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## Magnus Barefoot — the Last Viking King of Norway?

In the popular opinion, Haraldr hardradi's death in the battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066 is often perceived as a symbolic end of the Viking Age.<sup>1</sup> However, this moment should perhaps be postponed to 24<sup>th</sup> August 1103, when, following his ten-year reign as king of Norway, his grandson Magnus fell in combat, after having been caught in an ambush in Ulster. Some of the Old Norse accounts of his reign tend to compare the two rulers by depicting Magnus as a true and dedicated follower of his grandfather. Unsurprisingly, the circumstances of Magnus's last stand are frequently seen as the best illustration of this image, in terms of both its positive and negative connotations. This naturally provokes one to ask whether this particular image of Magnus should be considered only as a highly imaginative construct of later medieval Scandinavian historiography or, rather, as a reflection of the genuine policy of Magnus to see himself as the heir and follower of his famous grandfather. The present article is an attempt to find an answer to this question.

Textual evidence in the contemporary skaldic poetry dedicated to Magnus appears to make such an option at least plausible. Magnus, the only son of the Norwegian king Olaf kyrri, was born around 1073. Twenty years later, he succeeded his father on the throne. Having crashed the opposition of his cousin Hákon Magnusson and his supporters, Magnus was able to make his name known also outside Norway by turning his attention to the political

<sup>1</sup> See P.H. SAWYER: *Kings and Vikings*. London—New York 1982, p. 6; F.D. LOGAN: *The Vikings in History*. London—New York 1983, p. 178; Ph. PARKER: *Furia Ludzi Północy. Dzieje świata wikingów*. Poznań 2016, pp. 361—410; J.D. RICHARDS: *The Vikings. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford 2005, p. 134.

developments in the British Isles. Magnus's activity there evinces itself in the two expeditions he led there. The first one, undertaken in 1097–1098, resulted in the instalment of his son Sigurðr as a new jarl of the Orkney Islands as well as the submission of the Hebrides and taking over the Isle of Man. The latter would become his residence and a very convenient location when it comes both to the control of the main trading route between the British Isles and Scandinavia, and to his ensuing military activity in the area.<sup>2</sup> The achievements of the Norwegian king could not have gone unnoticed by the local powers, in particular, Edgar the Valiant, king of Scotland, and Muirchertach Ua Brian, the ruler of Munster and Dublin. Magnus probably found both rulers powerful enough to be his allies, although the contacts between the three sides were quite regularly plagued by distrust and caution in trying to keep the previous positions.<sup>3</sup>

The first expedition of Magnus in the West ended with his raid of Wales in the summer of 1098, resulting in the rather accidental strife with the Norman forces at Anglesey, led by the earls Hugh of Chester and Hugh of Montgomery. As a result, the latter of the two leaders was killed — perhaps by Magnus himself — which is the fact that came to be widely echoed in the Norse and Anglo-Norman accounts. Some scholars see these events as an attempt to conquer England — a remarkable feat by means of which he would appear to try to emulate his grandfather Harald. Such interpretations should, however, be regarded with great caution or even dismissed. Shortly after the battle of Anglesey, Magnus returned to Norway.<sup>4</sup>

The second expedition in the West started in either 1101 or 1102, culminating with Magnus's death in Ulster in the August of 1103. This time, the king strove to strengthen the “insular kingdom” of his son Sigurðr and further pursue his own interests in Dublin, still the most important trading centre in north-western Europe at that time.<sup>5</sup> The expedition once again brought Magnus to the Isle of Man and resulted in his strong military presence in Ireland. This made Muirchertach very cautious, and so, in order to ensure peace between the two monarchs, the king of Munster and Dublin decided to marry his daughter Bjadmynja to Sigurðr Magnusson. The move appears to have been highly profitable to both sides, with Magnus becoming allied to the most powerful ruler in the region (thus opening Dublin to the Norwegian

<sup>2</sup> *Heimskringla* III. Ed. BJARNI Aðalbjarnarson. Íslensk fornrit 28. Reykjavík 2002, pp. 219–225.

<sup>3</sup> See HAKI Antonsson: *St. Magnús of Orkney. A Scandinavian Martyr-Cult in Context*. Leiden—Boston 2007, p. 82; R. POWER: *Magnus Barelegs' Expeditions to the West*. “Scottish Historical Review” 1986, Vol. 65, No. 180, pp. 112–120.

