs to be interpreted as a royal colour, linked to the battle field (Ármann 1997, 108). Yet, the Heimskringla version of this ‘clothes-episode’ provides the same description of field-work clothes, but then emphasises the description of the robes of state Ásta sends to her husband (Finlay and Faulkes 2014, 25). This underlines Sigurðr’s transition from farmer to king and the dark-blue clothes seem to be the symbol of the former. Thus, it could be discussed if Sigurðr’s blue clothing reflects more of a commoner’s clothing, reaffirming his ‘farmer’ image.
For Sigurðr, Ásta oversteps the boundaries of a wife’s behaviour. In a Christian worldview, the husband rules his wife, and this is a point which is also used in theories of kingship. A proper realm is governed by a king who also governs his wife, and the opposite is perceived as a threatening challenge to the natural order (Earenfight 2013, 23). A king who is commanded by his wife is not fit to rule. This passage underlines the haughtiness of Ásta’s behaviour, and also reminds that although Sigurðr is a descendent of Haraldr hárfagri, he lacks the ‘noble traits’ of his forefather. The narrator’s intention can be to make a point about kingship; although Sigurðr does not seem pleased by his wife’s treatment, he does as she commands, and does not ‘man up’ to either act as a king on his own impulse, or to disregard her orders. He does not have the charisma of a proper king, and as such offers a striking counter-example to make Óláfr’s royal qualities shine.

Ásta’s disrespect for her husband is further underlined by her description, “Asta kona hans var riclundut oc aúr” (69), which can be translated as haughty or imperious, and liberal (Baetke 2006). ‘Ríklynðr’ can be translated in different ways, with different intensity of its negative aspects. For instance, in the English translation of Heimskringla by Anthony Faulkes and Alison Finlay, the Swedish couple’s ‘ríklynðr’ is translated as ‘haughty’, whereas Ásta’s

27 [‘These words asked us Ásta to bring you, that it seems to her now of the greatest importance that you should behave nobly, and she asks this, that you should take more of Haraldr hárfagri’s temper than of your maternal grand-father Hrani miónef, or of jarl Nereid the older – although they were very wise men.’ The king answers: ‘You are bringing me great news, and you bring it very impetuously. Ásta had already behaved arrogantly with men to whom she was less obliged to.]

28 Both in a Christian and ‘heroic’ value system, the disrespect of this rule gives a negative image of the involved individuals. For the latter, Bandlien has pointed out “that a man had to seek his wife’s acknowledgement throughout the marriage”(Bandlien 2005, 160). In the Christian view of the marriage, Eve’s responsibility for the Fall was used as a justification for the patriarchal order, which was thus seen as “divinely ordained social order” not to be challenged (Mitchell 2011, 180).

29 If Ásta’s intention is to impress the audience to create a favourable atmosphere for her son’s political ambitions, she needs Sigurðr to be part of the picture, and remind everyone of the noble lineage they are part of.

30 These adjectives are not encountered very often in the Separate saga. Regarding ‘ríklundaðr/ríklynðr’, it appears only two other times in the saga and remarkably, it is linked to Óláfr’s enemies, the Swedish royal couple: “drotningen var riclundvt. oc ecki vel til stiupbarna sînna” (191) and “Olaf konungr var maðr ríclvndað oc oþýðr í mali” (191-2). [The queen was haughty and was not kind to her stepchildren.] and [King Ólaf was a haughty man and harsh in speech.] The negative judgement in these two later uses of the adjective can be inferred. The queen’s haughtiness is put in relation to her bad treatment of her husband’s children, among whom is Ólaf’s future queen Ástríðr, and the description of the Swedish king is also connected to a lack of kindness. Interestingly, the description of the spouses is framing a longer and positive description of Ástríðr Óláfsdóttir, who on the contrary is pictured among other things as cheerful, humble and liberal (“bezt orðum farin gladmêlt var hon oc litillat milld af fê” (191)).
is rendered by ‘imperious’, which coupled with ‘liberal’ gives a more positive picture (Finlay and Faulkes 2014, 84, 25).

Thus, in the description that the author provides when he presents her alongside her husband, Ásta appears to be attributed unusual adjectives; the overall impression is ambivalent. On the one hand, she seems more aware of social and aristocratic norms, and acts with liberality, an appreciated quality in Scandinavian kings, while her husband is not interested in other things than his fields. On the other hand, her attitude towards Sigurðr disregards gender norms which are at the heart of the institutions of medieval kingship and marriage. Yet, the only critique directed at Ásta seems to be about her behaviour towards her second husband, and no other negative consequences are implied – as will be demonstrated with the relation to her son, she enjoys, all in all, a positive image.

**Óláfr’s ambitions**

This theme can be explored alongside a further example of Sigurðr’s lack of manliness. In Óláfr’s first speech about reconquering Norway, after having stated how terrible it is that their forefathers’ realm is under foreign dominion, Óláfr declares his intention to change the situation, and asks about his stepfather’s support in these terms: “en hvart er þer vilit lysa manndom neckverðn um þenna lut” (73). He points that whether Sigurðr helps or not, he is confident that people of the land will be willing to shake the foreign rulers off. Thus, in the saga itself, the interest for restoring family honour by force of arms is directly linked to a demonstration of manhood. Sigurðr’s reply is full of caution, as he thinks Óláfr’s plans are too eager, but he contextualises his own lack of enthusiasm with their difference of character: “enda er þess ván at langt myne í milli vera litilmenzco minnar. oc ahuga þess ens micla er þv mant nv hafa” (73), but he promises material support. Óláfr’s eloquence and his expression of ‘manly honour’ contrasts with Sigurðr’s caution and ‘litilmenska’, which translations have been rendered in various ways, yet all are remote from manliness.

Thus, Sigurðr’s non-martial character and lack of ambitions is connected again with a deficient manhood.

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31 Cleasby-Vigfusson gives only ‘imperious, high-spirited’ (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, 499). Zoëga says ‘imperious, severe’ (Zoëga 2015, 340), Baetke ‘stolz, hochmütig, herschsüchtig’, proud, arrogant and domineering (Baetke 2006, 501), and at the end of Hrólf’s saga Gautrekssónar, the adjective is used with other, seemingly positive, terms (see the translation in Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 115).

32 […] and whether it is your desire to show some manliness in this matter.

33 [And indeed, it is likely that there will be a noticeable difference between my paltriness and the great eagerness that you seem to have.]

34 Zoëga and Cleasby-Vigfusson propose “paltriness, meanness” (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1957, 394), and Baetke goes further with “unmännliche, niedrige Gesinnung”, unmanly, mean mentality (Baetke 2006, 387).
Ásta’s enthusiasm for Óláfr’s conquest plan is intense. Contrary to Sigurðr, she does not understand it as too ambitious; on the opposite, she expresses her satisfaction and pride in her son’s aspirations:

“þa tok Asta til orða. Sva er mer gefit son minn at ec em þer fegin orðin. oc þvi fegnvst ef þinn þrosci metti mestr verþa. vil ec til þess engi lut spara þann er ec a kosti. en her er litt til raðastoða at sia er ec em. En helldr villda ec þott þvi veri at scripta at þv yrðir yfirkonungr í Noregi þott þv lifðir eigi lengr i konungdominom en Olaf Tryggva son heldr en hitt at þv verir eigi meire konungr en Sigurðr syr oc yrðir ellidauðr” (75).

The portraying of her approval can point in two directions; first, it can hint at Ásta’s joy seeing that her upbringing methods attained the goals she hoped for, and that she managed to raise the ambitious son she wanted. Second, the portraying of her approval could be an expression of a norm of behaviour that was expected from women; the unwavering support of their male kin, especially in honour-related matters. And indeed honour is at stake, in restoring the power of the hárfagri ‘dynasty’. Her motherly pride can also be read against the heroic ideal of women’s admiration, as when Bandlien discusses that in skaldic poetry, women are depicted either as egging or shaming men, and in fact they appear as the judges of the masculine deeds (Bandlien 2005, 45). If a woman’s admiration increases a man’s honour, and thus his manhood, Ásta is providing a necessary ‘symbolic’ support to her son – while refusing it to her husband. Moreover, following on an already established pattern of comparing Óláfr with Sigurðr, Ásta seems unable to refrain from an additional, sarcastic, remark on their differences. Her positive evaluation of Óláfr’s ambitions concludes with her disregard for men who die of old age, which can be seen as an additional evidence of Sigurðr’s poor manhood and her dissatisfaction with his unambitious attitude.

Despite her motivation, Ásta says there is one thing she cannot provide: sound counsels, “en her er litt til raðastoða at sia er ec em”. This comes as somewhat of a surprise, since that both queens in Europe and women in sagas can be depicted as sources of counsels (e.g. Gos 2009)

35 [Then Ásta began to speak: ‘This is what I think, my son, that you make me happy, and yet I will be most pleased if your manly achievements could become even greater. For that (to happen) I won’t spare a thing that which I have power upon, and yet here is little point to look to me regarding helpful counsels. And I would rather, if this were the choice, that you become supreme king over Norway though you would not live longer in the realm than Óláfr Tryggvason, rather than if you were no greater king than Sigurðr sýr and became dead of old age.]

36 The motif of the woman increasing the honour of one man at the expense of another can be found in other sagas. See for instance Bandlien’s discussion of Guðrún praising Sigurðr instead of Gunnar (Bandlien 2005, 47).
In family sagas however, women’s whetting also is the trigger that keeps bloodfeuds going, and the ambivalence of saga authors “toward the incitement speech suggests that some part of them, and their society, sanctions violence, but ultimately they are aware that in the new social order, it must be rejected and repressed, either back into the past or into the subconscious” (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 21). And due to the fact that in the very same speech, Ásta states her preference for a dead but mighty son, Ásta’s comment could be a critique of the female kin’s incitements to get honour through the spilling of blood. However, in the broader context of the saga, Ásta’s remark can also be read not only as a critique of female behaviour, but as a statement of the limits of a king’s mother’s power, and a critique of the konungamóðir who do not respect that. Ásta shows by this comment that she has no intention to interfere in her son’s power, yet that she will support him no matter what. In this way, she presents a model of how a queen-mother should behave – and she contrasts thus with Álfífá, who is represented as interfering in her son’s reign, as will be discussed in the next section.37

The inquiry into Ásta’s depiction has shown the importance of kinship ties, social ascension through marriage, and of motherhood for a woman’s status. However, reading Ásta’s presence in the saga through her interactions and attitudes to her male relatives proved even more fruitful, as her descriptions can be understood as a device to articulate judgement on different type of masculine behaviour and kingship, as well as the limits of a king’s mother’s power.

Thus, I analysed her interactions with her husband Sigurðr sýr in the light of the descriptions of their characters and actions, and showed that while Sigurðr is depicted as lacking masculinity by lacking warrior-like ambitions, she was depicted as despising him, and compensating his lack by enacting by herself some of the masculine qualities society was expecting in a hárfagri’s descendent. On the other hand, I demonstrated that Ásta’s relation to her son Óláfr was quite different, and devoid of haughtiness or inappropriate behaviour. With him, she displays the finest motherly behaviour; she gives material support for his expedition, and through her admiration for him, she provides him with a more ‘symbolic’ support, which she expresses both in private situations (her happiness at his ambitious unification plan) and in public ones (the feasts she organises for him). But most importantly, contrary to the royal

37 This thematic of the good and the bad mother is also present in other sagas, as discussed for instance by Carolyne Larrington about king Hákon Hákonarson’s kinswomen: “Hákon’s mother and wife are never depicted as attempting to exercise political influence over him” (Larrington 2009, 518). See also Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir discussion of the admiration received by mothers who protect their infant sons on going on dangerous journeys (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 86).
women that will be analysed now, although she supports his plan and benefit from them, she does not interfere in his political decisions. Her support stays limited to his promotion, and not hers.

Álfífa

Álfífa the mother

In the Stockholm manuscript, Álfífa is first mentioned after the death of Óláfr Haraldsson, when her husband king Knútr sends their son Sveinn to rule over Norway and she accompanies him. Her main role seems to be harvesting the critiques for the Danish overrule, and intervening in the canonisation process of Saint Óláfr to stop it. Yet, she also is a mother of a king, and as such a brief comparison of her ‘mothering’ with Ásta’s can help to determine her evaluation by the narrator.

“Sveinn son Knvts konungs oc Alfífu dottor Alfrims jarls hann hafði verit settr til rikis a Vindlandi i Ioms borg. En þa hafði comit til hans ordsending Knvz konungs ðofur hans at hann scyllldi (…) fara i Noreg oc taka við riki þui til foraþa er i Noregi var oc hafa þar með konungs nafn yfir Noregi. (…) Siþan for SueiN i Noreg oc með honom Alfífa mþir hans oc var hann þar til konungs tekin i hverio lagþingi” (593-4).38

Álfífa is introduced, as many female characters, in relation to her male kin. She is the daughter of a jarl but most importantly wife of a king, and mother of a legitimate male heir.39 Yet, her importance vis-à-vis her son seems even more significant, as Sveinn is subsequently designated by his matronym, Álfífusonr, instead of the usual patronym.40

Patronyms were the norm to identify people in Scandinavian society,41 and in the Stockholm manuscript version of the Separate saga, except for Sveinn Álfífusonr, only the sons of Eiríkr

38 [Sveinn, son of Knútr and jarl Álfrím’s daughter Álfífa, he had been set to the realm of Vindland, in Jomsborg. And here had come to him messengers from his father king Knútr, that he should (…) go to Norway and take the realm that was there to take under his rule, and have with it the title of king. (…) Then Sveinn went to Norway and his mother Álfífa with him, and he was accepted there as a king in each district.]
39 As already seen, the Church’s role was crucial in changing Scandinavian kings’ practice regarding wives and concubines. See for instance Bandlien’s discussion of the changes in inheritance laws (Bandlien 2005, 188).
40 For instance, in the Bajarbók version of the Separate saga, when the narrator introduces a new character who has a matronym, he feels urged to comment it: “hann war kendr wid modur sina ok var kalladr Halldór Ragnveigsson” [he was known by his mother, and was thus named Halldór Ragnveig’s son] (742).
41 For instance, Miller mentions that patronyms were used in case the person’s father died young (Miller 1990, 60) and Thomas A. Dubois discusses an example of a used matronymic as reflecting the lack of an acknowledged father (Dubois 2013, 88). The broader significance of patronyms can be illustrated with
blóðox and Gunnhildr are designated by both their patronym and matronym, which makes it a peculiarity worth analysing. If the use of matronym and patronym is compared for the Gunnhildarsynir, it appears that the patronym is used when the brothers are successful warriors (19, 22, 23, 25), and the matronym when they meet misfortune, i.e., when they are driven out of Norway (25, 141). Regarding Sveinn’s denomination, he is mostly called ‘konungr’, and alternatively by patronym or matronym. The use of the matronym occurs three times: relatively to a skaldic poem that was composed about the king, then when the length of his reign over Norway is stated, and to announce his death (“þan sama vetr varþ Sveín Alfiðo son söttduðr i Danmorco” (619)). Thus, the matronym appears to be linked to official statements about king Sveinn. If this is further connected to the fact that he is not granted much political action or recognition when his mother is around, it would thus seem that a designation by matronym could show a judgement of a king who was too strongly under his mother’s influence.

