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The Adaptation of *Laxdæla Saga* in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe

In the Middle Ages, there were some central texts, such as the Bible, that needed to be copied as accurately as possible. Other important works, such as Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, were treated quite differently. These became what Tim William Machan calls living textual traditions, in that writers freely created their own versions by selecting from, modifying and adding to earlier copies, translations and commentaries.¹ The composite texts that resulted were in turn available for the use of later writers. Although the modern reflex is to categorize some of the writers participating in this tradition as authors or translators and the rest as (mere) scribes, the difference between 'authorial' work and 'scribal' work was a quantitative one, not a qualitative one, for scribes often took on the role of editor as well as copyist. In Iceland the sagas of King Óláfr Tryggvason and St Óláfr appear to be just such living textual traditions. Shortly after 1300, one editor-scribe created the so-called 'Longest Saga' of Óláfr Tryggvason (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*) by taking Snorri Sturluson's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* from *Heimskringla* and expanding it with loans from Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga*, the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* written by the monk Oddr Snorrason, material on the kings of Denmark, material on the settlement of Iceland, material on Greenland (from *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Landnámabók* and *Heimskringla*) and excerpts and summaries relating to the events told in *Orkneyinga saga* and *Laxdæla saga*.² The latter is the subject of the present study, which examines how the interpretation of the story of Kjartan Ólafsson's stay at Óláfr's court is substantially modified by the changes made to fit it into its new context.

In addition to the expansions described above, the editor-scribe of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* also interpolated three entire sagas (*Færeyinga saga*, *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*) and eleven short narratives (*Eindriða þátr ilbreiðs*, *Gauts þátr*, *Kristni þátr*, *Ögmundar þátr*

dytts ok Gunnars helmings, Rögnvalds þáttir ok Rauðs, Svaða þáttir ok Arnórs kerlinganefs, Sveins þáttir ok Finns, Þiðranda þáttir ok Þórhalls, Þórhalls þáttir knapps, Þorvalds þáttir tasalda and Þorvalds þáttir víðförla). This list of interpolations is taken from the redaction in AM 61 fol because its copy of this version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* is relatively complete. However, this redaction was not the only one made. For example, between 1370 and 1380, another compiler created the redaction in AM 62 fol by taking some form of the early version and abridging *Færeyinga saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Jómsvíkinga saga* and the material from *Landnámabók*. This compiler also added *Helga þáttir Þórissonar* and *Norna-Gests þáttir* and expanded some of the sections about the adoption of Christianity with material from the monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson's Latin account of Óláfr Tryggvason's missionary activities.³ Yet another redaction was made in 1389, when Jón Þórðarson, the editor-scribe of the first part of *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol), created yet another—and yet larger—version of *Óláfs saga* by taking a text related to the AM 62 fol. version and interpolating into it six more *þættir* and also substituting the entire texts of *Orkneyinga saga*, *Færeyinga saga*, *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds* and *Jómsvíkinga saga* in the place of the abridgements in his exemplar.

All three redactions create a rich mixture of history, hagiography and heroism. First there is the story of Óláfr Tryggvason himself, who as a young viking of royal descent has a vision of a marvelous stone pillar floating in the air. Steps are carved into the pillar, and in the vision he mounts these steps and comes to a place where he can see the inhabitants of paradise. A voice tells him to go to Byzantium to be baptized and then return to Norway to be its king. Óláfr does so, and after a series of battles he succeeds in winning the throne. He begins the work of converting the Norwegians to Christianity, and his missionaries contribute to the decision of the Icelanders to adopt the new faith as the religion of their country, but the Norwegians are stubborn and Óláfr must often use threats and force when preaching and persuasion fail. His political enemies regroup and defeat him at the sea-battle of Svölðr. Óláfr's body is never found, and some believe that he was killed, but others believe that he escaped to the Holy Land and spent the rest of his life as a hermit. Elaborating this main narrative thread are the stories of the Icelanders who came to Óláfr's court and were willing to accept Christianity in order to gain the high honour of royal favour. Further narrative complexity is provided by the miscellaneous texts that the compilers found interesting, such as the report from an unknown Latin source about how the sons of the legendary Danish king Ragnarr loðbrók were with a Scandinavian army

pillaging Germany. When confronted with the emperor's superior force they surrendered and agreed to become Christians, only to renounce their faith and resume plundering as soon as the emperor's army had moved off. This capacious saga thus offered something for everyone: for the pious, a salutary history of the overthrow of paganism; for the bored, entertaining accounts of haughty queens, fearsome monsters and stupendous battles; for the ambitious, stories illustrating how to behave at court; and for the patriotic, narratives of how one Icelander after another is acknowledged by the king for his noble blood, outstanding character, physical prowess or ability to compose poetry.

The following material from *Laxdæla saga* was interpolated into *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*:

- Ch. 123 of *Óláfs saga* tells how Dala-Kollr marries Þorgerðr and has three children: Höskuldr, Gróa and Þorkatla.⁴ Höskuldr's grandson is Bolli, who marries Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir. Höskuldr buys a slave named Melkorka who is the daughter of Myrkjartan, king of the Irish. Their son is Óláfr pá, who marries Þorgerðr, the daughter of Egill Skallagrímsson. Among their sons is Kjartan, who marries Hrefna Ásgeirsdóttir. Their sons are Ásgeirr and Skúmr.