<sup>4</sup> *Heimskringla* III..., pp. 222–223; see also R. POWER: *Magnus Barelegs' Expeditions...*, pp. 119–120; P.A. WHITE: *The Latin Men. The Norman Sources of the Scandinavian Kings' Sagas*. “Journal of English and German Philology” 1999, Vol. 98/2, pp. 166–169.

<sup>5</sup> C. KRAG: *The Early Unification of Norway*. In: *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*. Volume 1: *Prehistory to 1520*. Ed. K. HELLE. Cambridge 2003, p. 199.

and Orcadian trade) and Muirchertach raised in his hopes that any further endeavours of Magnus would not affect his power and position in the Hiberno-Norse world.<sup>6</sup>

It may be quite safely assumed that, notwithstanding the alliance, the king of Muster and Dublin would count on the weakening of the Norse influence in the region and that, in the end, “the insular kingdom” of Sigurðr would not last long. Muirchertach knew very well that to achieve this goal, he would have to take any opportunity to weaken the condition of Magnus and to make his political and military activities as problematic as possible. Such an opportunity did indeed occur before long, when the king of Norway decided to return north. Muirchertach was expected to supply the Norwegians with necessary provisions, but as the Irish support was delayed, Magnus — impatient and angry — decided to supply his forces with the basic necessities on his own account. Thus the Norwegian fleet appeared in Ulster, where the king commanded to obtain the provisions by any possible means. The local people decided to defend their properties, and so attacked the aggressors. The Norwegian troops were not prepared to withstand the attack and on 24<sup>th</sup> August, trapped in an ambush, came to be completely obliterated, with Magnus himself ultimately fallen in combat.<sup>7</sup>

The abrupt end of Magnus’s expedition plunged the contemporaries into shock, perhaps similar to the one that came about as a result of the defeat of the Norwegian army of Harald hardradi at Stamford Bridge in 1066.<sup>8</sup> Both kings found their death under rather negative circumstances, when their prudence, carefulness, and self-awareness came to be completely overshadowed by unnecessary bravado and overconfidence. In each case, it was also the king’s attitude that led to the ultimate disaster of his army. Both defeats — at Stamford Bridge and in Ulster — were seen as evidence that both Harald and Magnus were very much alike, sharing similar worldviews and political philosophies. This view appears to be dominant in medieval Scandinavian historiography. And so, according to the anonymous author of the *Ágrip af Noregs konungasögum*:

King Magnús ruled alone and uncontested, kept his land in peace and rid the country of all vikings and outlaws. He was a warlike man, doughty and industrious, and in disposition he was in every respect more like his grandfather Haraldr than like his father. They were all tall and handsome men [...].

<sup>6</sup> *Heimskringla* III..., pp. 233—235. See also S. DUFFY: *Ireland, c. 1000—1100*. In: *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages. Britain and Ireland, c. 500—c. 1100*. Ed. P. STAFFORD. Blackwell 2009, p. 296; P.S. ANDERSEN: *Samlingen av Norge og kristningen av landet 800—1300*. B. 2. Bergen—Oslo—Trømsø 1977, pp. 175—176; S. BAGGE: *From Viking Stronghold to Christian Kingdom. State Formation in Norway ca. 900—1350*. Copenhagen 2010, p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> *Heimskringla* III..., pp. 235—237. See also R. POWER: *Magnus Barelegs’ Expeditions...*, pp. 124—128.

<sup>8</sup> See J. MORAWIEC: *Między poezją a polityką. Rozgrywki polityczne w Skandynawii XI wieku w świetle poezji ówczesnych skaldów*. Katowice 2016, pp. 591—593.