Additionally, when the use of the matronym for both Sveinn and the Gunnhildr’s sons is compared from a political, symbolical and ideological point of view, a common tendency can be outlined. The matronym seems to imply a feminisation of these kings, which effect is to discredit them both as men and as rulers. In the same vein as William Sayers has argued that in konungasögur and Íslendingasögur, assigning magic to foreign women was a way to feminise a foreign culture (Sayers 1995, 60), I would like to propose that assigning a matronym to a king was a way to anchor him in history as a weak ruler; not only was he not masculine enough, he even had let himself being influenced by his mother, as children are.

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42 He is called ‘sonr Knuts konungs ok Álfífu’ (593) one time, which is for his first appearance. This leads me to consider it more as the introductory statement of a character’s genealogy than as a ‘naming’ or designation. He is called one time ‘Sveinn konungr Knutsson ok Álfífu’ (607), once only ‘Knutsson’ (619) and three times ‘Álfífusónr’ (603, 610, 619).

43 [This same winter Sveinn Álfífusonr died of sickness in Denmark.]

44 The use of the patronym regarding his return to Denmark (619) does not necessarily comes as a contradiction, as it can be explained by the fact that Harthacnut was the son of Knútr’s second wife Emma, and not Álfífa. Thus using the patronym for Sveinn in this case makes more sense, if then he is designated as Harthacnut’s brother.

45 He does have some action without Álfífa, when he defends Norway against Trygvi, Óláfr Tryggvason’s son (610-2) and then when he loses the realm against Óláfr Haraldsson’s son Magnús (615).

46 Further light can be shed on this by Gunnhildr’s involvement in her sons’ flight to the Orkneys (25). She is acknowledged as taking part in the decision for the flight, whereas she was never mentioned with them before, when they were successful.
Yet, the use of the matronym is not negative for Sveinn only; regarding Álfífa’s treatment in the text, the designation by the matronym can also hint at her being an overbearing mother who influences unduly her son’s politics – contrary to Ásta. This can be discussed on the basis of the following examples. Sveinn appears in the saga the first time when king Knútr says that he intends to send ‘his son Sveinn’ to be king in Norway: “hefi ec ŋv segir hann sent menn oc iartegnir minar til Danmarcar til Sveins sonar mins oc ṣat með at ec hefi gefi t honorn rici i Noregi” (524).\(^{47}\) Knútr does not mention Álfífa as a fellow recipient of the messenger, and Álfífa seems to sneak in the political sphere without it being necessarily Knútr’s intention.\(^{48}\) Sveinn would be supposedly fifteen or sixteen years old,\(^ {49}\) thus not a child anymore for his father to need him having Álfífa as queen-regent.

One example of her political involvement is during the canonisation process of Óláfr Haraldsson. Álfífa is consulted alongside the king, she intervenes in the official setting amongst the gathered chieftains, and her requests are taken in account up to a certain point (599-601). She is the one who involves herself in trying to slow down the process of canonisation, while her son does not seem to show interest for the situation, and grants what the bishop wants, seemingly without giving it many thoughts; “baŋ byscop ṣar fara med sem hann villdi” (599).\(^ {50}\) Álfífa is taking advantage of her status of king’s mother, to insert herself in a public, ‘political-under-religious-cover’ situation. She puts a great deal of effort in stopping the canonisation, and regarding the fact that Óláfr is later on recognised ‘sannheilagr’ (601), truly saintly, by the men of authority shows that she was ‘on the wrong side’, and thus puts her doubts of Óláfr’s sanctity in a negative light.

However, from a dynastic point of view, her interfering actions are coherent with a queen-mother’s duties, as the canonisation of a former Norwegian king is a threat to her son’s reign.\(^ {51}\) Consequently it can be argued that as a mother, she is doing the right thing, \textit{i.e.} protecting her offspring’s status. Yet, she collects only harsh words, and no admiration as did Ásta for her promotion of Óláfr. The possible explanations for this difference of treatment are

\(^{47}\) [I have, says he, sent my men and tokens to my son Sveinn in Denmark with this, that I have given him the realm in Norway.\]

\(^{48}\) It can be furthermore noted that she is never called \textit{drottning}, but always \textit{Sveins móðir}. Thus, her power does not appear as a legitimate or institutionalised identity, in the narrator’s way of presenting her.

\(^{49}\) Based on the fact that Álfífa’s children cannot be born after 1017 (Lawson 2004).

\(^{50}\) And he \textit{told the bishop to dispose with (the body) however he wanted.}

\(^{51}\) Óláfr was far from being the first or only example of canonisation of a dead king as a tool for securing political power: “The instigation of a martyr’s cult in veneration of its fallen leader was a way in which a deposed royal family or political faction could associate itself with God in the popular mind and thereby foster its return to power” (Chase 2005, 30).
first, of course, the political position of Álfífa and Svein vis-à-vis Óláfr and the Norwegian realm. She symbolises the foreign power, against which Óláfr was fighting – and the present text is a saga for the glory of the aforementioned saint. Thus, even though she can be perceived in a positive light for her understanding of the political threat of the canonisation, and acting against it, she cannot enjoy the approval of the narrator and the audience. Consequently, the bad judgement she reaps as rewards of this specific intervention is more linked to political bias than misogyny or setting up of gender boundaries.52

Álfífa’s presence in Norwegian politics is discussed two other times; when Sveinn imposes new laws which creates discontent of which she is the target (“brátt hófþu menn ameλi mikit til Sveins konungs oc kendu menn mest þó Alþífu allt þat er moti scapi þotti en þa napþiz sæmþeλi af morgum monnom til Ólafs konungs” (596)),53 and her regency due to Sveinn’s childishness (“Sueiþ konungr Knuz son oc Alþífu red fyþir Notegi noccora vetr hann var bernscomaþr þeþi at allþri oc raþum. Alþífa moþir hans hafþi þa mest landraþ (607)).54 Her involvement in her son’s politics seems to culminate in, or be explained by, the fact that Sveinn is too childish to be able to govern, and thus that Álfífa assumes this charge – much to the Norwegians’ unhappiness.

Her regency can be also interpreted in another way, when contextualised with the widespread fear of the queen’s informal influence over the king (Earenfight 2013, 11), influence which could be exercised by royal women independently of them being king’s wife, mother, sister or daughter. The fear of the wife’s influence has often been analysed through the threat of a queen’s seductive powers and sexuality. The nature of the queen-mother’s influence is harder to determine, as most of the occurrences of a mother involved in her son’s politics, or overruling him, do not describe any private interaction between them, and the impression the son’s description usually creates is that of a puppet, a mere tool in his mother’s hands.55 Her

52 Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir has pointed out how in Óláfr’s saga, both Ástríðr and Álfífa show a certain degree of political autonomy, and proposed that Álfífa’s lack of success is linked not to her gender but to the hostility Norwegians had for her and her son specifically (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 94).
53 [Soon had men great complaints against king Sveinn and yet blamed mostly Álfífa for everything that was against their mind. And then the truth about king Óláfr appeared to many men.]
54 [King Sveinn, son of Knútr and Álfífa, ruled over Norway some winters. He was a childish person both in age and reason. Álfífa, his mother, exercised thus most of the government.]
55 This is the case for instance with queen Emma’s plot to crown Harthacnut in Denmark while Knútr was raiding in England (430-1). The reader is not informed on the son’s opinion about this – and everything is decided by the mother and the jarls. However, as noted by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir who comments on the same episode in Heimskringla, this pseudo coup d’état is not portrayed negatively, but rather as extreme measures in an extreme situation (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 91). In both Emma’s and Álfífa’s case, the
threat seems to come from her regency; she could use her authority to potentially hinder the power of some of the *hirðmenn* and counsellors, or she could try to retain the power longer than necessary. But she can also present the risk of making her son an ‘eternal child’, and thus an unsuitable king who would never reach manhood. John McKinnell has discussed the heroes beheading giantesses in *fornaldarsögur* as symbolising the need a boy has to get rid of his mother’s authority and influence in order to become a man (McKinnell 2005, 143–44) - and the discussion on Sveinn’s matronym or Sigurðr’s *sýr* comparison with Óláfr seem to point indeed towards the importance of a ‘proper’ masculinity, free of the feminine influence, to be a proper king.

Subsequently, it seems that the queen-mother poses the double problem contained in her title; as a queen, she has an intimate access to the king, and thus she can ‘steal’ the power of the male counsellors or other relatives. And as a mother, she can have beneficial effect on her child’s education, giving him a good start in life, like Ásta does - yet if the mother uses her child for her own power, it can keep her son at the childish stage of the boy under his mother’s control, and thus prevent him of becoming a man and thus a proper king – maybe as exemplified by Sveinn’s childishness. This can be taken further: if the masculine king (and his appropriate relations with his female kin) ensures, or reflects, the stability of the realm, then an overbearing queen-mother is also to be understood as a threat for the realm’s balance.

Thus, the way medieval redactors portray relations between different kings and their mothers shows a reflection about the qualitative differences between the various natures of the relation. The mother who works to secure her offspring’s future power will be at one end of the spectrum, and the one who uses the situation for her own ends and power at the other.

**Álfífa the foreign queen**

In this last section about Álfífa, my aim is to discuss how by juxtaposing her regency with that of Saint Óláfr, the redactor proposes a comparison of the two ruling figures, which can be read as yet another way of conveying ideas about proper rulership. By discussing the ingredients the narrator subtly uses in this indirect comparison, I will explore how the contrast is used to reflect about elements of a ruler’s quality and legitimacy. For this I will analyse three passages already mentioned, namely the first time she is blamed for her son’s laws, and people ‘see the truth’ about Óláfr (596), then her attitude towards Óláfr’s canonisation (599), situation is similar as no interaction is portrayed between mother and son, the mothers simply intervene without any other ceremonial.

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and finally the comment about her unsanctioned regency due to Sveinn’s childishness - when people realise their mistake about plotting Óláfr’s death, once again (607).

The first time Álfífa is reported as being somehow involved with power in Norway, it immediately triggers the invocation of Óláfr as a good king. The third passage works with the same structure: Álfífa’s politics are criticised, and straight after the positively-marked memory of Óláfr is evoked, which prompts comparison between the two rulers. The second episode, with the canonisation issues, implies rather competition, between Óláfr’s sanctity and Álfífa’s rejection of it. Both of these attitudes, comparison and competition, invite an evaluation of the two rulers and their legitimacy. These episodes create a perfect setting to investigate which ingredients a medieval redactor considered necessary for a royal reputation. Thus if a comparison between Álfífa and Óláfr as rulers is implied in this passage, two noticeable differences are to be investigated - gender and provenance.

The first explicit difference between the two rulers is their gender, which in itself is already significant, as female rule was less of a norm than male, and women were less welcomed to exercise this type of power than men (e.g. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 10). Yet it goes further than the simple statement of male versus female. As has been demonstrated in this chapter about Álfífa, she oversteps the limits of her gender- and social-role as a queen-mother, which makes it possible to say that not only her comparison with Óláfr is building on the superior legitimacy of male rule over female, but also, as in Óláfr-Sigurðr comparison, points to the superiority of those who conform to gender roles over those who do not.

The second emphasised difference between the two rulers is their cultural belonging, expressed as Norwegian and Danish.56 Álfífa’s origin seems to be problematic, yet not per se, as the narrator does not mention her as native of Mercia (Stafford 2004), but for the unsolicited changes she brings in the legal domain, which are defined by her husband’s culture. She is blamed for the laws Sveinn introduces, which are new and shaped on the Danish model.

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56 A third difference that could be discussed between Álfífa and Óláfr is of religious nature: Óláfr is saint, whereas Álfífa is not. She is obviously Christian, due to the time and place she evolves in, yet her attitude to religion is never mentioned, and the only portrayed interaction she has with the Church is her doubting of Óláfr’s sanctity at the canonisation assembly. She doubts the sayings of Norwegian bishop and chieftains, an even though the narrator presents her as in front of the straightforward proofs of the defunct king’s sanctity, she refuses to believe in these God’s signs. Comparatively, Óláfr is responsible for Norway’s definitive conversion, and his sanctity is made clear at the end of the saga. This difference is slightly less relevant for the discussion of Álfífa’s and Óláfr’s legitimacy as rulers, or exempla, as Óláfr’s sanctity is mostly discussed once he is dead.
In political and legal theory the importance of customary law for the European medieval society has been discussed. Among the various traditions that contributed to the medieval legal landscape, one contribution attributed to the Germanic legal tradition was the conceptualisation of law as immutable (Pennington 1988, 427), and its influence on twelfth century can be seen for instance when authorities such as Gratian defined a valid law as promulgated by the prince, but also approved by people (Pennington 1988, 424).

