

POWER, IDEOLOGY AND PIETY IN HIGH MEDIEVAL NORWAY: THE KING'S MIRROR

Costel Coroban

“Valahia” University of Târgoviște, E-mail: coroban_costel@yahoo.com

Acknowledgements

This paper has been prepared with the financial support of the project “Quality European Doctorate - EURODOC”, Contract no. POSDRU/187/1.5/S/155450, project co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Sectoral Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” 2007-2013.

Abstract:

This paper explores the concepts of piety and power in the work entitled Konungs skuggsjá (King's Mirror or Speculum Regale), a writing that dates from circa 1250 issued under King Hákon Hákonarson (1217-1263) of Norway and issued for the education of his son, King Magnús lagabætir (1263-1280). Konungs skuggsjá is utilitarian and didactic, unlike other examples of literature such as saga. It is presented in the form of a dialogue between an authoritative “Father” and the “Son” and is presumably authored by one of the priests, monks or chaplains at the Norwegian court, given the extensive theological knowledge expressed in it. The text bears similar characteristics to other pieces of mirror literature that is characteristic to the High Middle Ages. Piety, which can be considered a universal value in medieval times, was also required of kings and of all men, as The Homily Book (Hómiljubók) of the time prescribed obedience as a vital ingredient for salvation. In his exploration of Norwegian kingship in the High Middle Ages, the scholar Hans Jacob Orning begins by highlighting the difference between Christian piety, in which nothing can be asked of God in return for servitude towards him, and the old pagan beliefs, wherein the gods were often addressed various requests at occasions such as sacrifices.

Rezumat:

Această lucrare explorează conceptele de piosenie și putere în lucrarea intitulată Konungs skuggsjá (Oglinda regelui sau Speculum Regale), o scriere ce datează din jurul anului 1250 sub domnia regelui Hákon Hákonarson (1217-1263) al Norvegiei și scrisă în scopul educării fiului său, regele Magnús lagabætir (1263-1280).

Konungs skuggsjá este o operă utilitară și didactică, spre deosebire de alte lucrări care se încadrează în literatura de tip saga a acelor timpuri. Textul se prezintă în forma unui dialog dintre un tată autoritar și fiul său, și se pare că a fost scrisă de unul dintre preoții de la curtea norvegiană, având în vedere extinsele cunoștințe teologice prezentate în lucrare. Textul se aseamănă cu alte exemple de literatură de tip “oglinda principilor” caracteristice Evului Mediu dezvoltat. Pioșenia, o calitate umană considerată universală în perioada medievală, era cerută din partea oamenilor de rând cât și din partea regilor, după cum și Cartea de Omilii (Hómiljubók) a acelor timpuri recomandă supunerea drept o cerință a mântuirii. În abordarea sa asupra regalității norvegiene, istoricul Hans Jacob Orning începe prin a pune în evidență diferența dintre pioșenia creștinească, în care lui Dumnezeu nu i se poate cere nimic în schimbul supunerii față de acesta, și vechile credințe păgâne, în care zeilor li se solicitau în mod expres favoruri divine în cadrul unor ceremonii cum ar fi sacrificiile.

Keywords: power, ideology, medieval history, Norway, King’s Mirror

An important source for researching the ideology of power in Norway in the High Middle Ages is *Konungs skuggsjá*¹ (King’s Mirror or *Speculum Regale*), a writing that dates from circa 1250 issued under King Hákon Hákonarson (1217-1263) and issued for the education of his son, King Magnús lagabœtir (1263-1280). *Konungs skuggsjá* is utilitarian and didactic, unlike other sagas. It is presented in the form of a dialogue between an authoritative “Father” and the “Son” and is presumably authored by one of the priests, monks or chaplains at the Norwegian court, given the extensive theological knowledge expressed in it². The text bears similar characteristics to other pieces of mirror literature that is characteristic to the High Middle Ages.