He won a part of it straight away and as a result grew bolder and then became more unwary, because all went well for him in the beginning, just as it had for his grandfather Haraldr, when he fell in England. And the same treachery drew him to his death.<sup>9</sup>

A similar opinion concerning the circumstances of Magnus's death is provided by the monk Theodoricus, the author of the *Historia de Antiquitate regum Norwagiensium*:

[...] after winning control over part of the island, hoping that the rest might be conquered with ease, he began to lead his army with less caution, and fell into the same trap as his grandfather Haraldr in England.<sup>10</sup>

These opinions find an intriguing follow-up in the *Morkinskinna*. The saga describes Magnus's second expedition in the West during which the king was planning to besiege Dublin. Sigurðr Sigurðarson, one of his *lendir menn*, is reported to have made a speech in which he warned Magnus against following too close in the footsteps of his grandfather:

Sire, everyone is prepared to promote your honor, but we are somewhat apprehensive about what honor is to be had in this country. It is a populous region and the people are treacherous. We are not certain how well we can guard ourselves against them. Your kinsman King Haraldr had the experience that people in England at first surrendered to him wherever he went, but it ended with his death. Your friends would have deemed it best if you had remained quietly in your realm, considering the advantages that you have.<sup>11</sup>

All these excerpts point to a relatively uniform image of Magnus Barefoot in the Old Norse accounts, an image that all too often focuses on his military activity and omits other significant spheres (e.g. economic) of his reign.<sup>12</sup> As has been noted, a situation like this may be found in Scandinavian medieval historiography, provoking the question whether such a depiction of Magnus is

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<sup>9</sup> *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum*. Ed. M.J. DRISCOLL. London 1995, pp. 67, 69.

<sup>10</sup> Theodoricus Monachus. *Historia de Antiquitate regum Norwagiensium. An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*. Eds. D. McDougall, I. McDougall. London 1998, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> *Morkinskinna* I. Eds. ÁRMANN Jakobsson, ÞÓRÐUR INGI Guðjónsson. Íslenzk fornrit 23. Reykjavík 2009, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> See P.S. ANDERSEN: *Samlingen...*, p. 171; L. KLOS: *A Courtly King — the Change of Hall Customs under the Reign of King Olaf kyrri, Depending on European Influences*. "Skandinavistik" 2004, Vol. 34/1, pp. 12—30; ÅSLAUG Ommundsen: *The Cults of Saints in Norway before 1200*. In: *Saints and their Lives on the Periphery. Veneration of Saints in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe (c. 1000—1200)*. Eds. HAKI Antonsson, I.H. GARIPZANOV. Turnhout 2010, p. 79.

not in fact a later development, or whether it should be linked with the actual policy and means of poetic propaganda at the court of the Norwegian king. A potential answer to this question could be found in the skaldic verses dedicated to Magnus composed during and around the time of his reign and, in all likelihood, connected with his court and retinue.

According to *Skáldatal*, there were five poets known to have regularly composed strophes on King Magnus. These were: Þorkell hamarskáld, Björn krepphendi, Gísl Illugason, Ívarr Ingimundarson, and Bardr svarti.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, no poetic works of the last of them have survived until our time. Similarly, in the case of Ívarr, we are only in possession of a single poem dedicated to Sigurðr slembidjákn, the supposed son of Magnus Barefoot and short-term king of Norway (1135—1139).<sup>14</sup> This means that the following analysis must be limited to the three *Magnúsdrápur* attributed to Björn krepphendi, Þorkell hamarskáld, and Gísl Illugason. The first of these three poems was composed during Magnus's lifetime, the other two belong to the period shortly after 24<sup>th</sup> August 1103.<sup>15</sup>

To varying degrees, each of the three poems recapitulates the events of Magnus's lifetime. Björn krepphendi's *drápa*, for instance, relates the king's military exploits during the early stage of his reign and his first expedition in the West. The poems of Þorkell and Gísl have a more retrospective character, providing account of some of the most important endeavours of the Norwegian monarch, both in Scandinavia and beyond. In the *Magnúsdrápur*, the depiction of Magnus's encounters possesses a number of features which could be seen as an attempt to create a direct link between the praised hero and his royal grandfather.

First of all, what is worth noting are the instances of the poets' direct references to Haraldr hardradi. Gísl does it twice, as Kari Ellen Gade correctly observes, first in stanza 11 and then in stanza 20, each time calling Magnus "Harald's kinsman" (*frændr Haralds*).<sup>16</sup>

Further inspection also reveals other, more subtle hints of comparison between both monarchs. Those skalds who outlined the encounters at Fulford Gate and Stamford Bridge are quite unanimous in underlining Harald's bravery, which was pushed to such an extreme that one may well take it to mean unreasonable recklessness. This can be noted, for instance, in some of the stanzas in Arnórr Þórðarson's *Haraldsdrápa*, in which Arnórr, as the only poet, relates the circumstances of Harald's final battle:

<sup>13</sup> *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar. Edda Snorronis Sturlaei*. Eds. JÓN SIGURÐSSON et al. Vol. 3. Copenhagen 1887, pp. 254, 262.