The relevance of these general theories for the Northern spheres is reflected for instance by Sigurður Líndal’s opening remarks on ideas of law in his article on Icelandic legal culture. He mentions that “law and public justice were, in the eyes of the Germanic peoples, a common heritage akin to their language and religion. Rules of law were not to be interfered with by individual man … They were ancient customs which had existed from time immemorial by the reckoning of the wisest” (Líndal 1993, 62). Once the monarchy was established in Norway, such an understanding of law was perpetuated, as can be traced in for instance the oath a king had to swear to the people that he will respect the already established law, and the nature of which was understood as reciprocal (Orning 2008, 75). Thus, one problem with Sveinn and Álfifa’s laws is already expressed in the first adjective used for them: they are new, coming from a more centralised realm, and thus different from people’s old customs.

The second problem with Álfifa’s laws is that they are moulded on Danish laws, which builds on the importance of local customs treated in the preceding paragraph. Moreover, scholars dealing with Icelandic sagas have pointed to the link between laws and identity, as William Ian Miller when he discusses the expression ‘vár lǫg’ (Miller 1990, 221), or Líndal on Icelanders accepting the Norwegian overrule in 1262-64 on the condition that the king will guarantee them “Icelandic laws” (Líndal 1993, 77). The link between laws and identities thus explains, in the Icelandic settings, the importance attached to the rejection of foreign laws.\footnote{There is a consistent body of literature dealing with feelings of belonging and identity in medieval Iceland. As the \textit{Separate Saga} has been written in Iceland and the question of Norwegian identity has been much less covered, I will consider the research concerning Iceland alongside reflections about “Norwegianness”, in order to see if these discussions can be helpful in considering not only Icelandic identity, but also the nature and meaning of Norwegian and Danish identity as described and understood by a thirteenth century Icelandic narrator.}

A similar attitude seems to be present in the rejection of Álfifa’s laws, as if their foreignness was a threat to the community’s integrity.

This allows us to jump to the tricky question of identity and feeling of belonging which is reflected in the implicit critique of Álfifa’s laws for being ‘Danish’, and which is also strongly
expressed in Óláfr’s ‘post-feast speech’ where the illegitimacy of the foreign powers is presented as bringing dishonour and harming the manhood of hárfagri’s kin (72-3). Two scholars have discussed the question of ‘national’ identity in medieval Norway. Kåre Lunden argued that the konungasögur constitute a proof for the existence of a subjective Norwegian identity. He defined this identity as ‘national’, based on an adaptation of Anthony Smith’s definition of the concept as composed of two main features: integrated economy and common mass culture. Lunden replaces Smith’s components by the military system and Christian practices, and he points to the figure of the king in thirteenth-century sagas as personifying the political community (Lunden 1995, 20–26). On the other hand, Sverre Bagge argues that konungasögur have an idea of ‘Norwegian people’ as opposed to the Danish or Swedish, but that it is difficult to link it to an idea of state, as it seems to be more of a “traditional group identification”, celebrating the heroism of the people rather than their belonging to a realm (Bagge 1995, 6–11).

Nationalism in the Middle Ages is subject to debate; depending on the definition researchers choose, and how much space for the state they allow in it, the conclusion on the existence or not of a national feeling will vary. For reasons of space, I will not enter the debate and I will consider the highlighting of Óláfr’s ‘Norwegianness’ as opposed to Álfifa’s Danish belonging as feelings of belonging, depicted by the elite culture, and creating an opposition between ruler houses based on an idea of group identity and its promotion. The point is that Óláfr’s identity is built by contrast to what he is not – Swedish, Danish – and in this process Álfifa symbolises the ‘Other’, thanks to whom “Us”, the norm, the good, the proper … can be defined.

Álfifa’s depiction in the Separate saga has been analysed through two main angles, as queen mother and as a ruler; in both cases, her story is intertwined with that of a male ruler. As queen-mother, she overrules her son Sveinn and seems thus to stay as an example of what a queen-regent should not do, reflecting the fear of a mother influencing her son, and the risk that she can represent for both his power and masculinity. As a ruler, she creates a contrast to Saint Óláfr, highlighting his qualities and underlining how gender and origins are important for a ruler’s authority and legitimacy.

**Swedish princesses**

The last royal women to consider are daughters of the Swedish king Óláfr Eiríksson: the legitimate Ingigerðr, and the illegitimate Ástríðr. In the Separate saga, they are showed as
active political agents, who are addressed by their father’s retainers and enemies to intercede on their behalf. They are also, to a certain extent, independent from their father’s politics, and they embrace an opposite political agenda than the one of the king. Although their presence in the saga is not limited to this episode, I will only consider their implication in the wedding-negotiations between Óláfr of Sweden and Óláfr of Norway.

**Ingigerðr’s intercessions**

Ingigerðr, who is the legitimate daughter, is not granted an introduction regarding her character or beauty, but she is portrayed as an intercessor addressed by both jarl Rǫgnvalldr’s and Óláfr’s envoys, and her father’s men. Her intercession however fails to succeed; the first time, she is addressed by the Icelander Hjalti on behalf of Óláfr Haraldsson. After arriving at the Swedish court, Hjalti came often to speak with her, until one day he dared to bring up the reason of his visit: the peace negotiations between the two kings. “Hann sagði henne þa af trunaði fra ferð þeirra Biarnar. oc spyr hana hvat hon hyggr hvernig Svia konungr man taka þeim malom at sett vere gør milli þeirra konunga” (138-9), but Ingigerðr replies that a positive outcome for the peace-request seems impossible. After a failed attempt by himself, Hjalti then returns to see Ingigerðr, and “bað hana lecia orð nokkur til við konung. oc quað þat hellzt töia myndo. Hon quað konung ecki myndo hlyða huat sem hon mělti. En um ma ec røða sagði hon ef þu vill” (142). She then opens the discussion with the king by directly asking him about his intentions regarding Óláfr Haraldsson. She says that many people are complaining about the problems brought by the tensions with the Norwegians, and she also points that it is very unwise to claim this realm (“Var þat miok vsynio er þer kolloðut til rikís i Nøregi,” 142-3), as it is a poor country, difficult to travel and with unreliable people, who according to her would have rather any other king than Óláfr svenski. She then gives him her political advice:

“nu ef ec skylda raða. myndir þu lata vera kyrt at kalla til Noregs. en briotaz helldr i Austrveg til rikís þess er att haufðv enir fyri Svia konungar. oc nv fyr scommo lagði

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58 [He told her in confidence about his and Björn’s journey, and asked her what she thought, whether the Swedish king would receive the suggestion of making peace between the two kings.]

59 [He asked her to speak some words about this matter with the king, and said that he is more likely to take her into account. She said that the king will probably not listen to what she says. “But I can try”, said she, “if you wish.”]
The king replies angrily to her speech, refusing to abandon his claim on Norway let alone marry her to the Norwegian ruler. He says that instead of this, he will call a levy and burn the region in retaliation the next season.

The king is eventually forced by the Uppsala þing to agree on the marriage, but he fails to make any preparations, and as time goes by, his people start to be worried that he will not keep the agreement. “En margir kêrðu þetta fire Ingigerði konungs dottor oc baðv hana til at verða visa hvernig konungr myndi vilia” (192). She answered that she did not want to speak with the king, due to his anger every time Óláfr digri was mentioned. She addresses the problem nevertheless, in a provocative manner, one day when her father comes back from a hunt proud of having killed five birds in one morning. When he asks her if she has ever heard of such a successful king, she replies that Óláfr digri had once got five kings with their realms, in one morning. The king is furious, and replies that he will never let her marry Óláfr with whom he never intends to be friend, and that he will rather marry Ingigerðr to one of his chieftains (194). The king’s anger breaks the agreement that was made with Norway, men are threatened with war, and Ingigerðr with a marriage below her status; her negotiations are reduced to nothing.

Two models can be considered to read her action, the saga-egging and the ‘continental’ intercession – yet Ingigerðr’s speech conforms to neither of them. With the saga-model, women’s egging is usually un-diplomatic and results admittedly in action, but also in the male protagonist’s anger - as Hildigunnr’s egging of her uncle Flosi in Njáls saga for instance. However, in these examples, the restoration of the male’s honour triggers him to act in the sense the woman wanted, whereas in Ingigerðr’s case, her remarks provoke only a stubborn reaction and anger. The scene is interesting for the fact that Ingigerðr is not egging her father for what he perceives as a ‘honour redressal’, but to an action that he perceives as lessening his honour – making peace with a man who stole a part of his realm. Moreover, her speech is referring to politics, and not to matters of honour.

60 [Now if I can advise you, you should abandon your claims on Norway, and rather turn eastwards to these reals which previous Swedish kings possessed, and which earlier on our kinsman Styrbjorn had conquered. Let Óláfr digri has his inherited land and make peace with him.]

61 [And many appealed to Ingigerðr, and asked her to inquire what her father’s plans were.]
The two scenes of Ingigerðr’s intercession can also be read through continental models of the intercessory role of queenship, which were crucial in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Europe. In these, the queen’s intercessory behaviour is modelled on biblical figures such as Mary and Esther, accentuating “a range of virtues regarded as “feminine” in their emphasis on queenly access to mercy or compassion personal experience of abjection or sorrow, and deference to established authority” (Strohm 1992, 96–97). The queen was seen as necessary to balance the kings’ attitude, offering to a king the means by which he could change his mind, or show mercy, without losing his honour. In order to achieve this, she needed to show her subordination to male power, definitely not to threaten it. If this idea of a royal woman’s intercession is paralleled to Ingigerðr’s actions, the difference is evident. She does not show any deference, on the contrary, the content of her speeches seems more of a challenge to her father’s ability to make rational decisions and thus authority, as when she defines his claims on Norway as non-sense (142).

In both readings, she was neither defending family honour, nor showing deference to her father’s power to bring the suffering of his people. However, she was acting on behalf of a peace settlement, presented as advisable by the narrator. As a result, she interferes in international politics, and works on her own marriage agreement without her father’s approval; after the unsuccessful first intercession, Hjalti talked at length about Óláfr Haraldsson’s qualities (144). He then asked Ingigerðr for her reaction if king Óláfr asked for her hand. “Hon roðnaði oc svaraði ubratt oc þo stillilega”, she blushed and was late to reply; she said that she would not wish for another husband (144), if all what Hjalti said was true. Hjalti assures her that he has not exaggerated, and “þau röddv þetta sin í milli mioc optliga. Ingigerðr bað Hialta varaz at mela þetta fyr avðrom monnom fyr þa soc at konungr man verða þer reiðr. ef hann verðr þessa viss” (145).

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62 Strohm, writing about English and French examples, has argued that queen’s intercession in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was playing with the models of “judgmental kings and merciful queens, in which the queen’s mild intercessions may be viewed as essential course-corrections in the navigation of a male-piloted ship of state” (Strohm 1992, 103). The ‘compassionate monarch’ models is a creation of the later Middle Ages, and the virtues of a pre-fourteenth century king are “harsh and leonine” (Strohm 1992, 112). However, a good king could take advantage of showing mercy, or changing his mind due to the intercession of his queen, and in this way enhance his public image (Strohm 1992, 117).

63 Strohm writes about how a thirteenth-fourteenth century queen’s intercession could be helpful for a king on three different points: supplying a male lack of mildness, permitting royal reconsideration and reaffirming the maleness of the king, by her feminine behaviour (Strohm 1992, 103–4).

64 [They spoke often about this matter, and Ingigerðr bade Hjalti not to mention this in front of other men, for the reason that the king would become angry if he knew of the plan.]
The depiction of Hjalti asking Ingigerðr’s opinion on a marriage proposal can be read in two ways. To begin with, as discussed by Jochens, the idea of consent was promoted by churchmen in Scandinavia during the time of writing of the *konungasögur*, and was likely projected on the sagas as something appropriate and linked with Christianity (Jochens 1986, 158). Yet, Bjørn Bandlien has also pointed that in a situation of conflict, taking control over the enemy’s women harms his honour (Bandlien 2005, 53). Consequently, by discussing this matter with Ingigerðr but without her father, Hjalti is also working on the political situation between the two kingdoms, undermining Óláfr svenski’s honour and authority.

To sum up, her interference in international politics is not condemned by the narrator of the saga, whereas her father’s stubbornness seems emphasised and disapproved of. Moreover, the way (the future St) Óláfr’s qualities are presented makes Óláfr of Sweden also guilty of selfishness, by denying a good match to his daughter. Bandlien pointed out how the attitude of the princesses can be read as a ‘battle’ of households’, using “heroic conceptions about the love of an independent woman”, which enable the narrator to depict the Norwegian Óláfr as gaining the upper hand (Bandlien 2005, 129).

Ástríðr

Ástríðr’s part in this text-witness is smaller, and she displays less initiative than Ingigerðr, although no less independence. More attention is given to her qualities, and her lower birth seems commented and ‘excused’ by the fact that although a *frilla* ‘concubine’, her mother Eðla was of noble family; “dottir iarls af Vindlandi hon hafði verit hertekin. oc var fire þui caullot konungs ambatt” (191). Whereas Ástríðr’s sister is simply a legitimate king’s

65 The idea of consent reappears when later on Ingigerðr organises a feast on her own estate, where jarl Rognvaldr, her kinsman, asks her as well about her opinion on the marriage. He emphasises that he thinks the idea is good (and addresses her as ‘frendkona’, thus as a male relative having the right to counsel her), but that he will not proceed if it is against her wish. She answers that she wants to hear his counsel and follow it, as he is her kinsman (162).