Speculum regis/principis is the name given to these books intended for the education of the ruling class, most of them authored by clerics and elaborated during two main periods: the Carolingian renaissance and the High Middle Ages (most of them being written post-1250). Their source is

¹ The version I have used is L. M. Larson (translator), *The King’s Mirror*, New York, New York American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1917. The main manuscript is identified as the Arnarnaganean manuscript 243 Ba, folio, and is found in Copenhagen at the Kongelige bibliotek (Royal Library). For the Old Norse version I have used Oscar Brenner, *Speculum regale, Ein altnorwegischer Dialog nach Cod. Arnarnag. 243 Fol. B und den ältesten Fragmenten*, Christian Kaiser, Munchen, 1881.

² Philip Pulsiano, Kirsten Wolf (editors), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, New York, Garland, 1993, p. 366.

classical and patristic tradition as well as the pastorals of Pope Gregory the Great, therefore emphasizing the “Christian ruler’s high moral responsibility to his people and to God”³. This is a clear difference to the kings’ sagas, which although authored by the same literate class of the priesthood, have the more secular purpose of portraying the lives of Norwegian kings (Sverris saga notably being the first to convey the biography of a single king in one book⁴). Most of *speculum regis* literature takes monarchy as the given system of government and implies that good governance follows the reign of a morally good king⁵.

Structurally, *Konungs skuggsjá* is divided in three great parts. The first of these concerns matters such as trade and geography, which make it highly suitable for the study of the time’s culture, yet for the present research, the last two parts, dealing with the royal court (chapters 24-41) and, respectively, truth and justice (chapters 42-70), are of the most importance.

A major piece of scholarship dedicated to the *King’s Mirror* is Sverre Bagge’s monograph⁶, which extensively examines the politics embedded in the source in relation to the political thought of the time in Europe. Sverre Bagge establishes relations between the political philosophy of the author of *Konungs skuggsjá* and intellectual developments such as the Carolingian renaissance or the rise of Aristotelian studies in the High Middle Ages, in order to be able to discern what is original in the Norwegian *speculum regis* literature text. Sverre Bagge finds that, unlike other examples of *speculum regis* literature that discuss the principle of *rex justus*, *Konungs skuggsjá* implies that the purpose of God’s representative on earth should be the advancement of the independence of royal power, instead of supporting the supremacy of the Church.

³ Joseph R. Strayer (editor), *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, Vol. 8, *Macbeth – Mystery plays*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1987, s.v. “Mirror of princes”.

⁴ Joseph R. Strayer (editor), *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, Vol. 9, *Mystery religions - Poland*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1987, s.v. “Norse kings’ sagas”.

⁵ Joseph R. Strayer (editor), *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, Vol. 8, s.v. “Mirror of princes”. Also see Lester K. Born, “The Specula principis of the Carolingian Renaissance,” in *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire*, vol. 12, no. 12-13, 1933, pp. 583-612; Walter Ullman, *Law and Politics in the Middle Ages. An Introduction to the Sources of Medieval Political Ideas*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. 227-306.

⁶ Sverre Bagge, *The Political Thought of the King’s Mirror*, Odense, Odense University Press, 1987.

The Christian principle of *rex justus*, “righteous king,” was introduced by Saint Augustine and became a very productive concept during and after the reign of Charlemagne. The principle was used by Pope Gregory VII against Henry IV, arguing that the pontiff had the right, as Vicar of Christ, to determine whether a king had violated justice, and if the king did to depose him.⁷

Sverre Bagge argues that in the view of the author of *Konungs skuggsjá*, royal power consists in the king’s role as supreme judge in his kingdom, and provides advice to the monarch on how to issue correct judgment in the purpose of consolidating public law. Sverre Bagge concludes that *Konungs skuggsjá* produced a Scandinavian theory of divine right coupled to a rational governmental plan with the scope of reinforcing the emerging high medieval Norwegian state.

Context: The consolidated Norwegian monarchy

It must be stated from the beginning that the circumstances under which *Konungs skuggsjá* was written are entirely different from those under which our previous source, *Sverris saga*, was produced. The purpose of this sub-chapter is to compare and contrast the differences and similarities between the two sources in order to allow a better characterization of the structures of kingship in Norway in the 12th and 13th centuries.