<sup>14</sup> *Scandinavian Poetry of the Middle Ages, Poetry from the Kings' Sagas I. From c. 1035 to c. 1300*. Ed. K.E. GADE. Vols 1—2. Turnhout 2009, pp. 507—529 (hereinafter SPMA II).

<sup>15</sup> SPMA II, pp. 395—405, 409—414, 416—430.

<sup>16</sup> SPMA II, pp. 424, 430.

Hafðit brjóst, né bifðisk  
bögðsnart konungs hjarta,  
í hjalmþrimu hilmir  
hlítstyggr fyr sér litit;

þars til þengils hersa  
þat sá herr, at skatna  
blóðugr hjorr ins barra  
beit döglinga hneitis.<sup>16</sup>

The prince, shunning mediocrity, had no small courage in himself, and the battle-swift heart of the king did not tremble in the helmet-din, where the army saw, watching the lord of *hersar*, that the bloody sword of the zealous subduer of princes bit men.

Olli ofrausn stillis,  
ormalátrs þats máttit  
stáls í ströngu éli  
striðir elli bíða;

sás aldrigi aldins  
ótams lituðr hramma  
viggs í vápna glyggvi  
Varðrúnar sik sparði.<sup>17</sup>

The excess of heroism in the ruler caused [this] in the stern blizzard of steel, that the foe of the reptiles' lair could not live to see old age, the stainer of the claws of the old, untamed steed of Varðrún who never spared himself in the wind-storm of weapons.

Following the suggestions of Diana Whaley,<sup>19</sup> one can find in these stanzas certain elements of criticism towards Harald's mindset, his flawed attitude that led both him and his army into their final disaster. The criticism touches on the king's excessive bravery and overconfidence, both of which could have easily turned into his egocentric pride and the feeling of superiority above others. In stanza 12, Arnórr clearly refers to Harald's heroism as the foremost cause of his death. Here, the skald uses the word *ofrausn*, which could be translated as "excessive heroism." According to Whaley, this term could have also been used in connection with Harald's exceptional bravery and inclination to risk-taking, which, together with his self-confidence and disrespect for the enemy, could only have resulted in his death in combat with the overwhelming forces of a well-disciplined enemy.<sup>20</sup> This tendency of Arnórr can also be seen in the other part of the poem. In stanza 11, the skald calls Haraldr *hlítstyggr*, an ambiguous term which could be interpreted as the poet's willingness to highlight the king's zeal and fervour to outshine others in battle in the way in which no one could question Harald's outstanding military qualities. Likewise, Steinn Herdísarson, in the *drápa* dedicated to Olaf kyrri, refers to the king's father as a "protection-shy" leader who, during the battle of Fulford Gate, did not hesitate to risk his own life (*hlífstrauðr konungr hætti lífi*).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> SPMA II, pp. 272—273.

<sup>18</sup> SPMA II, pp. 273—274.

<sup>19</sup> SPMA II, pp. 273—275.

<sup>20</sup> SPMA II, p. 275.

<sup>21</sup> SPMA II, p. 369.

The poetic utterances of both Þorkell hamarskáld and Gísl Illugason seem to be quite similar in tone. The former reveals it in the first helming of stanza 5 of his *Magnúsdrápa*:

Uppgöngu réð yngvi  
itr með helming litinn,  
áræði hykk áðan,  
Eysteins fǫður treystask.<sup>22</sup>

The splendid king advanced ashore with a **small unit**, I believe Eystein's father earlier put faith in **his courage**.

The crux of this half-stanza is practically analogous to that of the poem dedicated to Harald hardradi. It relates the account of a small number of warriors who accompanied the king and, on the one hand, serves to rationalise his failure and death, but, on the other, subtly criticises Magnus for his nonchalance and lack of foresight. The king — Þorkell is in fact particularly explicit about that — is too self-confident, relying too heavily on his previous successes.

Magnus's courage and bravery, as decisive factors in his triumph over Lögmaðr of the Hebrides and Earl Hugh of Montgomery, are also recalled by Gísl:

Tók á Skíði, en Skotar flýðu,  
jófra œgir Ívistar gram;  
hafði fylkir, sás frami téði,  
Lögmann konung í liði sínu.<sup>23</sup>

The terrorifier of princes captured the lord of North Uist in Skye, and the Scots fled; the leader, **whom courage aided**, kept King Lögmaðr in his company.