66 From the perspective of gender role’s conformity, it could be reproached to Ingigerðr to make her own wedding-arrangements without her father knowing; yet, as Bandlien has pointed out: “The *giptingarmaðr* refuses his daughters a good and *jafnrædi* marriage, and the women’s defiance of their father is legitimized” (Bandlien 2005, 177). She is doing what she needs to get a good match – and moreover she is involving another *giptingarmaðr*, thus almost respecting the tradition.

67 [She was the daughter of a jarl from Vindland, who had been taken as a war hostage, and was for this reason called king’s slave.]
daughter, which is in itself sufficient to be an interesting woman and bride, Ástríðr seems to need additional qualities, and popular appreciation to validate them.  

“hon var kvenna fríðvz oc bezt orðum farin glaðměllt var hon oc litillat milld af fe. En er hon var fulltíða at alldri var hon optliga med feðr sinum oc þoccadiz hveriom manni vel” (191).  

Then, as with her sister, she acts against her father’s political decisions, which are driven by anger, and go against family’s, retainers’ and people’s will. Her approval of the concealed wedding plan is interesting, by the fact that she chose to shift her loyalty without much consideration for her father. Ástríðr appears slightly ‘out of the blue’ at jarl Rǫgnvaldr’s feast, where Sighvatr, Óláfr Haraldsson’s poet, came to speak with her. Later, the jarl and the poet discuss whether Óláfr would marry Ástríðr instead of her sister, and Ástríðr approves of the secret plan, “oc ef hann vill þat segir hann þa vetti ec at um þetta rað spyri ver ecki Sviakonung eptir. Slict sama mělti Astridr konungs dottir” (203). Is it because, as an illegitimate child, a marriage to a king is a golden opportunity of social ascension and increased legitimacy? When she marries, she is betrothed by the jarl, and granted the same dowry and bridal gift as was negotiated for her sister (209). This information discards a later comment her father makes about her, which seems to imply that he does not regard her marriage as valid. He calls her a concubine, when he angrily expresses his will to kill jarl Rognvaldr, for he had “for til Noregs med dottor mina. oc selldi hana þar til frillo þeim enom digra manne þeim er hann vissi varun vvvin mestan” (211). Thus, regarding Ástríðr as well as Ingigerðr, the Swedish king is depicted as a victim of his anger, being incapable of

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68 This is expressed also later on, at a þing where the Swedish Óláfr is asked to arbitrate a case for which men are not named and only the situation is given. After having given the logical response, he asks his wise men what this all was about – and discovers that he has been trapped, as the case was a metaphor for his dealings with Óláfr of Norway. The case is using the comparison between gold and mud to symbolise the difference between Ingigerðr, who belongs to the noble Uppsala lineage, and Ástríðr who is the daughter of a slave (219-20). This passage puts the emphasis on the importance of lineage for kings, yet it seems to attach importance to kin and status than to the difference between a child born in an official marriage or in concubinage, and underlines the importance of antiquity for a royal line.

69 [She was a beautiful and kind woman, and skilled with words, cheerfull in speech and humble, yet liberal with wealth. When she was full grown, then she was often with her father, and everyone liked her well.] Her description, introduced in the place of the saga before her father’s breaking the agreement with Norway, seems also used as a perspective of the political situation. She is liked by the people, while her father acts against their wishes.

70 ['And if he wishes that,’ says the jarl, ‘then I advise that we do not ask after king Óláfr of Sweden’s counsel.’ The king’s daughter Ástríðr said the same.]

71 [(Rǫgnvaldr) went to Norway with my daughter, and have given her away as a concubine to this fat man who he knows is our worst enemy.]
discernment, and thus his daughters appear as justified in their disobedience, as the giptingarmaðr is not granting them a good match.  

**Óláf and the princesses**

Linked to the Swedish princesses is the story of Óláf Haraldsson’s wedding negotiations, and his reactions to the up and downs of them, which gives an image of Óláf as a king wanting to reach settlement, who shows few emotions but some sorrow for Ingigerðr’s loss, and an appropriate anger for the politically disrespectful attitude of his Swedish neighbour. In the end, he has both daughters’ admiration, and one of them in marriage. This, in a context of heroic symbolic, the ‘control over women’ gives him the upper hand over his Swedish namesake.

His reactions are the following. At first, when he hears that the Swedish king has broken the agreement and will not marry Ingigerðr to him, “vað hann reiðr miok oc hugsivkr. oc vað þat nákkvara daga at engi maðr fecc orð af honom. Eptir þat atti konungr huþing við lið sitt. …” (195). After the initial emotional response, he discusses the summoning of troops for an expedition to Sweden. It is relevant to note that the king’s affect is two-fold, but neither part seems to prevail over the other. There is the anger of the wounded honour, but also distress – which the text links explicitly neither to the political nor to the emotional aspect of the situation.

Then, when the poet Sighvatr brings the proposal of marrying Ástríðr, he also tells the king that Ingigerðr has been betrothed to the eastern king Jarizleifr. Due to that, Óláf is at first in very low spirits, allúkátr (206), but the information about “frilleic oc malsnilld Aztíðar konungs dottor” (207), the beauty and eloquence of the other king’s daughter, and that people say that she was in no point worst than her sister, cheers him up. Sigvatr then tells about the

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72 Bandlien points to which logic lies behind the justification of Ástríðr’s behaviour: “The giptingarmaðr refuses his daughters a good and jafnræði marriage, and the women’s defiance of their father is legitimized” (Bandlien 2005, 177).

73 [he became very furious and distressed, and for several days no man could get a word from him. After this, the king summoned a house-assembly with his people …]

74 His ‘fast recovery’ is slightly contrasted by the fact that the narrator informs us that the poet Sighvatr was at Óláf Haraldsson’s court, a friend of the jarl Rognvald, and that Óláf was enjoying his company, “þvi at honom þotti got fire trudarmönnin sinur at tala optliga um Ingigerði konungs dottor” (198) [Because he enjoyed to talk often about the king’s daughter Ingigerðr with his confidents] – which could then point to a possible interpretation of hugsjúkr as linked to a love-affect.
plan he discussed with the jarl and Ástríðr: “fannz konungi mart um þetta oc metli þat. Eigi man Svia konungr þat etla at ec mona þora at fa dottor hans. fire utan hans vilia” (207).  

Óláfr’s sadness at the announcement of Ingigerðr’s marriage in the east is not depicted in many details, and seems gone when he measures the ‘vengeful’ potential of marrying Ástríðr behind her father’s back. Thus, the interest for the Swedish princesses appears as very political, with only few glimpses of emotion from Óláfr and Ingigerðr; moreover, as Bandlien discusses (Bandlien 2005, 128), the interest women have for a warrior plays directly on his honour, and thus the princesses’ admiration for Óláfr makes him a qualified-enough suitor, contrary to what the Swedish king says. The narrator seems to use the Swedish princesses, and the consent to marry Óláfr they display, to make a point about the two opposite kings: Óláfr is a hero, and a more praiseworthy king, and he rightfully enjoys the princesses’ praise. It seems thus that it is the ‘old model of love’, the heroic one, that is at work here.

To conclude, the Stockholm manuscript’s royal women illustrate a number of topics linked to the issues of nascent monarchical power, its perpetuation and mechanisms. Themes such as motherhood, lineage and its importance in marriage negotiations, or support for the male kin have been underlined, and will be further discussed in the following section.

Later queens

The interpolated episodes

Several Icelandic manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries onwards preserve the Separate saga but usually in somewhat different form from the Stockholm manuscript. Their patrons and/or redactors clearly had different interests and goals in mind and although the core of the saga remains the same, occasionally, these manuscripts contain variants, *i.e.*, passages or episodes not found in the Stockholm text, which can add nuances to the character descriptions and interactions depicted in the saga. Those with interpolations, as presented in the Johnsen and Jón Helgason edition, are AM 61 fol., Bergsbók, Flateyjarbók, Tómasskinna, and copies of the now lost Bæjarbók. I will now explore which changes they display, and propose if some trends can be spotted and interpreted. As not all interpolations picturing queens could be covered, the selected examples were chosen on the basis of their dealing with

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75 [The idea pleased the king well, and he said: “The king of Swedes will not imagine that I could dare to get his daught, moreover without his approval.”]
themes explored in the Stockholm manuscript; Ásta’s motherhood and relation to her son and husbands, Swedish princesses’ courtship methods and their underlying discourse on male honour, and Álfífá’s regency and the threat she symbolises to her son’s power and to the Norwegian population.

**Sigríðr’s prediction**

The first interpolation I will consider is Flateyjarbók’s alternative version of the details of Haraldr grenski’s proposal and lethal relation to the Swedish queen Sigríðr stórráða. In the Stockholm manuscript, the emphasis is placed on the ‘luck’ and the future that Óláfr symbolises for his parents. Alongside with the emphasis on Ásta’s lower birth, and thus Haraldr’s comparatively high one, the manuscript seemed to highlight the importance, and thus legitimacy, of Óláfr from the perspective of lineage and dynasty. In the Flateyjarbók version however, Sigríðr’s comment about Óláfr comes after insulting Haraldr’s birth, realm, appearance, and anything related to him:

> “Sigríðr suarar suo ordum hans æigi girner mig til uænleiks þins eigi til ríkis þins æigi til ættar þinnar ok til æingra þeirra hluta er þer sealfuunm heyra til en þat er satt at Asta er nu þess sonar æigande uordin er ek uillda giarnna moder hafua at verit” (715).

Her negative remark creates a contrast to the importance Óláfr will have, as her closing remark about him counterbalances her whole soliloquy on how unimpressed she is by Haraldr as a king. Succinctly, she says that the only thing of any value Haraldr has is the son whom he is abandoning, because he aims above his reach at a higher born Swedish queen.

Sigríðr predicts Óláfr’s birth, like she did with other words in the Stockholm manuscript. It is not said how she knows about Ásta’s pregnancy, yet the most important point seems to be that her comment prepares the reader for what will come next: Óláfr’s birth and future importance. Regarding this, female characters in Scandinavian literature are often portrayed as displaying prophetic abilities, and as Sweden has been slower at the adoption of Christianity, it was

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76 [Sigríðr answered in this manner to his words: ‘I do not desire you physical beauty, nor your realm, nor your lineage and none of these things that are related to you, although it is true that Ásta is now having this son whose mother I would have gladly been.]

77 However, the critique is voiced by a Swedish queen, and reminds of the feeling of superiority due to a more prestigious history, as also expressed by Óláfr svenski.

78 Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir discusses the link between women and knowledge of the future for instance regarding Íslendingasögur in her article “Women’s weapon” (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2009, 424).
thus perceived as the repository of paganism and its clichés for a longer time. Sigriðr’s remark also underlines the significance Óláfr’s birth will have for the one who carries him. This would further confirm the already treated point about a woman’s status being influenced or increased by her child’s accomplishments; consequently, voicing Ásta’s future motherhood enhances her status, weakened by her husband planning on leaving her.

**Geirstaðaálfr’s belt**

The second interpolation-theme about Ásta is in the þáttir of Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr. and Hrani’s dream. In Flateyjarbók, Hrani, Haraldr grenski’s foster-brother, is visited in his dream by Geirstaðaálfr, a dead pagan king described as a good chieftain, who explains him how to get in his burial mound, overcome the evil spirit dwelling there, collect a few specific items and escape to reach Haraldr’s household. There, he should ease Ásta’s child birth difficulties by putting Geirstaðaálfr’s belt on her belly, in exchange for the possibility of naming the baby Óláfr.

The importance and topic of this þáttir is portraying a link between Óláfr and Geirstaðaálfr. However, this thesis focussing on queens, the central point to analyse is Ásta’s role, how it is presented, and if and how it affects and uses already explored ideas on gender and kingship. Ásta’s role in this episode seems to be at first sight mostly being the vessel through which Óláfr is delivered, in accordance with what has been noted before on the dynastical importance of queens for their king’s lineage and legitimacy (Jochens 1987).

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79 In Flateyjarbók, the saga of Saint Óláfr is preceded by the saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, where Sigriðr is credited as being behind the death of the missionary king. Ideally this paragraph should also consider how she is described in the Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, and how the Swedes are characterised there. Yet, this is unfortunately out of the scope of the present study.

80 In the middle ages, mothering had gain symbolical value and was a tool of empowerment for late medieval queens (see e.g. Parsons and Wheeler 1996; L’Estrange 2008). Moreover, the glorification of the mother of a saint man can be found in the Bible, as when Elizabeth says to the pregnant Mary that she is the most blessed of women (Luke 1:48).

81 I will refer to him only as ‘Geirstaðaálfr’, in order to make the text less confusing with the number of present Óláfrs.

82 Dreams in medieval Scandinavian literature can be used as media for several things; information coming through dreams could be associated with practical knowledge, point at the involvement of “metaphysical forces”, state something about a character’s psychical features, or simply give a hint about the future (Crocker 2015, 264–66).

83 “Dræingr godr ok hofdinge mikill var Oláfr … hann var allra mamma fridazstr synum ok mest uexste” (715). [Óláfr was a noble-minded man and a great chieftain … he was of all men the most beautiful and the tallest].
To start with, the emphasis on the difficult situation Ásta encounters seems to be a way to justify the intervention of an obviously pagan agent, as thanks to him neither child nor mother died, as was probably feared by the household: “munu þar dopr heim kynne þuitat Asta Gudbrannz dotter kulu droting mun liggia a golftui ok verda æigi lettare ok hefer verit nockura stund ok mun monnum þikia a þat v uænliga horfazst” (718). The difficulty at birth seems additionally to be a royal trend, which can be found also for instance with the delivery of Magnús Ólafsson (317). Hrani is said to discuss his dream both with the king and with Ásta (“séger henni draumin ok þeim Hatalldi konungi” (718)), and she has a say on whether she accepts or not Hrani’s proposition, and thus Geirstaðaálfr’s intervention: “hon segizst giarrrna uilia at hann rade fyrer nafnri ef þa ueri nockuru nærr um hennar heilsu” (718). It gives Ásta agency, and shows that her opinion concerning herself and her child is to be taken in account. Consequently, she is also the one who decides if she agrees on Hrani’s naming, and her decision is informed by Hrani’s account of the mound-dream (which is not the case in all the versions of this þattr, as will be discussed). Thus, alongside her main role as Óláfr’s conveyer to life, she also appears as an independent agent having influence on his future.