This chapter summarizes the genealogical information pertaining to Bolli and Kjartan conveyed in chs. 5, 9, 13, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30 and 47 of *Laxdæla saga*. However, ch. 9 of *Laxdæla saga* gives Höskuldr's wife's name as Jörunn, not Hallfriðr, and it says nothing about Kjartan and Hrefna having a second son.

- Ch. 157 of *Óláfs saga* reintroduces Óláfr pá, his wife and his son Kjartan and tells how the latter grows up at home with his father.⁵ Kjartan is the most handsome man of his time who was born in Iceland. A description of him is given that brings in his descent from the sons of Skallagrímr. The chapter also describes Kjartan's warm relationship with his fosterbrother and relative Bolli, who was brought up with him. A description of Bolli is included.

The beginning of this chapter summarizes information from *Laxdæla saga* about Bolli and Kjartan in their youth, and the middle section closely parallels ch. 28 of *Laxdæla saga*. Sometimes the details are in a different order; sometimes they are expanded a little. For example, the description of Bolli in ch. 28 of *Laxdæla saga* is not as detailed as that in this chapter of *Óláfs saga*.

- Ch. 158 of *Óláfs saga* (or the equivalent text, as it is not always a new chapter) introduces Osvífr Helgason and his daughter Guðrún.⁶ The chapter describes her and her marriage to Þorvaldr Halldórsson, as well as their divorce and Guðrún's marriage to Þórðr Glúmsson, who drowns. They have a son, Þórðr,

whom Snorri goði fosters. The chapter then tells of the friendship between Osvífr and Óláfr pá; Kjartan meets with Guðrún at the hot-spring baths, but his father warns him that it will come to no good and affect their luck. Kjartan says that he will not go against his father's wishes, although he thinks nothing bad will happen. Kjartan continues his visits to the baths as before, and Bolli always goes with him.

This chapter summarizes chs. 32, 34, 35 and 37 of *Laxdæla saga*. The last part of this chapter is drawn from the end of ch. 39 of *Laxdæla saga*.

- Ch. 159 of *Óláfs saga* describes Ásgeirr æðikollr and his daughter Hrefna the beautiful.⁷

This information is from the beginning of ch. 40 of *Laxdæla saga*. It gives Hrefna's genealogy, including some information not in *Laxdæla saga*, such as the descent of Auðun skökull from Ragnarr loðbrók's daughter Ólöf and Auðun's daughter's being the ancestor of St Óláfr's mother.

- Ch. 160 of *Óláfs saga* (or the equivalent text, as it is not always a new chapter) describes Kjartan and Bolli's visit to Kjartan's uncle Þorsteinn Egilsson at Borg.⁸ While there, Kjartan says that his most important reason for visiting is to buy a half-share in a ship at Gáseyri owned by Kálfr Ásgeirsson and to travel abroad. Þorsteinn encourages him, and Kjartan makes the purchase. Kjartan goes home and informs his father and Guðrún of his plan. Both say that this is rather sudden. Guðrún says she wants to go with him, but Kjartan will not hear of it. Kjartan and Bolli leave Iceland as planned and arrive in Norway north of Trondheim, where they learn that jarl Hákon is dead and Óláfr Tryggvason has arrived in Norway, and everyone is accepting him as king. Also, King Óláfr is preaching a change of faith, which is not accepted everywhere. Kjartan and his companions head for Niðarós, where there happen to be three merchant ships owned by Icelanders. They give Kjartan a good welcome, especially Brandr the generous. The Icelanders in Niðarós had discussed the conversion and had decided to decline to change their religion, and now they bring it up again with Kjartan and ask his opinion. He thinks little of it and says he will agree to whatever they think most advisable.

The information in this chapter is also from ch. 40 of *Laxdæla saga*. The phrases are rearranged somewhat, but overall the borrowing is very close. In some places *Óláfs saga* has dialogue where *Laxdæla saga* has a summary of the conversation, but in other places it is *Laxdæla saga* that has the dialogue and *Óláfs saga* the summary. There are other changes as well: *Óláfs saga* has Kjartan specify that Guðrún is to wait for three years and not get married, whereas *Laxdæla saga* only

has him ask her to wait for three years. The passage at the end in which the Icelanders ask Kjartan about converting is not in *Laxdæla saga* (nor is it in *Hallfreðar saga*, another interpolation in *Óláfs saga* that deals with an Icelander and Christianity).

- Ch. 161 of *Óláfs saga* relates the famed swimming match between Kjartan and King Óláfr.⁹ This is a key moment, for the king's holding Kjartan underwater prefigures Kjartan's later baptism.¹⁰ Kjartan accepts the gift of a cloak from the king, which the other Icelanders dislike because it will put him in the king's debt. (The gift of a cloak prefigures the king's later gift of a baptismal robe.) The weather turns bad, and the heathens explain that the gods are angry.