Hoðum hildi með Haralds frænda  
Onguls við ey innanverða,  
bars af reiði ríkisvendir  
konungr ok jarlar kapp sitt brutu.<sup>24</sup>

We waged war with Harald's kinsman on the inner side of Anglesey, where the royal spectres, the king and the earls, tested their **courage** with rage.

This tendency to juxtapose the deeds of Magnus Barefoot with those of his grandfather Harald may be seen in other elements as well. Björn krepphendi describes Magnus, in stanza 3 of his *drápa*, as being “shy of protection”

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<sup>22</sup> SPMA II, p. 413.

<sup>23</sup> SPMA II, p. 422.

<sup>24</sup> SPMA II, p. 424.

(*styggr hlifar*),<sup>25</sup> the very same phrase also being used by Steinn Herdísarson in the fourth stanza of his poem to reflect the warlike attitude of Haraldr.<sup>26</sup> Also in the third stanza, Björn labels Magnus the “troop-Baldr” (*her-Baldr*).<sup>27</sup> A very similar phrase, *lið-Baldr*, is used by Þjóðólfr Árnórsson in stanza 2 of his *leiðangr vísur*.<sup>28</sup> In stanza 17 of his poem, Gísl calls Magnus a ruler of the Oppland people (*Upplanda gramr*).<sup>29</sup> Although an identical phrase is used by Þjóðólfr ór Hvini in his poem dedicated to Harald Fairhair and, in fact, appears to be its closest analogy,<sup>30</sup> Gísl could have also been inspired by the words in stanza 15 of *Sextefja*, in which Þjóðólfr names Haraldr hardradi the king of Oppland (*upplenzkr hilmir*).<sup>31</sup> The latter appellation seems to be the more accurate of the two, as both Gísl and Þjóðólfr refer to Harald’s sovereignty over the people of Oppland in the context of his military exploits on the Norwegian-Danish border.

There is another set of stanzas in Gísl’s *drápa* which may well have been inspired by Þjóðólfr’s poetry:

Vágr þrútnaði, en vefi keyrði  
steinóðr á stag storðar galli;  
braut dýrr dreki und Dana skelfi  
hrygg í hverri hafs glymbrúði.<sup>32</sup>

The sea swelled, and the raging destruction of the sapling drove the sails against the stays; the precious dragon beneath the terrorifier of the Danes broke the back in every roaring-bride of the ocean.

Blár ægir skaut búnum svíra,  
gjalfr hljóp í gin gollnu høfði;  
skein af hausum sem himins eisa  
døglings dreka djúps valfasti.<sup>33</sup>

The dark ocean struck against the adorned neck, the surge leaped into the jaws of the golden head; the corpse-flame of the deep shone like the cinder of heaven from the skulls of the ruler’s dragon.

Some of the closest analogies seem to be provided in the stanzas attributed to Þjóðólfr Leiðangr:

<sup>25</sup> SPMA II, p. 398.

<sup>26</sup> SPMA II, p. 362.

<sup>27</sup> SPMA II, p. 398.

<sup>28</sup> SPMA II, p. 151.

<sup>29</sup> SPMA II, p. 428.

<sup>30</sup> SPMA II, p. 61.

<sup>31</sup> SPMA II, p. 127.

<sup>32</sup> SPMA II, p. 426.

<sup>33</sup> SPMA II, p. 427.

Skeið sák framm at flœði,  
fagrt sprund, ór ɔ hrundit;  
kennd hvar liggr fyr landi  
løng súð dreka ins prúða;

orms glóða fax of farmi  
fráns, sízt ýtt vas hönum  
— børðu búðir svírár  
brunnit goll — af hlunni.<sup>34</sup>

I saw the warship beautiful lady, propelled out of the river onto the ocean, look where the long side-planking of the splendid dragon-ship lies offshore; the gleaming manes of the serpent shine out above the cargo, since it was launched from the rollers, the decorated necks bore burnished gold.