The importance given by this episode to naming calls for more attention, especially regarding the link it creates between a new-born and the forefather he is named after. Hrani is asked by Geirstaðaálfr to name the future king Óláfr: “þu skal þæizst at rada firer nafne ef sueinn er alit. … mun þat sueinn uera bðsi mikill ok jodligr þu skal Olaf lata hæita” (718). Hrani should then go north to be baptised by Óláfr Tryggvason, before taking care of the freshly born Óláfr. In this way, the narrator creates a continuity between three kings: a pagan one, who was nevertheless qualified as a good chieftain; the missionary king, whose saga focusses on his efforts to bring the true faith to Norway (e.g. Bagge 2006, 473) and

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84 Although it is acknowledged that Óláfr’s family was not Christian yet, linking his birth with a former king who bears ‘álf’ in his name and who is buried with his treasures and warriors in a mound, can seem astonishing at first, if the idea of the narrator is to advertise the Rex perpetuus responsible for Norway’s conversion; a possible explanation will be proposed later on.

85 [There you will find a sad household, because Ásta Guðbrandr kula’s daughter, will be in labour and unable to deliver the child and this will have (already) lasted for hours and it will seem to people that hope was lost.]

86 [She said that she will be glad (to let him) counsel for the name if that could anyhow improve her health.]

87 This however seems to stop as soon as Óláfr can speak, as will be discussed in the next interpolation-theme on her second wedding.

88 To this point, Merrill Kaplan pointed out that naming had a significance in this society, as a term existed for namesakes (Kaplan 2011, 194), and the practice of naming with reference to a deceased ancestor seems customary (Jochens 1996b, 204).

89 [(If) You can counsel the name if the baby was a boy… a boy who will be both big and thriving, and you shall name him Óláfr.]
finally the one who brings definitive conversion and unification to the realm of Norway. As the saga focusses on the Norwegian *Rex perpetuus*, the two previous kings appear as prefiguring his reign and persona. Óláfr Tryggvason is often linked to Óláfr Haraldsson, as the pair is typologically read as John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. The ‘uncanonical’ introduction of the pagan and pagan-named king Geirstaðaálfr in the equation creates a ‘trinity’ of kings, starting in the pagan heroic past, covering the conversion and ending with the saint *rex perpetuus*.  

The following question is then why this continuity is created, which purpose does it serve, and how relevant is it to discuss it in a paragraph focussing on Ásta. First, the *Geirstaðaálfr þáttr* creates an impression of continuity, as an unbroken link from (more or less) legitimate king to legitimate king, in addition of the links of blood these men supposedly shared. Continuity, and thus roots extending deep in the past, were regarded as legitimising a dynasty, or at least showed its prestige, especially when compared to newly established kings - as has been discussed regarding Óláfr svenski’s disdain for Óláfr Haraldsson. In the same way as talking about unification or conquest of a country implies different connotations, creating a lineage of ‘accepted’ kings and showing the approbation regarding Óláfr Haraldsson’s legitimacy as the king of Norway by past rulers is a way to link Óláfr Haraldsson with the past of the land, and thus present his reign and unifying action as natural, logical or in any other manner positively rooted in, and legitimised by, the past. If he is to be the *Rex perpetuus*, the king from whom all the subsequent ones descend, this backing by former kings creates an additional unbroken line between pagan and Christian Norwegian kings.

A response to the first question, about the possible reason for creating a continuity between three Óláfrs, could thus be that this continuity anchored Óláfr’s claim on supreme kingship more firmly in the past than the other petty kings’ one. Now the second part of the question regarding Ásta can be discussed. She is obviously present in the birth scene because she is the mother. Yet, it is also through her body that the new-born Óláfr and Geirstaðaálfr are associated, as the imposition of the latter’s belt eases Ásta’s labour: “lagde Hrani þa hana

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90 Kaplan discusses the significance of *Flateyjarbók*’s þættir dealing with pagan past. In this context, she points out that Geirstaðaálfr, by sending Hrani to be baptised, ensures that Óláfr Haraldsson will grow up in the care of a Christian man. She further points that although some þættir seem to warn against the alluring aspect of pre-Christian knowledge, Geirstaðaálfr is an example of a past worth to build upon, or be part of its continuity (Kaplan 2011, 202–3).

91 Yet they shared them also with the other petty kings.

92 Geirstaðaálfr takes care of Óláfr’s physical birth, and Tryggvason of his soul’s one by baptism.
Concerning the belt, it is worth noting that in twelfth century England and onwards, prayer rolls containing the *vita* of Saint Margaret were used as belts to help women to give birth (Jones and Olsan 2015), and a similar practice also existed in Iceland (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2014). Here, a belt is employed with the same aim, supplanting the divine intervention of a female saint with that of a (male) pagan king.

The point is that the two kings could have been associated together differently; Geirstaðaálfr could have for instance appeared directly to Óláfr later on, and sent him to his mound to get the sword and the ring. Thus, the fact that they are associated through Ásta’s pregnancy needs to be analysed further. My argument is that using Óláfr’s mother to create the link between the kings is a well-thought device to create an impression of biological nature of their link. It creates a parallel between the new-born’s ‘blood-lineage’, as a descendent of hárfragri as all the other petty kings, and the relation to Geirstaðaálfr, which appears thus as a spiritual filiation. Ásta’s body thus, by serving for the biological birth, is symbolically also bearer of a second filiation, by the symbolical intervention of Geirstaðaálfr.

Childbirths are not frequently commented upon, and unless it goes wrong, the birth of even an important person is usually disposed with in one sentence. Thus, the time spent on Ásta’s labour, contextualised by Hrani’s dream of Geirstaðaálfr’s involvement is significant. The episode provides the possibility to depict Ásta as giving the opportunity, by her body and by her agreement, to her son’s double lineage.

The stratagem is similar to many mythological stories which naturalise a social idea to make it less questionable, or more legitimate. This is what seems to happen here; Geirstaðaálfr’s link to Óláfr increases the legitimacy of Haraldsson’s claim, and this link is itself legitimised as well by depicting it on the same level, or of the same nature, as a biological filiation.

To sum up, it seems that with this episode, Óláfr is given an additional anchorage into the Norwegian dynasty and ruling class by being linked to Geirstaðaálfr. His link to Óláfr Tryggvason is furthermore emphasised in this manuscript by the later baptism, and by the report of a discussion between the two Óláfrs later on. On a broader level, there seems thus to be a more elaborated presentation of the roots, continuity and legitimacy of the Norwegian royal line and members. The past has always been used as a way to legitimate the present;

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93 [Hrani laid on her the belt that he took from Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr and soon it was over.]
consequently linking Óláfr Haraldsson to an additional former ruler - from a specific region? - enhances the prestige of the saint, and attaches the king more firmly in the (political) lineage and landscape, giving mythical undertones to his aura and story.

The AM 61 fol. version of Óláfr’s birth is also contained in Geirstaðaálfr’s þáttr. The story seems the same, except for the following differences:

“When ok sa sueinn mun uerða hialp ok heilsa kyns vars. þúiat ver allir munum fagna hans hingat burð ok andlati sua sem ver seem naliga af dauða reistir. þa gripi þu tekkr af mer i hauginum. vil ek at þu selir i hendr Astu. ok bið þu hana uarðueita. ok selia i hendr syni sinum þa er hann uex upp.” (723-4).

Then Hrani’s journey is described until he came to Ásta and her condition gets bad, and people become very concerned “Satu menn yfir henni miok harm þrungnir.” (p.725). In the end they asked Hrani if he did not have any clue. He said he would help if he could have a say on the child’s name; they let him try, and thus Hrani put the belt on her and soon Ásta’s troubles were over.

The main differences with the Flateyjarbók version are that the scene happens after Haraldr grenski’s death, Hrani is explicitly told to never leave Óláfr, and there is no mention of him going to meet and be baptised by Óláfr Tryggvason. Additionally, Geirstaðaálfr gives an explanation on Óláfr’s future importance for the kin and names Ásta as safe-keeper of his goods until Óláfr comes to age. Furthermore, although Ásta accepts Hrani’s company and he tells her the dream before she feels sick, the decision of belt-imposition is granted by ‘people’ who are very concerned about her (“Satu menn yfir henni … þeir sogðu þat skylldu ath uisu” (725).

In the Bæjarbók version, the attention is put more on a direct relation between Óláfr Haraldsson and Geirstaðaálfr, as the narrator places emphasis on the naming; first, in the dream, Geirstaðaálfr requests “ath þid gefid honum nafn mitt ok kallit hann Olaf” (726), and then when the boy is born he was named Óláfr, “epter Olaði digbeinn” (726) and it is furthermore explained that many people were happy about the naming, because they believed

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94 [And this boy will be the help and salvation of our kin, because we all will rejoice his birth and death, since it will almost seem to us that we have been raised from the dead. And these goods that you take, I want you to give them to Ásta for safekeeping, and she will give them to her son when he is grown up.]

95 [The people who sat by her … they said it should be tried.]

96 [That you would give him my name and call him Óláfr.]
that his name “mændi fylgia su gippta sem þeim syndiz Óláfr digrbeinn haft hafa”\(^\text{97}\) as it seemed to them that Geirstaðaálfkr has been a good king at his time, “uitr konungr hollr ok heilradr miukr ok astudigr” (726).\(^\text{98}\) Ásta’s presence is downplayed to the strict minimum; there is no description of direct interaction between her and Hrani, and the only developed ‘detail’ in this version is Óláfr’s significance for the realm and the prophetisation of his good ruler-qualities, thanks to his forefather’s name.\(^\text{99}\)

To conclude, the episode of Hrani’s dream is a good example of how a same core narrative can be used to emphasise different aspects of a message. In Flateyjarbók, the lineage-aspect between Geirstaðaálfkr and Óláfr is highlighted, and Ásta and her body play an important role in the way it is presented. AM 61 fol. and Bergsbók give less agency to Ásta in the belt-imposition, but they make her the official safe-keeper of the goods, as a way to create the link between Geirstaðaálfkr and Óláfr, thus reminding more of a transmission of status – king’s ring – than lineage. Yet, both redactions underline the ‘salvatory’ nature of Óláfr.

**Ásta’s second wedding**

Three manuscripts contain the details of how Ásta married Sigurðr sýr. All present him in competition with a landed man Gizurr, whom Ásta’s kinsmen prefer, yet her choice is influenced by the young Óláfr and his reflection on the difference of prestige between a petty king or a landed man, and their consequences for their sons.

In all the versions of Ásta’s choice of husband, Sigurðr’s lineage is portrayed as important. Whereas in the Stockholm manuscript, his kin is simply stated when she is said to marry him, later interpolations emphasise it. They contrast Sigurðr with the lesser landed man Gizurr, and expand on the lineage-related reasons for why Ásta choses the former, through the counselling of Óláfr on the status these men would transfer to their sons, as in Flateyjarbók:

> “þat seger Hrani mer fostri min at æigi mune verda kústir þui bedri en adal tre at þu muner ala konung vid lendum manni en þu mæter vel ala konung vid þeim er konungborinn er j allar ætter.” (737)\(^\text{100}\)

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\(^\text{97}\) many thought it to bring good luck

\(^\text{98}\) smart, of good counsel and loving towards his men

\(^\text{99}\) The AM 75 fol. has also an account of the þáttir, but as it is very focussed on Hrani’s adventure, does not bring any new information and no other interpolations from this manuscript are discussed, I decided to leave it out.

\(^\text{100}\) Hrani, my foster-father, tells me that the branch of the tree cannot become better than the trunk; that you could raise a king from a landed man, but you could certainly (have) a king from someone descended from kings on every side.]
Another point of the Flateyjarbók episode is the opportunity Ásta’s marriage ‘dilemma’ gives for describing Sigurðr; his outstanding qualities and yet lack of popularity are noted at this point: “hann var uitr madr ok audigr ok fasthalldr af fe. þat var fleire manna vile at árnanu Gizsori kuonfangs þuiat hann var mæir vid alþydu skap” (737). This in turn gives space to build the nature of Óláfr’s relation to Ásta; she disregards the opinions of her kinsmen to follow her child’s advice. However unwise this can seem, the way the narrator describes the two suitors and their lineage portrays her as being legitimised in her approach. Moreover, it shows Óláfr’s outstanding qualities from a young age on, as his counsel is based on political considerations and not on the popularity of a man. In a way, this can put a corner stone for his legitimacy as a leader. Also, it seems to prefigure the post-feast discussion with Ásta, when she says she will not be able to give sound counsels; already there, Óláfr is the decision making man, and she is only the support.

Additionally, one denomination Óláfr uses for his mother needs further comment; after she insists on having his opinion, he asks her if she is an ambitious man: “hue mikill eðtu metnadad madr moder” (737). It is curious that in a context in which she plays very clearly female roles, she is defined and called by such a male-gendered term. Ambition - especially political - appears to belong to the male sphere. This reinforces what has already been said about Ásta’s masculine qualities and ambitions, and the lack of blame towards this. As discussed earlier, this can be linked to the fact that contrary to Álfifa, Ásta’s ambitions are ‘son-oriented’ – to the point that she chooses even her husband in consultation with her son. In a way, Ásta demanding counsel from her son places her in a traditional gender role, although Óláfr’s age makes the scene curious.