The beginning of this chapter, about King Óláfr's urban development in Niðarós, is not in *Laxdæla saga*; borrowing from that saga begins with the swimming match, which is drawn from ch. 40 of *Laxdæla saga*. The material here has been revised to integrate the interpolation of *Hallfreðar saga*, for in *Óláfs saga* Kjartan asks Hallfreðr if he wants to compete against the good swimmer from town; when he declines, he then asks Bolli the same thing. In *Laxdæla saga*, Hallfreðr is of course not present and Kjartan asks only Bolli. *Óláfs saga* also places the detail of Kjartan's red kirtle before the swimming match, whereas *Laxdæla saga* places it afterwards. *Óláfs saga* underscores the outstanding characteristics of the king and Kjartan in a number of ways: it includes a remark giving Kjartan's favourable impression of the townsman (who turns out to be the king); it has the king praise Kjartan for being a fine and lucky-looking man; and it adds that the cloak was the best of gifts. None of this is found in *Laxdæla saga*. The end of the *Óláfs saga* chapter is rather jumbled in its treatment of the material from *Laxdæla saga*, but overall the content is very similar.

- Ch. 162 of *Óláfs saga* presents Kjartan and Bolli's discussion about whether to convert to Christianity.¹¹ The next day the king summons the Icelanders to a meeting with him. He tells them to convert, and Kjartan says he will accept the new faith to the extent of ceasing to believe so much in Þórr when he goes home. The king smiles and says that it is clear that what Kjartan really believes in is his own strength, not Þórr or Óðinn. Later the king's companions urge him to compel the Icelanders to accept Christianity, but the king says he will not do that. The autumn progresses, and the king learns that the heathens of Trondheim plan on holding a great sacrifice at the beginning of winter.

This chapter follows the material from ch. 40 of *Laxdæla saga* about Óláfr's first efforts to convert Kjartan. The beginning of the *Óláfs saga* chapter, about the king's assembly at Eyrir, is not particularly close to the parallel material in

Laxdæla saga. The *Óláfs saga* passage about the king's spies watching the Icelanders is more detailed than in *Laxdæla saga*. In general, *Óláfs saga* is more expansive here than *Laxdæla saga*, but apart from the additions, the borrowed content is not greatly changed. The mention of the sacrifice is not in *Laxdæla saga*.

- Ch. 164 of *Óláfs saga* continues the account of Kjartan's conversion.¹² On the first day of Yule, Kjartan suggests that the Icelanders go and see how the Christians are worshipping their god in the new church of St Clement. Impressed by the singing and incense, they stay until after high mass. Then they argue about whether to accept Christianity. Kjartan argues for it, and Bolli tells Kjartan to decide for both of them. All these conversations are reported to the king.

This chapter too is drawn from ch. 40 of *Laxdæla saga*, but the latter does not include the details about the king's building and Christmas plans that are at the beginning of the *Óláfs saga* chapter. As before, there is more detail in *Óláfs saga* than in *Laxdæla saga*, such as the *Óláfs saga* references to the singing and incense, and Kjartan's much longer speech. Interestingly, *Óláfs saga* does not borrow the *Laxdæla saga* description of the king's sermon, but the beginning of the chapter does mention the presence of the bishop, which *Laxdæla saga* does not.

- Ch. 165 of *Óláfs saga* recounts how King Óláfr summons Kjartan the next day and commands him to accept baptism.¹³ Kjartan agrees, on the condition that the king's friendship will accompany it. The king agrees, and Kjartan and Bolli and their crew are baptized. The chapter reports that most men say that on the day that Kjartan and Bolli stopped wearing their baptismal robes, Kjartan became the king's retainer.

This chapter continues the adaptation of material from ch. 40 of *Laxdæla saga*, although many of the details are different. The most significant difference is that in *Laxdæla saga* the king meets Kjartan on the way to church and Kjartan volunteers his desire to be baptized, whereas in *Óláfs saga* the king commands Kjartan to accept Christianity. *Óláfs saga* also moves the king's comment that holy days bring the best luck to this part of the narrative; in *Laxdæla saga* the king uttered this on the previous night.

- Ch. 167 of *Óláfs saga* describes how, after Christmas, King Óláfr goes into the district of Trondheim with his men.¹⁴ Kjartan, Bolli, Hallfreðr and many Icelanders were with him. At an assembly, Óláfr disputes with a prominent pagan named Járnkeggi.

This material is not in *Laxdæla saga*, and we may assume that it is the invention of the compiler of *Óláfs saga*, made to integrate the interpolated narrative threads more closely into the main narrative.

- Ch. 170 of *Óláfs saga* tells how King Óláfr has a great longship named the Crane built that same winter.¹⁵ Kjartan and Bolli have been with the king ever since they were baptized. Óláfr values Kjartan above all the other Icelanders because of his family and accomplishments. The chapter also reports that it was commonly said that Kjartan was so popular that he had no ill-wishers among the king's retinue and that virtually no-one like Kjartan had come from Iceland. His kinsman Bolli is also considered a very valiant man.

As with ch. 167, this material is not in *Laxdæla saga*, and we may again assume that it is the invention of the compiler of *Óláfs saga*, in this case made to enhance Kjartan's reputation with praise from King Óláfr and the Norwegian populace. This in turn reflects well on Kjartan's native land.

- Ch. 175 of *Óláfs saga* explains that the winter that Gunnar helmingr was in Sweden, Kjartan and Bolli and Hallfreðr were with King Óláfr, as was previously mentioned.¹⁶ But as the winter passes and traders prepare for their spring voyages, Kálfr Ásgeirsson asks Kjartan about his plans for the summer. Kjartan is thinking of a trading voyage to England, but when he discusses this with the king, Óláfr tells him that he should go back to Iceland and bring its inhabitants to Christianity, whether by force or persuasion. But if Kjartan thinks this too difficult, then Óláfr will not let him go to England, because it is better to serve noble men than to be a merchant. Kjartan replies that he would rather stay in Norway with the king than get into a conflict with his family, but probably his family will not go against the king's will when they know that he is treated so well by the king. Óláfr approves and gives him a suit of clothes that he had made for himself. The chapter reports that people say that Kjartan and the king were of the same height. Kálfr goes to England with Kjartan's wares.