Slyngr laugardag løngu  
lið-Baldr af sér tjaldi,  
út þars ekkjur líta  
orms súð ór bœ prúðar;

vestr réð ór Nið næsta  
nýri skeið at stýra  
ungr, en árar drengja,  
allvaldr, í sæ falla.<sup>35</sup>

The troop-Baldr throws, on a Saturday, the long awning off, where fine women gaze at the side-planking of the serpent out from the town; the youthful overlord set about steering the brand new longship west out of Nidelven, and the oars of the warriors plunge into the sea.

Like his grandfather, Magnus Barefoot — as he is depicted by Þjóðólfr Árnórsson — appears to be the owner of an excellently equipped and richly adorned fleet. In his poem, Gísl uses precisely the same elements: the sea-faring quality of the royal *drakkar* that can easily cope with the wrath of the sea, the shining gold of the dragon heads that adorn both the prows and the sterns of all the ships, and the terror that the sight of his fleet arises in the hearts of Magnus's enemies, acting as a foreboding of his successful military achievements. The stylistic analogies seem to be by no means accidental. On the one hand, they point to some distinct artistic influence of the skalds working for Haraldr on those who are known to be working at the court of Magnus Barefoot. On the other, though, such similarities may be interpreted as a poetic response to the particular expectations articulated by Magnus and his retinue. The latter group also presumably included the sons of the Norwegian king. Both Þorkell and Gísl call Magnus the father of both Eysteinn (*Eysteins foður*) and Sigurðr (*Sigurðar feðr*).<sup>36</sup> The two brothers were undoubtedly among the original audience of the poems dedicated to their father and, later, actively participated in the process of preserving the memory of Magnus Barefoot as a true follower of Haraldr hardradi.

The process in question presumably included another element, namely the tradition of the king as a poet, which may be exemplified by the

<sup>34</sup> SPMA II, p. 150.

<sup>35</sup> SPMA II, pp. 150—151.

<sup>36</sup> SPMA II, pp. 429—430.

sequence of three stanzas preserved in the *Morkinskinna* which are attributed to Magnus<sup>37</sup>:

Sú's ein es mér meinar Maktildr ok vekr hildi (mør drekkr suðr ór sörum sveita) leik ok teiti;	sá kennir mér svanni, sín lñnd es verr røndu (sverð bitu Høgna hurðir) hvítjarpr sofa lítit.
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There is one Matilda, who denies me fun and pleasure and stirs up strife, in the south the seagull of gore drinks from wounds; that lady with the light-brown hair, who defends her lands with the shield, teaches me to sleep but little, swords bit the doors of Høgni.

Hvat's í heimi betra, hyggr skald af þró sjaldan (mjók's langr sás dvelr drengi dagr) an víf en fogru;	þungan berk af þingi þann harm, es skalk svanna (skreytask menn at móti) minn aldrigi finna.
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What's better in this world than fair women? The poet seldom forgets his yearning, the day which delays men is very long; I carry that heavy care from the assembly, that I shall never meet my woman; men dress up at the meeting.

Jórp mun eigi verpa arm-Hlín á glæ sínum, orð spyrk gollhrings Gerðar góð of skald í hljóði;	annk, þótt eigi finnak opt, goðvefjar þoptu; viti menn at hykk hennar hála rœkðarmqlum.
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The brown-haired Hlín of the arm will not throw away her [words] to no avail, I hear in secret the kind words of the Gerðr of the gold ring about the skald; I love the thwart of precious cloth, although I don't often meet [her]; let men know that I think very highly of her caring comments.

The authorship of the above stanzas is far from certain. Moreover, even the author of the saga himself appears to have raised some air of doubt, as he wove these pieces into his own narrative (*bessi vísa er kennd Magnúsi konungi*).<sup>38</sup> The stanzas are dedicated to a woman named Matilda (*Maktildr*), and their content suggests that the skald's attempts to win her favour ultimately failed, as she, denying him fun and pleasure (*leik ok teiti*), in a sense defended her land with a shield (*verr lñnd sín røndu*). Despite this, the skald expresses his unshaken affection towards her and fears that he will not see her again. His praise is capped by a rhetorical coda, a question through which he asks whether there is anything better in this world than a beautiful woman (*hvats betra í heimi*

<sup>37</sup> SPMA II, pp. 387—389; R. POOLE: *Some Royal Love-Verses*. “Maal og Minne” 1985, Vol. 1, pp. 117—118.