The period *Konungs skuggsjá* was written, the later part of King Hákon Hákonarson’s reign (ca. 1240-1263), differs significantly from the troubled period of the Civil war. It could be argued that after the struggles of the Civil war Norwegian royalty has acquired new meaning given the growing influence of the Church and the push for state centralization. King Sverrir Sigurðarson, leader of the Birkibeinar, had fought a long war against Magnus Erlingsson, who was supported by the Church. That is why King Sverrir was keen on refusing to continue to grant benefits to the Norwegian king and sought to use the theory of divine power in his own benefit.⁸ As we have seen in the subchapter that examines *Sverris saga*, King Sverrir eagerly took advantage of the renown of Saint Óláfr portraying himself as the true champion of the saint and as his continuator.

⁷ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Medieval Civilization*, Eugene, John Wiley & Sons, 1968, p. 471.

⁸ Knut Helle (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia, vol. 1. Prehistory to 1520*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 378.

King Hákon Hákonarson, also called Hákon IV, is considered the son of King Hákon Sverrisson, who ruled Norway between 1202-1204 and was the illegitimate son of Sverrir Sigurðarson, former leader of the Birkibeinar. The struggle with the opposing political faction, the Baglar⁹, was mostly over the control of Østlandet (Eastern Norway), a desire of King Sverrir which materialized later, under King Hákon Hákonarson. The period witnessed Church interference in the country, dating back to the creation of the archbishopric of (Nidaros) Trondheim, with the approval of King Magnus Erlingsson. The Church's position deteriorated when Sverrir became king, who in the *Speech against the bishops (Varnaðar-ræða or Mote klerkom)* published during his reigns laid out his vision on kingly authority in ecclesiastical matters¹⁰. The speech notably begins with the metaphor of the kingdom as a body, whose organs must function in complete harmony in order to avoid decline. In consequence, the king's authority must be accepted by all, including bishops, and the king should be accountable to God alone¹¹.

In 1217, when Hákon Hákonarson was acclaimed king, the situation did not fare any better for the supporters of the Church, namely Jarl Skúli Bárðarson and his followers. The pro-Church faction had to be realistic and accept King Hákon, admitting that there would probably never be a time when ecclesiastical power was as high as in the days of King Magnús, whom Sverrir had deposed.¹² Skúli Bárðarson was slew on 24 May 1240 and on 29 July 1247 the coronation of King Hákon Hákonarson was organized, acclaiming the decisive victory of the Sverrir dynasty to the throne of Norway, these events taking place a few years before the writing of *Konungs skuggsjá*¹³. On the occasion of the coronation there were dispensations that

⁹ The group was formed in Denmark, Skåne, and it represented the higher classes and the clergy in opposition to the impoverished Birkibeinar. Most often, the causes for the civil conflict between the two factions are unclear succession laws (the *things* of 1163-1164 had prescribed that the king ought to be elected by a national assembly with the bishops as influential advisors) and the conflict between royal and ecclesiastical power (Karen Larson, *A History of Norway*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1948).

¹⁰ Knut Helle, *op. cit.*, p. 375-378.

¹¹ David Brégaint, Stéphane Coviaux, Jan Ragnar Hagland, *Le Discours contre les évêques. Politique et controverse en Norvège vers 1200*, Publications de la Sorbonne, Paris, 2013, p. 8.

¹² Knut Helle, *op. cit.*, p. 379-380.

¹³ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, „Kings, Earls and Chieftains. Rulers in Norway, Orkney and Iceland c. 900-1300” in Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal, Ian Beuermann (eds.), *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages. Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faroes*, Brill, Boston, 2011.

were made by the Papacy to the king, recognizing his illegitimate birth, in exchange for minor favours that were made to the Church¹⁴.