This chapter follows the very end of ch. 40 of *Laxdæla saga* and continues with material from ch. 41 of that saga. This material is almost unchanged from its source, except that the final information about Kálfr's voyage is brought forward from ch. 43 of *Laxdæla saga*.

- Ch. 218 of *Óláfs saga* recounts how the missionary Þangbrandr returns from Iceland and reports that the chieftains there are very much against Christianity.¹⁷ The king becomes very angry and wants to have every pagan Icelander in Niðarós killed or maimed. The Christian Icelanders, including Kjartan, protest. Hjalti and Gizurr give a speech, and Gizurr concludes by inviting Þangbrandr to stay with

him and promising to help him convert his countrymen. The king agrees to let the Icelanders go free except the four noblest—Kjartan, Halldórr, Kolbeinn and Sverting—who will stay as hostages. They are well treated during the winter.

This material is derived from *Kristni saga's* account of the conversion of Iceland, and it is quite different from that in ch. 41 of *Laxdæla saga*, where there is no mention of the king's threats against the Icelanders in Niðarós. *Óláfs saga* also omits the account in this part of *Laxdæla saga* of Bolli's conversation with Kjartan about the latter's friendship with the king's sister.

- Ch. 224 of *Óláfs saga* describes how King Óláfr and Queen Þyri spend the winter after the conversion of Hálogaland in Niðarós.¹⁸ Their infant son dies, which is considered a great shame. Many Icelanders are with the king, as is Óláfr's sister Ingibjörg. She has treated all the Icelanders well, but Kjartan is the one best known to her, as he has been with the king longest. The chapter reports that Kjartan enjoys speaking with her often.

None of this material is in *Laxdæla saga*, and we may assume that it is the compiler's way of acknowledging the relationship between Kjartan and Ingibjörg, which the audience of *Óláfs saga* would have been familiar with and might have expected to be addressed.

- Ch. 233 of *Óláfs saga* describes how King Óláfr has his ship the Long Serpent readied, and all the heroes who serve him prepare for battle.¹⁹ That summer, a ship arrives from Iceland with the news that Christianity has been accepted in Iceland and everyone there has been baptized. The king is very pleased at this and grants all the hostages their freedom. Kjartan is the first to answer; he thanks the king and declares his intent to set out for Iceland. The king reiterates his high esteem and friendship for him and says that he does not want him to be eager to go to Iceland, despite his noble kin there, because he will get great honour and treatment in Norway that Iceland cannot offer. Kjartan asks God to reward the king for all the honour he has shown him, but he says that he expects that he has no less permission to go to Iceland than the others. The king acquiesces but says that it would be difficult to find a man with no rank or title who is Kjartan's equal. Kálfr has returned from England, and he and Kjartan get ready to leave. Kjartan takes his leave of Ingibjörg, who gives him rich gifts, including a splendid headdress for Guðrún. The king gives him a sword and says that he does not expect Kjartan to die from weapon-wounds if he carries this sword. Kjartan arrives in Iceland, and the chapter summarizes the tragic events that follow. The chapter concludes with the king's evaluation that Kjartan and

some of his kinsmen have been allotted a dire fate and that great harm will result if their fate cannot be altered.

Laxdæla saga says nothing about the king's preparations for war, and this chapter of *Óláfs saga* begins its adaptation of material from *Laxdæla saga* with the mention of the arrival of the ship from Iceland, which occurs in the middle of ch. 43 of that saga. That chapter also supplies *Óláfs saga* with the conversations between Kjartan and the king and between Kjartan and Ingibjörg, as well as with the closing evaluation.

The preceding survey shows that the material about Kjartan in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* is not a word-for-word copy of its source in *Laxdæla saga*. There are numerous kinds of changes, including genealogical (e.g. the number of Kjartan and Hrefna's sons), the addition of detail (e.g. the description of Bolli) and the substitution of dialogue for summarized conversation. Possibly the compiler of *Óláfs saga* was using an expanded version of *Laxdæla saga* that is no longer extant, but many of the additions and changes could well be of his own composition, as they reinforce the impression of Kjartan's superiority and introduce didactic material. An example of the former is found after the swimming match. In understated family-saga style, *Laxdæla saga* has: 'Þá tekr konungur af herðum sér skikkju góða ok gaf Kjartani; kvað hann eigi skikkjulausan skyldu ganga til sinna manna' [Then the king takes a good cloak from his own shoulders and gave it to Kjartan; he said that he must not go back to his men cloakless], whereas in *Óláfs saga* the king says:

Eigi skaltu yfir hafnar lauss ganga til þinna felaga. sva sæmiligr maðr ok hamingiv samligr sem þu ert. ok vil ek gefa þer skickiv þessa. Vil ek ok at þu takir þat sem vit höfum við aatz i dag sem ek man gera fyrir gleði ok gaman. þvrat ek vænti at fair menn kalli þer at minni mennt i sund förum. þo at ek gangi þar vm til iafns við þik.