<sup>38</sup> *Morkinskinna* I..., p. 60.

*an in fogru víf*). The skald hopes, though, that he will soon be able to share further moments of tenderness with his beloved, as, according to him, Matilda has secretly admitted her fondness for him.

The stanzas in question may be classified as rather conventional love poetry (*mansöngr*), displaying some of the most characteristic features of the sub-genre: frequent erotic allusions, the poet's inability to fulfil his desires, his longing for the beloved woman articulated in the course of a long and distant military campaign.<sup>39</sup> Much attention so far has also been paid to the identification of this mysterious *Maktildr*. It is quite a complicated matter, though, as, according to the *Morkinskinna*, she was *dóttur keisarans*.<sup>40</sup> The potential candidates include Matilda, daughter of Malcolm III of Scotland, later married to Henry I of England, and Margret, great-granddaughter of Edmund Ironside.<sup>41</sup> Given Magnus's relations with Scotland and his supposed matrimonial plans, the former seems to be the most probable candidate. This short list may, however, be extended to include another Matilda, daughter of the aforementioned Henry I and Matilda of Scotland (1102—1167), who, in 1114, married the Emperor Henry V and, following his death, became the wife of Geoffrey V Plantagenet, the Count of Anjou and Duke of Normandy. It must be noted, though, that this identification is very problematic, as she was never considered to be the potential beloved of Magnus. Moreover, no emperor's daughter (in this case, it would have to be the daughter of Henry IV) is known to be called Matilda during the reign of Magnus Barefoot.<sup>42</sup> Hence, it seems that the identification may lead only to a person who, as a *dóttur keisarans*, was considered by the author of the *Morkinskinna*. The Empress Matilda was famous not only for her exceptional beauty, but she was also known as a charismatic woman, one whose exceptional qualities came to full expression as she was fighting for her rights to the throne of England. One cannot exclude the possibility that her fame was also known in the North and, in this way, inspired the saga authors. Yet another problem is the authenticity and reliability of the attribution of these stanzas to Magnus Barefoot. According to Russell Poole, the saga authors were consciously modifying the contexts in which love poetry, often attributed to particular rulers, could find its place.<sup>43</sup> It seems possible, then, that in the case of Magnus, one deals with another example of the poets' stylistic attempts to align the king

<sup>39</sup> See R. POOLE: *Some Royal Love-Verses...*, pp. 115—131; J. MORAWIEC: *Nidvísur i mansöngr — różne aspekty seksualności w poezji skaldów*. In: *Miłość w dawnych czasach*. Eds. B. MOŻEJKO, A. PANER. Gdańsk 2009, pp. 191—208.

<sup>40</sup> *Morkinskinna I...*, p. 60.

<sup>41</sup> R. POOLE: *Some Royal Love-Verses...*, pp. 116—117; *Morkinskinna. The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030—1157)*. Eds. Th.M. ANDERSSON, K.E. GADE. Ithaca—London 2000, p. 450; *Morkinskinna I...*, p. 60.

<sup>42</sup> R. POOLE: *Some Royal Love-Verses...*, p. 116.

<sup>43</sup> R. POOLE: *Some Royal Love-Verses...*, pp. 118, 130.

with his famous grandfather,<sup>44</sup> himself an active skald, also known for some love stanzas (*Gamanvísur*). The latter poem shares certain similarities with the stanzas on Matilda. Its attribution to Harald is at least uncertain and the poem might in fact be of a later date.<sup>45</sup> Although the skald's main concerns appear to be his personal achievements confirming his prowess and ability to display a wide range of skills (*átta íþróttir* in stanza 4), it is the erotic and/or love context which is confirmed in the concluding remark that appears in five of the poem's six stanzas (*pó lætr Gerðr gollhrings i Gørðum skolla við mér*: “yet the Gerðr goddess of the gold ring in Russia ridicules me”).<sup>46</sup>

Again, the poet's desire for the beloved woman is juxtaposed with her indifference to his advances and ultimate rejection. The similarities that both sets of stanzas share suggest that the motif of Magnus's love turbulences and his unfulfilled desire for the mysterious Matilda serve as a supplement to the more general comparison between the two rulers, a supplement, it ought to be stressed, with quite unique, and thus significant, features.