The AM 61 fol. offer some variations of this model, as in this version, the opinion of people and difference of popularity between the two men is the same, yet, popular opinion is introduced after a longer exposition of Sigurðr’s qualities. Also, Ásta’s strategy to get Óláfr’s advice is to point out how disappointed she would be if he did not come up with some idea – as a good mother she pushes him to develop his qualities early on. Second, whereas in Flateyjarbók the last line is about Sigurðr’s ancestry, in AM 61 fol., the last words are for his

101 [He was a wise man and rich but ungenerous with wealth. There were many men who wanted that Gizurr got Ásta because he was more popular.]
102 [How ambitious a man are you, mother?]
103 In this passage, she is at the same time a widow, the mother of a future king, a woman choosing her husband in accordance of his significance for the lineage of their future children.
managing abilities and his lack of interest for war: “hann uar landzstiornar maðr goðr. Engi uar hann hermaðr” (738).\footnote{[He was a good estate-manager, but he was no warrior.]} 

There seems thus to be little difference between the two versions of the episode, as both manuscripts emphasise the importance of lineage for political ambitions, and portray Óláfr as able to counsel his mother on this subject better than the older kinsmen. Yet, whereas both variants admit Sigurðr’s superiority over Gizurr, AM 61 fol. version’s end leaves Sigurðr with a less prestigious image than Flateyjarbók.

Ásta gives Bæsingr

In Flateyjarbók and AM 61 fol., the Bæsingr episode underlines Óláfr’s strong character, his stepfather’s interest for costly objects and the tensions it creates between the two men. Ásta plays the link between Geirstaðaálfr and the growing Óláfr, reminding the ‘symbolical’ lineage of Óláfr. When Ásta’s son is eight years old, he finds the sword Bæsingr, and Ásta gives it to him, which triggers Sigurðr’s jealousy and a subsequent confrontation between the two men. There are not marked differences between the two versions of the episode; a slight change of vocabulary in Sigurðr’s misogynist remark (740), and the fact that AM 61 fol. had the specification that Ásta should be the safe-keeper can be underlined as well (740).

In Flateyjarbók, Ásta plays once again the role of a mother refusing nothing to her child, as implied in the Stockholm manuscript’s episode of the buck. She gives the sword as soon as Óláfr expresses the wish to have it (739).\footnote{[“I will have it,” said Óláfr, “and go with it.” Ásta gave him the sword.]} As discussed with the buck-episode, this could be understood as a means of educating future kings, accustoming them to being obeyed, and feeling entitled to it. When he sees Óláfr with the sword, Sigurðr reproaches her: “þat se edli kuenna at lata þat mart eftir bornnum er þarféysa er en þau þarnnast hitt er þarf” (740).\footnote{[This is the nature of women, to indulge children with things which useless are (to them) and to let (these things) be lacking there where they are needed.]}

Yet regarding Ásta’s reaction towards Sigurðr’s anger: “ef þu getr teygt af hannon suo at hann grati æigi þa leyfui ek þat en grat hans vil ek æigi.” (740),\footnote{[(Ásta said) if you manage to get the sword so that he does not cry, then I allow you (to take it), but I do not want his cries.]} she appears more as a mother who does not want to be bothered with petty quarrels. However, it is difficult to make it fit with her overall devoted attitude to Óláfr’s success. Thus it can be proposed that this remark of hers creates a space for Óláfr to be portrayed as a child, but as a truly outstanding and royal
one. By her authority over Sigurðr, and by forbidding him to make Óláfr cry, she sets the opportunity for Óláfr to react - otherwise, Sigurðr could have been described as simply taking the sword by force. Ásta’s role here is outside the males’ competition, as she seemingly does not champion any of them. Yet, the rules she sets limit her husband. She delivers what she was supposed to, and then lets the men settle the issue. It can be both interpreted as a prefiguration of her not intervening in ‘politics’, but also that she has full confidence in her son handling the situation.

In this way, Óláfr’s strength of character is outlined by the very fact of emphasising him being still a child, in contrast for instance to his depiction at the wedding negotiations scene, where he displays an adult ability to understand the situation. However, the possible implication of weakness implied by the crying[^108] is dismissed by the end of the scene, when Óláfr turns the sword against his stepfather, showing a strong determination for protecting what he perceives as rightfully his, even in a desperate situation.

In the AM 61 fol. version, Sigurðr’s critique towards Ásta still concerns women’s, and thus Ásta’s resource-management, as in his opinion she gives to a child something that he does not need. Using this legitimation is interesting, as the narrator was prompt to emphasise earlier Sigurðr’s unwarrior-like features. In turn, this makes wonder how Sigurðr would be more justified than the boy in wanting the sword. This, together with the AM 61 fol. wedding-episode description of him as no warrior but as a rich man withholding his wealth contrary to Gizurr, emphasises slightly his qualification as a greedy man. Thus, his remark framed as an insult to Ásta’s irrationality, seems in the end used by the narrator to underline Sigurðr sýr’s envious and inappropriately proud character.

To conclude, Óláfr is legitimised in his possession of the sword as the previous owner designated him as his successor in this matter. Under this light, Sigurðr’s request appears as immature and disrespected customs. Ásta, on the other hand, grants to Óláfr what he wishes and is entitled to, adopting once more the ‘mother of heroes’ attitude and being active in the transmission of what seems to be a family heirloom.

[^108]: “Crying is not considered masculine in the sagas.” Ármann Jakobsson discusses further how this perception is to be found in many sagas, however he also points that Njáls saga’s attitude towards male tears seems to point more to a condemnation of those using accusations of crying against a man’s manhood, than against the crying man.
Óláfr goes viking

The Flateyjarbók contains a developed version of Óláfr’s wish to go on his first Viking expedition. Whereas in the Stockholm manuscript, it was said that Ásta provided for it without Sigurðr’s involvement, this version presents it as financed by Sigurðr, on Óláfr’s request and Ásta’s command. This episode portrays Ásta as a queen using intercession to promote her son’s request, potentially in line with continental queenship models promoted on the continent (Strohm 1992, chap. 5); she also appears as a wife who can command her husband to sponsor her son’s plans. She is also a regulating force in the tensions between two men of strongly different characters, and enables them to work, more or less, together.

Here Óláfr asks his mother to ask Sigurðr to provide for the ships, but Sigurðr objects that he needs his men for the harvest. To this, Óláfr replies that Sigurðr should prepare the ship, as he will give him ‘enough time to foster many cows’ (“gefa honum tostmund til ategraeda upp margar kyr” (743)), and that he does not intend to come back with fewer men than he set off with. Then Ásta goes back to Sigurðr:

“þat uillda ek at þu leter bua skip sem Olafr bidr uæit ek æigi nema suo beide hann j anann tima at þu uillder fuss þetta hafa til latit verdr mer uant j mille at ganga makliglæika hans ok fasthëllde þinnar” (743).109

Ásta’s intervention can be analysed through the framing, or nature, of her actions – i.e., the content of her words, - but also in light of the fact that this episode could have existed without her, as a direct argument between the two men. To start with, her intervention - Óláfr coming to her with a request he wishes her to transmit to Sigurðr - can be read as intercession and son-promotion.110 Thus this way of presenting Ásta’s intervention could be a way to portray the interactions in the Rex perpetuus’ family modelled on continental ideas. Following this, this episode suggests that Óláfr has knowledge of ‘courtly’ procedures, as he does not address the ‘king’ directly, but uses his mother as an intercessor for a query that will be difficult to obtain. Óláfr uses Ásta’s private access to Sigurðr, as she uses it to promote her son’s interests.

109 [I want this, that you let prepare the ship that Óláfr asked for, because I do not know when such a thing (will happen) another time that you would willingly this have to let be. I will get used to (finding a common ground) between his eagerness and your parsimony.]

110 As has been discussed regarding Ingigerðr and the Norwegian messengers at the Swedish court, the intercessory role of the queen was one accepted and portrayed in continental literature and practice.
Now regarding how Ásta achieves her ends, she simply orders Sigurðr to prepare a ship, after hearing Óláfr’s proud reply. The reasons she gives him is that his excuse is not valid, as she does not think that if Óláfr asked at another time he would have agreed anyway. She also points to the difference between the two men, ending with on Sigurðr’s greediness, which apparently triggers his generosity for the equipment of the ship. The last point to discuss is why Ásta is included in this scene, whose aim seems to be to underline once more the difference of character between Óláfr and his stepfather. From the short analysis presented here, it would appear that the episode gives the redactor an opportunity to show Ásta in the intercessory role of the queen, and in this way inserts the Norwegian kings in the realm of European culture. Additionally, it may be a way to show that (even low scale) politics sometimes benefit from female intervention, as defined by medieval views on gender roles and characteristics.

Another point is that Ásta is the character voicing the comparison between the two men, from her special position as mother and wife. As a woman, she is outside of the competition between males, but as discussed by Bandlien, her opinion contributes to the outcome of the evaluation of the two, and as such making her intervene can be a way to give this comparison more weight. She points to Sigurðr’s lack of generosity, and his lack of warrior and kingly values is obvious from his own speech, and underlined by Óláfr’s response. Ásta’s final command assesses this difference with a definitive blow, by commanding her husband, and in this way uplifting Óláfr’s manhood and downplaying Sigurðr’s one.

A last point I would like to mention is concerning the difference in outcome between the version in the Stockholm manuscript and Flateyjarbók; whereas in the former text, Ásta finances the expedition, and as a result she appears as ‘the man in education’, but here Sigurðr finances it, although under Ásta’s pressure. It can be linked to the Bæsingr episode, at the end of which it is said that afterwards Sigurðr felt differently towards Óláfr, and that the boy grew up well with him. The Flateyjarbók interactions between the child Óláfr and his stepfather seem to give to the latter more space in Óláfr’s upbringing, yet emphasises Sigurðr’s greedy aspect.

Álfifa and Sigurðr’s curse

The next interpolation to consider is about Álfifa, Sigurðr Akason’s curse and its consequences at the Danish court, as presented in Flateyjarbók and Tómasskinna. The episode starts with a description of the otherwise unknown Sigurðr, a successful trader and king
Knútr’s retainer, who happens to be cursed by a trollkona on one of his trips. It happens because he cuts her hand in a fight, defending a merchant-friend of his from whom the trollkona was requesting a due payment. After having been wounded, the woman curses him to never be able to see man’s blood again. Sigurðr then goes back to Denmark and keeps this secret – until Álfífa reveals it to her husband.

The Flateyjarbók episode shows how Álfífa interacts with her husband, bringing him an important information on one of his hirdmaðr’s handicap. In Flateyjarbók, Álfífa voices the accusation, pushes the king to try it and prove her point.

“This triggered the king to put distance between him and Sigurðr, yet sometimes later, Álfífa insists once more on Sigurðr’s ‘treacherous’ secret (“Alfifa tiar nu fyrer konungi ok kallar æigi suika laust vera mundu þetta bragdit” (775)), and the text states that it were her words which caused the king’s anger and Sigurðr’s banishment (“af för tolem hernar æiddizst konungr Sigurdi” (775)), and reaffirm once more that the retainers did not know how she knew about the curse (“en æigi vissu þeit hui hon hafde fregit þetta þuia þeir þotruzst þetta bragd leyniliga gert hafa med ser” (775)). The emphasis in this redaction thus is on Álfífa’s tenacity to persuade the king against Sigurðr, and on the fact that no one knew how she was aware of the secret.

In Tómasskinna, some additional details are introduced. Álfífa criticises Sigurðr’s placement of honour at the king’s table by the fact that he is not worthy of it due to his inability to see blood an information she knew thanks to old magic “þetta uissi hun af fornum gaulldrum” (777). After putting the information to the test, the king trusts Sigurðr less than before, yet he nevertheless calls upon him when he goes to war. On the way, a man attacks Sigurðr, but

111 [Álfífa told the king about Sigurðr that he had won a mighty victory over a certain giantess and she told about this event and that it was a great curse for such a doughty and valiant man if he should never be able to see blood. This condition had gone secretly and men seemed not to know how she had become aware of this.]
112 [Álfífa shows now before the king and calls this scheme not without treachery … ]
113 [And now from her ‘words intended to persuade’, the king became angry at Sigurðr.]
114 [They did not know how she had been informed about this because they considered themselves to have organised this trick in secret by.]
115 [She had learnt that from ancient witchcraft.]
when the king wants to put the aggressor to death, Sigurðr asks him not to. When they come home in the evening, Álfífa intervenes once more, attacking Sigurðr’s reliability and usefulness, the result being the king’s anger, and Sigurðr’s dishonour and departure:

“Eigi eru aurugger uiner þíner ok eigi mundi suo farit hafa frendur hans ok seiger nu Knuti konungi huersu farit hafdi med þeim traullikunune. eda huat skulu ydur sliker menn er til einkis eru nyter j her faurum. þo af storum ættum sic” (777).116

In Flateyjarbók, Sigurðr’s fault seems to be that he kept his situation secret from the king, and that his warrior abilities were affected comes as second. Yet in Tómasskinna, the prime concern is the nature of the affect, as Álfífa’s interventions point two things. First, that a man who cannot see blood is not worth the honour of sitting at king’s table, and second, that noble birth does not compensate for a man’s worth if he is useless as a warrior for his king.