[I want to give you this cloak, for such a fine and lucky-looking man as you shall not go back to your companions without an over-mantle. I also want you to take our competition today as I will, as fun and amusement, because I expect that few people would call you less skilled in swimming (than I), though I am your equal in it.]²⁰

An example of the latter occurs when Kjartan finally decides to accept Christianity. In *Laxdæla saga* he says:

Svá leizk mér vel á konung it fyrsta sinn, er ek sá hann, at ek fekk þat þegar skilt, at hann var inn mesti ágætismaðr, ok þat hefir haldizk jafnan síðan, er ek hefi hann á mannfundum sét; en miklu bezt leizk mér þó í dag á hann, ok öll ætla ek oss þar við liggja vár málskipti, at vér trúim þann vera sannan guð, sem konungr býðr, ok fyrir engan mun má konungi nú tíðara til vera, at ek taka við trúinni, en mér er at láta skírask, ok þat eina dvelr, er ek geng nú eigi þegar á konungs fund, er framorðit er dags, því at nú mun konungr yfir borðum vera, en sá dagr mun dveljask, er vér sveitungar látum allir skírask.

[The king seemed so fine to me the first time I saw him that I understood immediately that he was the greatest of excellent men, and this impression has held steady ever since, when I have seen him meeting with people. But yet he seems by far the best to me today, and I expect that all our dealings depend on our believing that the god whom the king preaches is the true one. The king must be no more eager for me to take this faith than I to let myself be baptized, and this alone delays me from now going immediately to meet with the king, when the day is so far gone, because the king will be at the table now, and that day will be a long one when we companions all let ourselves be baptized.]²¹

In *Óláfs saga*, however, he says:

þat berr storum huersu mer þocknaz vel þeira at hæfi. því helldr sem mer kynniz meirr. ok iafnan hefir mer litiz merkiliga aa konunginn. En nv í dag syndiz mer hans yfir bragð fra því aagiætligt sem fyrr. sva at ek ætla þa betr hafa er honum hlyðnaz ok veita goðuiliaða þionosto. Ok er þat sannaz at segia at ek ætla þar við liggja öll vor malskipti ok hamingiv at ver truim aa þann guþ sem hann boðar. Nv duelr mik engi lutr er ek geng eigi þegar til konungs at biðia skirnarinna. vtan sa einn at hann mun nu til borða genginn. ok þat at ek vil eigi vnaða konung eðr kristna kenni menn aa þessvm degi er þeir kalla mikla höfuð hatið guðs síns. þvíat mer er ván at þat se starfi mikill at veita oss skipverium ollum þat embætti. ok ætla ek þann dag dueliaz er ver látvm allir skiraz. En með engu mothi ma Olafi konungi vera annara til at þetta uerði framgengt en mer. Er þat ok eigi staðfastligt at lata sva aa kafliga at ein huerium lut at eigi fylgi hof ok stilling.

[It matters a good deal how well these things seem fitting to me, the more so as more becomes known to me, and the king has always looked to me like a man of note. But now, today, his appearance seems to me more excellent than before, so that I think it better to obey him and give him willing service. And it is most true to say that I think all our dealings and luck depend on us believing in this god that he preaches. Now nothing prevents me from going at once to the king to ask for baptism except this alone, that he will have gone to table now. And also that I do not want to disturb the king or Christian clerics on this day, which they call the great chief holy day of their god, because I expect that it would be a big job to grant all us companions this favour, and I expect that that day will be a long one when we all let ourselves be baptized. But notwithstanding, King Óláfr cannot be more eager for this to take place than me. It is also rash to act so impetuously and not be moderate and temperate in every respect.]²²

The additional material here shows the compiler using this speech as an opportunity to instruct his audience on such points as the moral basis of lordship, the significance of Christmas and proper behaviour.

The details of the textual relationship between *Laxdæla saga* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* remain to be clarified, but it is safe to say that *Laxdæla saga* probably used *Heimskringla* or Oddr Snorrason's saga about Óláfr Tryggvason for information about King Óláfr, and then the compiler of *Óláfs saga* used *Laxdæla saga* to elaborate Óláfr's story with information about Kjartan. In addition, the compiler expanded the *Laxdæla saga* material with information from *Landnámabók*, such as the genealogical link between Hrefna and Ragnarr loðbrók, and added material that was most likely of his own composition.

The first kinds of expansion could have resulted from the simple desire for a more detailed account, but the last kind of expansion suggests that the compiler of *Óláfs saga* had some further purpose in mind for this part of his narrative. What was that purpose, and how does it compare with its original purpose in *Laxdæla saga*? These questions may be answered based on what the *Óláfs saga* compiler left out as well as what he included. An example of the former is the elimination of *Laxdæla saga*'s focus on its female characters. *Óláfs saga* is silent about Unnr djúpúðga, the powerful matriarch who successfully finds a place for her family in Iceland despite their not being among the first settlers. And for all its concern with the conversion of the Icelanders, *Óláfs saga* is also silent about

Guðrún's becoming the first nun in Iceland. A reduced attention to the romantic—which may be related to the loss of interest in the female characters—results from *Óláfs saga's* omission of *Laxdæla saga's* hint of the possibility of marriage between Kjartan and Ingibjörg.