Despite the fact that the thematic scope of the poems dedicated to Magnus Barefoot is relatively limited, it allows one to draw some conclusions with regard to the above-examined issues. The king of Norway appears to be very much interested in presenting his reign as a direct continuation of the days of Harald hardradi, his grandfather. This trend is reflected not only in connection with his general policy, but also in the accompanying sphere of royal propaganda, the latter of which was the domain of those skalds who composed their verses with the monarch in mind.

This tendency to depict the king as a follower of his famous predecessor surely served to strengthen Magnus's position in Norway and to justify his military actions both in Scandinavia and in the British Isles. This poetic comparison with Harald was an occasion to accentuate the royal virtues of Magnus and to distinguish the king from among his contemporaries. That is why the skalds who are known to have made their living at his court were so willing to imitate the poets composing for Harald, especially Þjóðólfr Árnórsson, whose works were perceived as a good model to emulate, reflecting the spirit of the time. Then, it should come as no surprise that analogous criteria would be welcomed by Magnus in his recruitment of the skalds, whose task was to support and strengthen his royal actions by means of their poetic skills.

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<sup>44</sup> See I. MATIUSHINA, *The Emergence of Lyrical Self-expression in Skaldic Love Poetry*. “Maal og Minne” 1998, Vol. 1, pp. 32—33.

<sup>45</sup> SPMA II, p. 35.

<sup>46</sup> SPMA II, pp. 35—41.

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### **Magnus Bosy — ostatni wikiński król Norwegii?**

#### **Streszczenie**

W powszechniej opinii, śmierć Haralda Srogiego w bitwie pod Stamford Bridge w 1066 roku postrzegana jest często jako symboliczny koniec epoki wikingów. Jednakże, moment ten można przesunąć w czasie do 24 sierpnia 1103 roku, gdy, po dziesięcioletnim panowaniu w Norwegii, wnuk Haralda Magnus poległ w starciu w wyniku zasadzki, do jakiej doszło w Ulster. Niektóre ze staroskandynawskich przekazów, które opisują panowanie Magnusa, dokonują swoistego porównania obu władców, ukazując Magnusa jako prawdziwego i zadeklarowanego naśladowcę swojego dziada. Nie dziwi więc, że okoliczności, w jakich Magnus poległ, często przedstawiane są jako najpełniejszy przejaw tego wizerunku, zarówno w pozytywnym jak i negatywnym znaczeniu.

Król Norwegii jawi się jako osoba niezwykle zainteresowana tym, aby jego rządy były postrzegane jako bezpośrednia kontynuacja czasów Haralda Srogiego. Tendencja ta dotyczy nie tylko jego działań politycznych w ogólności, ale także sfery propagandowej. Ta ostatnia był zaś zdominowana przez skaldów komponujących na rzecz króla.

**Słowa klucze:** epoka wikingów, poezja skaldów, Magnus Bosy

**Jakub Morawiec**

### **Magnus Barfuß — Norwegens letzter Wikingerkönig?**

#### **Zusammenfassung**

Im Allgemeinen wird angenommen, dass der Tod von Harald III. dem Harten in der Schlacht von Stamford Bridge im Jahr 1066 oft als ein symbolisches Ende der Wikingerzeit angesehen wird. Dieser Moment kann jedoch auf den 24. August 1103 verschoben werden, als Haralds Enkel Magnus, nach zehnjähriger Herrschaft in Norwegen, in Ulster in einen Hinterhalt geriet und im Gefecht ums Leben kam. Einige der altskandinavischen Überlieferungen, die die Regierungszeit von Magnus beschreiben, stellen eine Art Vergleich zwischen den beiden

Herrschern her und zeigen Magnus als einen echten und überzeugten Nachahmer seines Großvaters. Es ist daher nicht verwunderlich, dass die Umstände, unter denen Magnus fiel, oft als der vollste Ausdruck dieses Bildes, im sowohl positiven als auch negativen Sinne, dargestellt werden.

Es scheint, dass es dem norwegischen König sehr daran lag, dass seine Herrschaft als die direkte Fortsetzung der Regierungszeit von Harald dem Harten betrachtet wird. Diese Tendenz betrifft nicht nur seine politischen Aktivitäten im Allgemeinen, sondern auch die Propagandasphäre. Diese wurde von den Skalden dominiert, die für den König komponierten.

Schlüsselwörter: Wikingerzeit, Skaldenpoesie, Magnus Barfuß