The curse affects Sigurðr’s worth as a warrior, and a king needs warriors upon whom he can rely, and thus Álfífa’s intervention seems to be beneficial for her husband. Yet, in Tómasskinna especially, the implied meaning seems more ambiguous. She is said to have acquired this knowledge through ancient galdrar,117 witchcraft or magic chants. This merits more attention, as what has been argued for Íslendingasögur ‘magic’ works as well for konungasögur’s depictions: “in these texts magic is fictionalized and fulfils a literary purpose” and can “engage larger socio-political questions and the idea of individual agency” (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2009, 409). William Sayers discussed the attribution of witchcraft to the other konungasögur’s ‘evil queen-mother’ Gunnhildr. He pointed how the portrayal of Gunnhildr’s magic practice was a destabilising factor in the Íslendingasögur where she appears (Sayers 1995, 64–65). In the broader context of European medieval queenship and kingship formation, Earenfight pointed out that accusation of witchcraft were amongst the weapons to harm the image of a queen (Earenfight 2013, 75). Nicolas Meylan discussed magic in konungasögur as a disruptive force threatening the normal order of things, and pointed that most of the characters targeted by discourses of magic suffer a negative images and “receive features distinctive of the ‘other’” (Meylan 2014, 74, 79). He further notes how in both Grágás and Gulaping, laws condemned magic with the highest punishments, for the consequence of these practices was understood as threatening the social

116 [“Your friends are not reliable”, and (she said that) his relatives would not have proceeded in this way. She then says to Knútr how it went with Sigurðr and the trollkona. “And what use are such men who to no one’s use are in war, even if they are from noble kin.”]

117 Galdrar were for instance mentioned among the forbidden pagan practices in Gulaping laws (Bagge and Nordeide 2007, 162).
order itself (Meylan 2014, 60–63). Yet, he also points to the depiction of magic in Rauðúlfr’s þáttr, to discuss how although condemned, magic is still a way to acquire knowledge “of great benefit to worldly leaders” (Meylan 2014, 98).

These last points bring new insights for the understanding of Álfifa’s use of ‘fornar galdrar’. Her use of magic is not condemned directly by the narrator; and she indeed brings useful knowledge to her king. Yet, with regards to the outcome of the short episode – Sigurðr finds shelter at Öláfr’s court, potentially showing the Norwegian king’s Christian and just attitude – Álfifa’s action appears as harming an ‘innocent’ man, already suffering from his curse. Álfifa’s agency, materialised through her magically acquired knowledge and expressed via her private access to the king, appears as a disruptive force in the king’s hirð, threatening the position of an otherwise respected retainer. The sympathies of the narrators seem to be on Sigurðr’s side, as he did not do anything wrong to deserve his situation. This episode can be read as an illustration of the threat the queen’s access to the king can pose to the retainers; moreover, Tómasskina’s justification of Álfifa’s knowledge through ‘ancient magic’ gives to her intervention an even grimmer evaluation.

‘A foal and a mare’

In Flateyjarbók, people’s discontent with Sveinn and Álfifa’s rule is developed further, as it is said that great misery and distress came upon the realm, as “folkit lifde mæir uit bufear fódr en manna mat” (837).¹¹⁸ This is followed by a skaldic stanza by Sighvatr which compares Álfifa’s reign and origin to Öláfr’s. This episode is followed by an altercation between Álfifa and Einarr, staged at the Níðaros assembly, where there was supposed to be a discussion about farmers’ loss of rights, “en þa var æinge er man r at male hans ne Alfífu” (837).¹¹⁹ And when no consensus could be reached, Einarr intervened. He started by saying that he was not a friend of Óláfr Haraldson, but he then pointed out that the people from Trondelag “selldu konung sinn helgann ok toku vid fyl ok meri konungr þessi kann ecki at mæla en moder hans vill illt æit” (838).¹²⁰ People then started to laugh; Álfifa said that the farmers should sit down and listen to their king, but then Einarr spoke once more, telling the people to go home instead of listening to a woman, and pointing once more to Óláfr being truly recognised as saint now.

¹¹⁸ [People lived more on live-stock fodder rather than food proper for people.]
¹¹⁹ [But no space was made neither for his (Sveinn’s) speech nor Álfífa’s.]
¹²⁰ [Sold their holy king and took instead a foal and a mare, a king who can not speak and his mother has only evil intentions.]
The situation uses once more Álfifía’s gendered identity (queen mother) and origin (foreign) to attack the legitimacy of her rule, especially when confronted with a Norwegian chieftain like Einarr. It is also interesting to note the content of the insult Einarr uses; Sveinn and Álfifía are compared to animals, and earlier in the text the suffering of the people is also linked to the animal realm, as they did not have proper human food. The text presents Álfifía’s rule in terms directly undermining her legitimacy as a ruler; she is unsuccessful in guaranteeing the fertility of the realm, she is compared to a mare and implicitly criticised for her influence over her son, and later on her utterance is termed as ‘woman’s word’, un-acknowledging her status of official, although disliked, ruler. The way the attacks are built, using the natural realm for their imagery, seems to anchor the critique not on the level of her being a bad ruler, but an ‘unnatural’, wrong one, especially compared to the now ‘truly saint’ Óláfr, or even to the authority that the Norwegian Einarr has.

Swedish courtship

The last interpolations to consider concern the Swedish princesses’ courtship. Two of the later manuscripts, Bergsbók and Tómasskinna contain a variation of it. They describe Óláfr Haraldsson’s reaction to the cancellation of his engagement with Ingigerðr, as well as Ástríðr’s subsequent courtship, in very different terms from the Stockholm text.

“He was thinking now about how he shall avenge this infringement to his reputation. Due to this, men said that Óláfr had lesser strength than any man in the world knows of. He went to the church evening and morning and never sat with a drink. He rested in his chamber, where doorkeepers were held. He spoke few.

Contrary to the Stockholm manuscript’s version, Óláfr’s reaction of distress is not only temporary. Although the situation is presented as a blow to king’s honour and although the king knows that he needs to seek revenge in both versions, the emotional description takes over the political in Bergsbók. He does not summon a þing straight after to decide whether and when to attack the Swedish king, but on the contrary, stays in his bed. The situation changes only on the initiative of Ástríðr, who comes to Norway although “aller lottv mik en einki fysti. at eins mannz ordvm var þetta giort” (769). Contrary of the main text, Ástríðr goes directly to Norway, and she says it is on her sister’s demand. She also points that nobody

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121 [King Ólaf was thinking now about how he shall avenge this infringement to his reputation. Due to this, men said that Ólaf had lesser strength than any man in the world knows of. He went to the church evening and morning and never sat with a drink. He rested in his chamber, where doorkeepers were held. He spoke few.]

122 [All wanted to dissuade me and none was eager to (come); this was done on the advice of one person.]
else is involved in the decision making. Ingigerðr, through her sister, assures Óláfr of her everlasting friendship, of her wish to maintain the agreement, but she also asks him to not let his sorrow affect his friends and weights upon them, when it is due to his enemy. And importantly enough, the breach of the agreement is mentioned in terms of honour loss for Óláfr. Then Ástríðr leaves, and comes back three days later.

In this second meeting, Ingigerðr’s message is further transmitted, and Ástríðr tries to trigger the king’s reaction by dangling her sister’s expensive gifts in front of the king – who would receive them only after having replied to her. Ingigerðr wants the king to cheer up, and urges him to find a new love – possibly in the place of her sister: “þv skylder læta þer ast rads nyligs ok hygia marger menn þa skiotara af harmi sinvm. þotti hennu þat rad ath þu leitader j þa alfv er þettı hellzt vid þit hęfi vera” (769).  

The last time Ástríðr goes to the king, she lifts up her veil, threatens him to leave if he stays silent and transmits the last part of Ingigerðr’s message. She wishes him then a successful reign and prepares to leave. However, the king finally reacts, talks to her the entire day, then goes to Mass and says that he will resume his royal duties. The episode ends on the comment that this was the beginning of Ástríðr’s positive reputation, and that they were very satisfied with her successful mediation.  

She talks about leaving, and starts her farewell message with an additional reminder of her sister, but also about a more political message, concerning the peace with Sweden, and she also reminds the king of the dishonour Óláfr Eiríksson had put on him. She says that if she leaves now, Óláfr of Sweden will never get repaid for the dishonour he caused to the Norwegian king. She offers the solution for this repayment: the Norwegian Óláfr could marry Ástríðr without the consent of her father.  

Thus, she uses three types of arguments to bring the king back from his lethargy: politics (peace), love (the message comes from Ingigerðr) and ‘egging’ (the reminder about his personal honour). Whereas the latter is a common Íslendingasögur trope, the engagement for peace, and the ‘intercessory’ aspect it gives to the woman is more common in fornaldarsögur (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 16). Moreover, intercession is also a role given to Ingigerðr and more broadly, it is a role that

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123 She said [you should seek a new love match and many men will leave their sorrow more quickly (if they do this). She thought it wisest that you looked in the area that were most suitable for you.]  
124 “Sva hofs fyrst met ord Astridar at allir þottuz gott af hennar” (770).  
125 “þat meltri Ingigerdr syster min ath eigi veri synt ath Olafi Svia konungi þetti minni svivirding at þv fastnader þer dottar hans adra med slikvm maldaga sem hana” (770).
medieval European queens were supposed to perform (e.g. Strohm 1992, 117). Although less prominent as the other ‘tools’, the pervasive reminder that Ástríðr comes on Inggerðr’s behalf instrumentalises king’s love to push him to act. As demonstrated in the analysis of the thirteenth century text-witness, king’s love sorrow was only very briefly hinted at, and gave space almost immediately to his anger, switching the topic to the honour and political aspect of the situation.

Thus, in this later version Ástríðr gains some (additional) agency. Her travel is presented as going against her foster father’s will, and has been decided only by her sister – the men had no say in it. Comparatively, in the earlier version, the idea has been formulated by king’s allies, the jarl Rǫgnvaldr and the skald Sighvatr. Ástríðr agrees, and then messengers discuss it with the Norwegian king before the two meet. In Bergsbók version however, the king is not a political actor anymore; it is her role to make him into one again. In this way, she goes with the positive examples of female royal characters – which is also the evaluation that she is granted by the end of the passage, when thanks to her the king returns to his hirð.

In the Tómasskinna redaction, Ástríðr comes to the Norwegian court and visits the king three times in his room. However, in this version Óláfr is more talkative – and the episode’s focus different. The marriage proposal comes directly from Ástríðr, in an attempt to achieve a peace-settlement; after three unsuccessful meetings with the king, she says that “faþir hennar mundi unna honum þess raðs at fa hennar. en konungr ser ekki um þat fiðaþ” (771).126 Óláfr’s refusal of Ástríðr has to do with neither vengeance nor love-sickness, but, in the Swedish king’s words,127 is due to the ‘foolish love’ driven by lust, girnd, that Óláfr has for Inggerðr. Anne Heinrichs has interpreted this comment as referring to a breach in Etiquette codes (Heinrichs 1999, 43), and additionally, the text seems to imply that a king too much in love is dangerous for the realm, as he almost refuses peace because of his ‘fascination’ for Inggerðr.128 In the end, Óláfr recovers his royal attitude (and rationality) only when Ástríðr makes him realise that due to his love-stubbornness, he will have war and death of Christian people on his consciousness.

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126 [My father will surely grant this, that he marries her. Yet she did not convinced the king.]
127 “hann kallar yckr þat girndar rað” (770) [because he considers it a foolish-lust match.]
128 In Heimskingla, the account about Haraldr hárfagri’s obsessive love for the sorceress Snæfríðr, and how this obsession made him forget about his royal duties and thus threatened the whole realm, makes this claim. An overview of the different interpretations of this episode, as well as an examination of Snæfríðr as both a witch and a Finn can be find for instance in Magic and Kingship in Medieval Iceland (Meylan 2014, 80–82). See also Bandlien’s discussion on the moral value of the example of Snæfríðr for kings to be warriors and kings first, and to not put women “easily accessible … higher than their royal duties” (Bandlien 2005, 135).
She appears thus as the wise and counselling (soon to be) queen, successfully interceding for the population’s good. Óláfr’s initial weakness can even be read in a positive light thanks to her; in the end, he is a good king, who is able, when well counselled, to put his realm’s needs before his own desires (see also Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, chap. 4).

Relatively to this, Tómasskinna’s version seems to is proposed to the readers an idealised version of the behaviour and relations between royal characters, as in this redaction, even the Swedish Óláfr is given sound reasons for his refusal of the first marriage. In the other passages, the conflict’s stagnation seems to come mostly from his stubbornness and lack of respect for the Norwegian Óláfr. In this passage however it is not the case, and once the Norwegian-Óláfr is also able to act rationally, peace can be reached.

The manuscripts and their trends
The precedent section has explored examples of interpolations from later redactions of the Separate saga. Based on these observations, and on the information available about the manuscripts, this section will discuss if the text witnesses present specific tendencies in their treatment of royal women, and if these could reflect broader socio-political changes.

Flateyjarbók
The manuscript GKS 1005 fol., also known as Flateyjarbók is now preserved at the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík, and is dated to the late fourteenth century. It was produced in Iceland, commissioned by the wealthy Jón Hákonarson (1350-1416), and two scribes worked on it: Jón Bórðarson, from 1387 to 1388, and, subsequently, Magnús Þórhallson. The manuscript has 202 leaves, and contains kings’ sagas, especially Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar and Óláfs saga helga, both with additional þættir. The Flateyjarbók has been compiled based on 44 manuscripts, and the konungasögur present there show both political and hagiographical trends. Regarding the ‘Óláfr-sagas’, Johnsen and Jón Helgason note that similarly to Bergsbók and AM 61 fol., Flateyjarbók presents both sagas with an introductory passage, however, everything that could be considered as a repetition is omitted. Thus, the

129 [Now the matters we discussed are in your hands, and I think that if you are such a clever man as everyone says you are, that you would give up because of a difference between sisters. … And this is most likely, that your stubbornness will cost the life of many Christian men.]
Separate saga starts directly with Óláfr Haraldsson’s birth, chapter 18; two þættir are added concerning it, and they create a link between Óláfr and two of his older namesakes, Óláfr grenski and Óláfr Geirstaðaðalfr. Flateyjarbók’s version of the saga has the most interpolations and changes. Miracles are shortened or omitted, which the editors explain with the contempt for repetitions, as these would have appeared in the saga of the later king Magnús. After the two Óláfs-sagas, the manuscript contains Noregs konungatal, some passages from Adam of Bremen, and Sverris saga (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 1030–33).