These shifts away from women and romance move the focus of the narrative to the male characters, their relationships, and their concern with power both secular and religious. The relationship between King Óláfr and the Icelanders who visited him took different forms in the different redactions of *Óláfs saga*, and the treatment of Kjartan (and indeed of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, whose story is intertwined with those of Óláfr and Kjartan) contrasts with the treatment of equivalent characters in the *þættir* interpolated by the compiler of the Flateyjarbók redaction of *Óláfs saga*. This later redaction presents the Icelanders at Óláfr's court as his spiritual sons, in that they have lost their biological fathers but have gained a spiritual father in the king, who converts them to Christianity and accepts them into his bodyguard, where they serve him faithfully, to the point of giving their lives for him at the Battle of Svöldr.²³ Although Kjartan and Hallfreðr do find salvation through Óláfr, they do not give their lives for him, instead leaving Norway and pursuing their own destinies, whether tragic (as with Kjartan) or religious (as with Hallfreðr). And although Hallfreðr's troubled relationship with his biological father does yield to a filial relationship with King Óláfr, as Marianne Kalinke has argued, Kjartan's case is quite different.²⁴ His father is alive, well and on good terms with his son when he leaves, and Kjartan never develops any inclination to spend the rest of his life with Óláfr. Indeed, both *Laxdæla saga* and *Óláfs saga* take the opposite tack and strongly imply that Kjartan is the king's equal. Their statements that Kjartan is the king's equal in size are what first suggests this, but *Óláfs saga* continues in this vein with Óláfr's remark about their equal competence in swimming. Furthermore, Kjartan's desire to return to his own country at the first opportunity shows the preferability of life in Iceland to life at court.

Rory McTurk argues that *Laxdæla saga* emphasizes Kjartan's royal descent and royal characteristics, with the implication that he—and Guðrún—would have been the ideal couple to rule Iceland, so the compiler of *Óláfs saga* could very well have thought of Kjartan as the Icelandic parallel of Óláfr Tryggvason.²⁵ What is curious about this supposition as regards *Óláfs saga* is that it ignores the obvious point of difference between King Óláfr and Kjartan, namely that Óláfr is fiercely dedicated to promoting Christianity, whereas Kjartan is notably reluctant to undertake a missionary effort in Iceland. Is this just a contradiction, an

unintended result of compilation, like *Óláfs saga's* contradictory depictions of the sons of Ragnarr loðbrók? Is the compiler of *Óláfs saga* ultimately unconcerned with the importance of Christianity per se (unlike the compiler of the Flateyjarbók *Óláfs saga*, who is explicitly worried about the spiritual effect of reading about pagan heroes)?²⁶ Or perhaps the compiler of *Óláfs saga* is unconcerned with the importance of the conversion of Iceland. After all, by the time he was working on this saga early in the fourteenth century, Iceland had been Christian for 300 years, and with none of the backsliding that had occurred in Norway, which necessitated a second missionary effort by St Óláfr. In retrospect, Iceland's conversion might have been seen as inevitable and unproblematic. Perhaps, just as Kjartan was so outstanding a young man, so much a potential king, so too his potential realm of Iceland was superior to Norway in not needing its ruler to be a missionary as well as a king.

These factors result in a significant change in the depiction of Kjartan as a Christian. In *Laxdæla saga*, the religious dynamics are complex. Kjartan's meek, Christ-like death is paralleled by Guðrún's devoutness in her old age, and the Christian elements in turn are balanced by the pagan heroic subtext, in which Kjartan plays the role of the innocent Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and Guðrún is the vengeful Brynhildr. These parallels in turn suggest an *interpretatio christiana* of the Sigurðr legend. In *Óláfs saga*, the legendary subtext has been stripped away, as has Guðrún's spiritual equality with Kjartan, and instead two 'martyrdoms' are juxtaposed—Kjartan accepts death at Bolli's hands, and King Óláfr is killed by his pagan enemies.

These manipulations lead to another question, namely, the nature of the 'original' tradition about King Óláfr's treatment of the pagan Icelanders in Niðarós, for in *Óláfs saga*, the king is considerably harsher than he is in *Laxdæla saga*. Which, if any, is more accurate? Possibly neither account is very reliable, for most likely both were written in service of the various programmes of their authors. That of the *Laxdæla saga* author seems to have been political. This saga was composed before Iceland became subject to Norway, and it accordingly makes certain assumptions about the relationship between conversion and rule. According to readings of St Paul—'Ubi autem spiritus Domini, ibi libertas' [And where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty] (2 Cor. 3:17)—the Christian's freedom from the devil's bonds of sin meant that he was also not subject to political conquest. Conversely, those who had to be forced to accept Christianity lost their claims to political sovereignty and could be subjugated by their converters.²⁷ Giles of Rome, whose treatise on kingship, *De regimine*, was

translated into Swedish in the mid-fourteenth century, possibly for the instruction of Hákon Magnússon (later king of Norway) and his brother Erik (later king of Sweden), elaborates on this very point. Giles argues that the right to rule could be obtained only through the working of divine grace, which became operational above all through baptism. This gave rise to the thesis that 'infidels could have neither legitimate property nor legitimate authority: what they had, they had unjustly and through usurpation. Governance or lordship could not be obtained by a mere inheritance (a merely carnal *generatio*) or by conquest, but solely by the efficacy of divine grace through regeneration, through re-birth in baptism. Power over infidels therefore belong to the Christians, and above all to the pope.'²⁸ Icelanders had long been conscious of this reasoning, and in the thirteenth century they developed a historical 'myth of freedom' as a means of resisting Norwegian efforts to annexe their country.²⁹ The topoi constituting this myth are found in several genres of Old Norse literature and employ both political and religious doctrine. The Icelandic historical myth situates itself within the Christian tradition and accepts that the forces of Christianity and Norwegian imperialism were joined in the person of the king of Norway, beginning with Óláfr Tryggvason and continuing through Magnús góði. However, it insists that the country chose to accept Christianity of its own free will at the Alþingi of 1000 A.D., thus countering both the Norwegian claim that Óláfr Tryggvason had converted Iceland forcibly and the concomitant claim to sovereignty over Iceland in the political sphere as well.³⁰ This controls the depiction of Kjartan's conversion, for he refuses to be pressured into changing his religion but later of his own free will accepts baptism at the hands of King Óláfr.³¹ This may be the reason that earlier accounts of Óláfr's harsh treatment of the pagan Icelanders were softened in *Laxdæla saga* to make Iceland's acceptance of Christianity seem more a free choice. This kind of account would better support Iceland's claims to independence.³² In *Óláfs saga*, written after Iceland's loss of independence, there is no longer any point in maintaining *Laxdæla saga's* version of these events. Indeed, a return to the earlier version is preferable, for Óláfr's willingness to murder and maim pagan foreigners emphasizes the strength of character of the Icelandic who stands up to him.

We should not forget that the adaptation of the story of Kjartan did not begin with the compilation of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*; in fact the author of *Laxdæla saga* itself had already adapted one element for his own purposes. This is the depiction of the ancestress of both Kjartan and Guðrún, named Unnr in *Laxdæla saga* but Auðr in *Landnámabók*. In *Landnámabók*, Auðr

djúpúðga is said to be a Christian. The description of her Christian interment is replaced in *Laxdæla saga* by an account of a pagan burial, in which the wealthy matriarch departs from the world of the living with extensive feasting, abundant grave goods, and a picturesque ship-grave. This change allows the saga writer to reserve the prestige of introducing Christianity for the later character Kjartan. In medieval Iceland, at least as much if not more effort was put into revising extant sagas than into composing new ones, and although this is not the place to go into the medieval Icelandic debates about the best ways to determine historical facts and preserve accurate accounts, the example of the story of Kjartan shows that the changes wrought by editor-scribes were far more likely to be the result of deliberation than accident or incompetence.³³

Not surprisingly, the willingness to go to the great cost and effort required to create a new saga or redaction was motivated by concerns that encompassed far more than an abstract antiquarianism. The depiction of Icelanders at the Norwegian court, for instance, turns out to be a mirror of contemporary Icelanders' hopes and fears about their relationship to their fatherland. While Iceland retained its independence, the story of Kjartan in *Laxdæla saga* shows an Icelander who is implied to be the equal of the king of Norway and a suitable match for the king's sister. In another three-quarters of a century, less than fifty years after the loss of Icelandic independence, the stories of Kjartan and Hallfreðr in the earliest redaction of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* multiply the examples of Icelanders who are free to choose and pursue their own destinies. Indeed, *Óláfs saga* strengthens the likeness between Kjartan and the king through its additional comparisons and the omissions that emphasize the similarities in the manner of their deaths. Given the current political situation, with Icelanders having accepted Norwegian rule, Norwegian laws, and Norwegian monopolization of their trade and even their ability to cross the ocean, this characterization of Kjartan seems a little pathetic, the result of wishful thinking or a futile desire to rewrite history. With the passage of time, however, Icelanders seem to have accepted the new relationship with Norway. The stories of Þorsteinn Ox-foot and Hallsteinn Hrómundarson in the late-fourteenth-century Flateyjarbók redaction of *Óláfs saga* depict Icelanders who recognize that not only their personal loyalty but the very salvation of their souls are owed to the king of Norway. This picture of profound dependence may have been exaggerated in order to suggest that such devotion deserved some suitable reward, but in any case it—and *Laxdæla saga* and the earlier redactions of *Óláfs saga*—tells us far more about their compilers than about the people they were writing about.

NOTES

¹ Tim William Machan, 'Scribal Role, Authorial Intention, and Chaucer's Boece', *Chaucer Review* 24 (1989), pp. 150-62.

² In ch. 233 the compiler of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* refers to *Laxdæla saga* (written ca. 1245) as one of his sources. See *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ed. by Ólafur Halldórsson, Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ A2 (København: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1961), p. 212. For the date of *Óláfs saga*, see Ólafur Halldórsson, 'Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano et al. (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 448b-9b.

³ Ólafur Halldórsson, 'Úr sögu skinnbóka', *Skírnir* 137 (1963), pp. 83-97, *The Great Sagas of Olaf Tryggvason and Olaf the Saint: AM 61 fol.*, ed. by Ólafur Halldórsson, Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile 14 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1982), p. 30 and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ed. by Ólafur Halldórsson, Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ A3 (København: C. A. Reitzel, 2000), pp. ciii-cxii and cccx-cccxcviii.

⁴ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ed. by Ólafur Halldórsson, Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ A1 (København: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1958) pp. 273-5.

⁵ Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 351-2.

⁶ Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 352-4.

⁷ Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 355-6.

⁸ Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 356-9.

⁹ Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 359-62.

¹⁰ Gerd Wolfgang Weber, 'Irreligiosität und Heldenzeitalter. Zum Mythencharakter der altisländischen Literatur', in *Specvlvm Norroenvm: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. by Ursula Dronke, Guðrún P. Helgasdóttir, Gerd Wolfgang Weber and Hans Bekker-Nielsen (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), p. 502.