Now that the interpolations have been explored, I will look if common trends can be seen within the different manuscripts. Flateyjarbók has furnished most of the stories. Several aspects of Ásta are highlighted in this text witness; her pregnancy and motherhood are emphasised, both by showing how she benefits from the birth of the prodigy son, and how she is a double dynasty-provider for his legitimacy. Her understanding of the importance of lineage for kings is also underlined. She is also the guardian of the symbols of kingship that she transmits to her son – almost a figure of sovereignty – and a model of the proper queen regent. In her mothering activities, she is also depicted with traits of intercessory queens, interceding and putting limits to male competition and resolving tensions.

Yet, there is also another queen who gets the attention, the foreign regent Álfífa. Contrary to Ásta’s, her description seems to emphasis the threatening aspects of the queen, such as the misuse of private access to the king to harm retainers, and the overruling of her son. The emphasis is also on her political action, the consequences of her reign on the Norwegian realm and on her lack of authority when confronted with Einarr, a proper Norwegian leader.

An interesting insight into Flateyjarbók’s origin story is developed by Rowe, who follows Ólafur Halldórsson’s proposition that the manuscript could have been intended as a gift for the Norwegian king Óláfr Hákonarson, but would have lost its purpose after the death of the young king in 1387. She argues that the attitude of the first scribe Jón Dóðarson towards the Norwegian king is bidirectional, with both Icelanders and kings having obligations towards each other; and his modification tends to be ‘Christianising’ the two Óláfrs. Also, the way the sagas are reworked point towards a specific editorial intention, as the addition of passages cannot be explained only as a prolongation for prolongation’s sake, due to the fact that other known episodes are shortened (Rowe 2005, 37).

The interpolation of þættir into konungasögur has been understood as a way to address counsels to the king; however, if Flateyjarbók was indeed addressed to the young Óláfr
Hákonarson, such counselling can have a hidden critique – if the queen Margareta did educate her son properly, there would not be a need for an educational manuscript (Rowe 2005, 50). Rowe’s understanding of Jón’s modifications is that he wanted to provide ‘moral lessons’ and models of royal behaviour, as well as a kind of plea for good Iceland-Norway relationship.

In my opinion, the opposition that can be spotted between Ásta’s actions and Álfífa’s ones can allow us to formulate an additional hypothesis; that the critique of Margareta was not only directed towards the education she gave her son – in the fourteenth century it was most likely not seen as her charge only – but a warning towards what makes a good queen mother and queen regent. It is tempting to see Ásta as the good role model of the queen who sticks with conform gender roles such as intercession, support of her male kin and who is thus working for the realm’s peace and prospering, and Álfífa a warning of the dangers for court and realm of having a too ambitious woman and mother who usurps the power which belongs to her son.

**AM 61 fol.**

The AM 61 fol. is dated to no later than second half of the fourteenth century by Jón Sigurðsson, and the editors of the present version point that the most likely dating is mid- or later half of the fourteenth century. The manuscript contains both Óláfr-sagas; the Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, as well as the first part of the Separate Saga, both written by the same hand. This first part of the latter saga has many interpolations, and has been based on the same manuscript as the Olafs saga helga edited in Fornmanna sögur IV-V. The second part of the saga was written by at least three different hands and has almost no interpolation; moreover, it seems to have been written later, and based on a manuscript belonging to another class of the saga. The editors think that it can be dated even to the very early fifteenth century (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 970–78).

The AM 61 fol. material parallels Flateyjarbók interpolations on Ásta, and seems to also emphasise her importance for the dynastical legitimacy of her son. There also is a stronger emphasis on Óláfr’s significance for his realm, his kin and Christianity. The lack of interpolations on the other queens considered is explained by the later redaction of the second part of the manuscript, probably based on a manuscript from another tradition, as pointed out in the sources’ description.
**Bergsbók**

The Holm. Perg. fol. nr. 1, commonly called *Bergsbók*,\(^{130}\) has been dated around 1400 (Rowe 2005, 16). The manuscript has 210 leaves, and contains, in the following order *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, the poem *Rekstefja*, composed in ca. 1200 by Hallar-Steinn about Óláfr Tryggvason, *Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar* by Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, followed by *Lilja* and *Geisli*, poems in *dróttkvætt* metre, the latter of which is about Saint Óláfr. The rest of the manuscript, leaves 119-210, are dedicated to the saga of Saint Óláfr, which starts with the heading “Her byriar vpp lifes sogo dyrligs uinart dorttens vors Jesu Christi hins agæta olafs konungs haralz sonar postula norðrlanda ok pislar votz thessins sama lausnara vors.” The text of the saga has been completed later with a medieval poem about the Saint (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 1008), and “contains thirty larger additions of miracles, marvels and episodes from Óláfr’s life of asceticism, two of which are unknown elsewhere” (Rowe 2005, 16). The text seems to have been written based on different sources, but some changes do not have a detectable side-source. On the whole, the editors Johnsen and Jón Helgason evaluated the text as not significantly different from the Stockholm one, and pointed that the changes do not affect the overall meaning of the text.

*Bergsbók* is interesting as it has an interpolation on all Ásta, Álfifa and Ástríðr. Ásta’s importance in the birth scene is downplayed, comparatively to *Flateyjarbók*, and the insistence seems more on a direct link between Óláfr Geirstaðálfr and Óláfr Haraldsson, as well as on the significance of the future saint king for Christianity in Norway. Ástríðr is offered the role of king’s saviour from his terrible love-sickness, and the interpolation about Álfifa accentuates the superiority of a male Norwegian leader over a foreign queen.

**Tómasskinna**

The manuscript GKS 1008 fol, or *Tómasskinna*, is dated around 1400s. Originally, it contained 167 leaves, of which now 165 are preserved. The first part contains the saga of Thomas Becket, written by three hands, the third being also the one writing *Óláfs saga helga*. The quality of the first part of the manuscript, written by the two first hands, is higher than the part written by the third hand. The third hand’s work also seems to have occurred later, sometime during the fifteenth century. The text of the saga is copied without the prologue, and is interpolated. Some chapters were omitted (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 1034–37).

\(^{130}\) Unless specified otherwise, this paragraph is based on (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 1005–24).
text witness contains the courtship interpolation that emphasises Óláfr’s lust for Ingigerðr but final decision to marry Ástríðr, thanks to her patient intervention to make him realise the importance of peace between the realms for Christian people, underlining the intercessory and peace-weaving aspects of queenship. It also contains the interpolation on Álfífð disturbing the harmony at her husband’s court by acquiring knowledge on his retainers through magic. If something is to be read from this meagre material, the starting point can be the emphasis on Óláfr’s wife Christianity, versus his anti-hero model’s use ‘ancient magic’.

Neither Ástríðr nor Álfífð’s image drastically changes from this development of their qualities; yet it anchors their reputation in another type of discourse than political only. As has been discussed in Álfífð’s interpolation, the Church’s attitude towards magic changed in the decades before the writing down of this text-witness, and witchcraft was then considered as more severe threat to society than before. Having the opposition of a more Christian Ástríðr and more sorcerous Álfífð is then a nice illustration of the way evolutions of values could be projected on a text to emphasize certain old points with new attitudes – although based only on this evidence, it needs probably to be considered anecdotal.

To sum up, by focussing on eight episodes absent from the oldest redaction of the Stockholm manuscript, this section demonstrated that the Separate saga was adapted through time by the redactors. Further conclusions could be reached if more episodes were studied; yet, it can be observed that the representations of the queens were rather emphasised than radically changed, and that the later redactions of the saga tend to highlight dynastical concerns and Óláfr’s significance for Christianity in Norway.

**Conclusion**

This thesis has explored the roles of several queens linked to Óláfr Haraldsson in his Separate saga, to discuss how their descriptions, and the description of their actions, reflect the saga’s ideological subtext. The point of interest was to see if and how gender norms intervene in the legitimising discourses of kingship, and how the royal women were involved in it. This work has thus had two main objectives; first, to discuss the roles of royal women in several variants of the Separate saga, and second, to evaluate if these variations can reveal either the evolution of gender and queenship norms, or changing attitudes and expectations of the narrator and his audience. To this end, episodes from five manuscripts have been considered and compared in
search for changes in the ideological subtext of the saga. The studied manuscripts are the Stockholm manuscript [Holm. Perg. 2 4to] from the thirteenth century, Flateyjarbók [GKS 1005 fol.] from the late fourteenth century, AM 61 fol. from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, Bergsbók [Holm. Perg. fol. nr.1] and Tómasskinna [GKS 1008 fol.] both from early fifteenth century, all edited in 1941 by Oscar Albert Johnsen and Jón Helgason.

The first part of the thesis discussed the *Separate saga* version from the thirteenth century, by looking at four royal women from different backgrounds. These are Ásta, the daughter of an otherwise unknown nobleman from Norway, married to two of Haraldr hárfagri’s descendants and mother of Óláfr; Ástríðr and Ingigerðr, the daughters of the Swedish king who conduct marriage negotiations with their father’s enemy; and Álfífá, the Mercian wife of the Danish king Knútr and king Sveinn’s mother. My analysis of their portraits and actions in the Stockholm manuscript, the saga’s oldest extant near-complete manuscript, has unveiled several episodes involving these women through which the narrator’s opinion on kingship is visible. As I have shown, the portrayals of the royal women contribute significantly to the construction of the saga’s discourse on kings’ ideal qualities and queens’ attitudes and actions.

The analysis of the four queens and queens-to-be presented here provides a review of thirteenth-century attitudes to and depictions of royal women and their power. Through these characters, the narrator explores diverse themes, such as mothering, courtship, marriage and royal women’s intercession. Ásta and Álfífá display different images of a king’s mother’s behaviour. While Ásta illustrates how a mother should raise and promote her son, Álfífá exemplifies the threat of usurpation of a king’s power a queen-regent may represent. Ingigerðr, Ástríðr and Ásta all demonstrate that a woman’s personality and determination to succeed can have a profound effect on her changing fortunes, but her rank is a matter over which she has less control. Although they are described as actively seeking to secure their status through a wedding or son promotion, they are all affected by the importance of lineage: Ásta when her first husband wants to abandon her for a queen of higher status, and the Swedish sisters when they are compared to gold and mud due to their mothers’ different statuses. Thus, it can be said that the Stockholm manuscript’s text of the *Separate saga* outlines clearly women’s role in the nascent monarchical institution: to marry a man of royal lineage, and to have a son whom she will raise and promote towards power.

The power or actions of the saga-queens do not seem to be judged on the basis of their gender and their conformity to the socially ascribed norms. Rather, their evaluations are relative to
the beneficiary of their actions’ goal. Ásta’s disrespectful behaviour towards her husband Sigurðr, and her lack of deference to him, is against both pre-Christian and Christian customs; yet her overall image is that of a supportive mother, as her actions aim at promoting her son’s ambitions. Ingigerðr’s and Ástríðr’s disobedience and wedding-planning with their father’s enemies do not bring them social or narratorial stigma either, as they are acting for the greater, Norwegian, good, from the narrator’s point of view. Álfifa’s rule receives a different treatment, as her power does not benefit any male protagonist to whom the narrator is sympathetic, but, rather, a foreign ruler to whom the Norwegians are hostile.

Moreover, the royal women also build a ‘middle-ground’ to compare Óláfr and other rulers, to his benefit. Ásta’s critique of Sigurðr’s lacking masculinity highlights Óláfr’s ambitions and legitimacy as a ruler; the Swedish sisters’ interest for Óláfr, and Ástríðr’s secretly arranged wedding with him, contribute to make him gain the upper hand in his confrontation with Óláfr svenski. Álfifa is the exception, as her rulership creates the direct opposition to point out Óláfr’s legitimacy to rule, as contrary to her, he was a male ruler of Norwegian origin, who respected people’s customs. In the end, it thus appears that the gender norms and their respect are primarily important for the kings and not as crucial for the queens or princesses. A king’s mother who displays masculine behaviour or ambitions will not necessarily receive disapproval or stigma; yet the king who fails to be a manly and ambitious warrior will be exposed to blame, or receive a matronym.

The second part of the thesis presented interpolations from several younger text witnesses of the Separate saga, in order to determine whether there were any differences in the royal women’s depictions over time and in the transmission of the narrative. Although fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts have added chunks of text not found in the Stockholm manuscript, no drastic changes to the representation of royal women were noticed; rather, the roles each queen had in the Stockholm manuscript were maintained or accentuated by the later redactions. Ásta’s motherhood tended to be emphasised in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century variations, and so, too, Ástríðr’s involvement for peace, and similarly, Álfifa’s negative influence on the Norwegian realm was amplified. Each one of the discussed manuscripts seems to have a thematic aspect which is stressed by the redactor, but, in order to make further assertions, a more thorough and complete consideration of the text-witnesses would be necessary. However, it can be noted that in all the later manuscripts, changes concerning Óláfr, Ásta and Ástríðr tend to emphasise Christian behaviour and attitudes.
To conclude, this thesis has pointed out that focusing on queens in a konungasaga can be profitable for the study of kings and kingship, as royal women’s actions and descriptions are intertwined with the central preoccupations of the monarchical institution, such as the perpetuation of the dynasty. But primarily, it has demonstrated the various roles royal women can be depicted to inhabit in a saga, and how these roles are used to contribute to the ideological subtext of the narrative. Additionally, these roles present certain parallels to discourses on queens in the continental literature, showing the importance of studying saga queens also in the light of their southern counterparts. Finally, this research has illustrated how a saga’s narrative is modified during its transmission, and how the differences between text witnesses can provide a starting point to discuss scribes’ intentions as well as changing social norms.
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