¹¹ Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 362-7.

¹² Ch. 163 of *Óláfs saga* interrupts this thread of the narrative; it describes Óláfr's speech at the Frosti assembly. Ch. 163 is published in Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 367-9, and ch. 164 is found on pp. 369-71.

¹³ Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 371-2.

¹⁴ Ch. 166 of *Óláfs saga* interrupts this thread of the narrative to describe how King Óláfr meets the Icelandic poet Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld. Ch. 166 is published in Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 372-6, and ch. 167 is found on pp. 376-8.

¹⁵ Chs 168 and 169 of *Óláfs saga* interrupt this thread of the narrative to return to the main plot, which tells how Járnскеggi is killed, the local people agree to be baptized, the king

agrees to marry Járnkeggi's daughter, and she tries to kill him on their wedding night. Chs 166 and 169 are published in Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 378-86, and ch. 170 is found on pp. 386-7.

¹⁶ Chs 171-174 of *Óláfs saga* interrupt this thread of the narrative. The first two of these chapters continue the material from *Hallfreðar saga*, and the second two chapters contain *Ögmundar þáttur dytts ok Gunnars helmings*. Chs 171-4 are published in Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 387-400, and Ólafur Halldórsson (1961), pp. 1-18, and ch. 175 is found in the latter volume on pp. 18-20.

¹⁷ Ólafur Halldórsson (1961), pp. 163-6.

¹⁸ Ólafur Halldórsson (1961), pp. 175-7.

¹⁹ Ólafur Halldórsson (1961), pp. 205-12.

²⁰ *Laxdæla saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1934), p. 118, and Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), p. 361.

²¹ Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1934), p. 122.

²² Ólafur Halldórsson (1958), pp. 370-1.

²³ In the case of one of these *þættir*, the *Flateyjarbók* compiler emphasizes the filial relationship between Óláfr and his Icelandic retainer by juxtaposing *Hrómundar þáttur halta* with the chapter of *Óláfs saga* that describes the death of the king's own son, almost as if to suggest that the loss of the biological child is compensated for by the acquisition of a spiritual son.

²⁴ Marianne Kalinke, 'Stæri ek brag: Protest and Subordination in *Hallfreðar saga*', *Skáldskaparmál* 4 (1997), pp. 50-68.

²⁵ Rory McTurk, *Chaucer and the Norse and Celtic Worlds* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2005), pp. 106-47.

²⁶ *Flateyjarbók: En Samling af norske Konge-Sagaer med indskudte mindre Fortællinger om Begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt Annaler*, ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C. R. Unger (Christiania: P. T. Mallings, 1860), I 35-6.

²⁷ Weber (1981), pp. 499-505 and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, 'Intellegere historiam. Typological perspectives of Nordic prehistory (in Snorri, Saxo, Widukind and others)', in *Tradition og historieskrivning: Kilderne til Nordens ældste historie*, ed. by Kirsten Hastrup and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Acta Jutlandica* 63:2, *Humanistik Serie* 61 (Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1987), pp. 125-7.

²⁸ Walter Ullmann, *Medieval Political Thought*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 125; see also Joseph Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought 300-1450* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 133-4.

²⁹ Weber (1981), p. 500.

³⁰ Óláfr Tryggvason's threats against Iceland and his keeping Icelandic hostages at court could be interpreted as equivalent to the use of force and punishment by which he converted Norway; see Weber (1981), p. 500.

³¹ Weber (1981), pp. 502-3, and (1987), pp. 125-7.

³² Oddr Snorrason's *Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason* gives this as Óláfr's response to Þangbrandr's report of the failed mission: 'The king became very angry when he heard this and had the Icelanders seized. Some he plundered, some he killed, and some he maimed' (*The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* [(by) Oddr Snorrason], trans. by Theodore M. Andersson, *Islandica* 52 [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003], p. 90). In Snorri Sturluson's version, the king is angry but calms down after hearing from the Icelanders at court: 'Óláfr konungr varð svá óðr ok reiðr, at hann lét blása öllum íslenzkum mönnum saman, þeim er þar váru í böenum, ok mælti síðan, at alla skyldi drepa. En Kjartan ok Gizurr ok Hjalti ok aðrir þeir, er þá höfðu við kristni tekit, gengu til konungs ok mæltu, "Eigi muntu, konungr, vilja ganga á bak orðum þínum, því at þú mælir svá, at engi maðr skal svá mikit hafa gört til reiði þinnar, at eigi viltu þat upp gefa þeim, er skírask vilja ok láta af heiðni..." Tók þá konungr at hlýða á slíkar ræður' [King Óláfr became so furious and angry that he had all the Icelandic men summoned together, those who were there in town, and then he said that they should all be killed. But Kjartan and Gizurr and Hjalti and those others who had converted to Christianity went to the king and said, 'Your majesty, you will not want to go back on your word, because you say that no man who wants to be baptized and refrain from heathendom will give you such great cause for anger that you will not pardon him...' Then the king began to listen to such counsels] (*Heimskringla*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Íslenzk fornrit* 26.1 [Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1979], pp. 332-3).

³³ For discussion of some of these debates, see Sverrir Tómasson, *Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum: Rannsókn bókmenntahefðar*, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 33 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1988), pp. 194-208 and 410, and Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 29.