The Pious King

Piety, which can be considered a universal value in medieval times, was also required of kings and of all men, as *The Homily Book (Hómilíubók)*¹⁵ of the time prescribed obedience as a vital ingredient for salvation.¹⁶ In his exploration of Norwegian kingship in the High Middle Ages, the scholar Hans Jacob Orning begins by highlighting the difference between Christian piety, in which nothing can be asked of God in return for servitude towards him, and the old pagan beliefs, wherein the gods were often addressed various requests at occasions such as sacrifices.¹⁷

The first part of *Konungs skuggsjá* concentrates on how the king should behave in his role as a merchant but also provides advice regarding the king's behavior in religious matters. The advice given is to "make it a habit to rise early in the morning, and go first and immediately to church wherever it seems more convenient to hear the canonical hours, and hear all the hours and mass from matins on. Join in the worship, repeating such psalms and prayers as you have learned. When the services are over, go out to look after your business affairs."¹⁸ Therefore, before commencing trade, the Son is taught by Father to attend and participate in religious service from the earliest hours of the morning.

Similarly, King Sverrir shows reverence to the churches after he had successfully dealt with an army of yeomen at Bergen: "...many of the yeomen came to him, and he gave quarter to all who asked; and as he marched through the town he kissed all the chief churches."¹⁹ The Kyrie is sung after a victory over King Magnús in Sogn²⁰. Overall, there is perhaps less piety shown in Sverris saga, as in the harsh civil war instances are described when rebels hiding in churches are brought out and executed:

¹⁴ Knut Helle, *op. cit.*, p. 380.

¹⁵ The collection of Old Norse sermons, also known as the Old Norwegian Homily Book, dates to circa 1200 (manuscript AM 619 4to), see Philip Pulsiano, Kirsten Wolf, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

¹⁶ Hans Jacob Orning, *Unpredictability and Presence: Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages*, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2008, p. 64.

¹⁷ Hans Jacob Orning, *op. cit.*, p. 57. Regarding pagans beliefs, the author points to Fredrik Paasche, *Kong Sverre*, Oslo, 1966 (orig. 1920), pp. 106–7.

¹⁸ *Konungs skuggsjá*, chapter III.

¹⁹ Sverris saga, chapter 40.

²⁰ Sverris saga, chapter 93.

“Many took refuge in the churches, and were nearly all slain; no church was a safe refuge this time. Men were dragged out of Kristskirk and slain, a deed that had never been done hitherto. One old Birkibein named Eyvind Skrapit, a valiant warrior, tall and strong, was taken from the choir, and dragged out of Kristskirk. They placed him on a sledge, dragged him to the Eyra and slew him there.”²¹

In the given fragment, King Magnús's men desecrate churches when going after the defeated Birkibeinar following the battle of Nidaros where King Sverrir's fleet of long ships was destroyed. It is perhaps the intent of the writer of the saga to portray King Magnús as a desecrator of holy places, which is considered unfit of any Christian. Later in the saga, when King Sverrir invades Sogn, in Soknadale, he delivers a speech to his men in which he encourages them to “Let not a cottage stand anywhere; take care only of the churches wherever you can,” and later “because the church was in danger from the fire, [...] they stretched sails in front which they moistened”²². This care for church property is an indication that the king considered respect for the church important.

Chapter 42 of *Konungs skuggsjá* is copiously dedicated to the ideal of kingly behavior before God, “who always loves justice and humility”²³. In the beginning, the Son is given the Biblical example of Patriarch Joseph who was sold into slavery in Egypt but was saved from imprisonment and made second in power next to the Pharaoh by God's love of him. Next, the story of Queen Vashti in the Book of Esther is presented in such a way that the insolence and haughtiness of the queen is highlighted. Furthermore, the son's instruction continues with the details that the new queen, Esther, was able to persuade King Xerxes to listen to her pleas only when she “...fell humbly at his feet...”²⁴, and concludes that “God demands moderation and fairness, humility, justice, and fidelity as a duty from those whom he raises to honor.”²⁵ This is reinforced with a further example of a purported Christian-Jewish synod held by Emperor Constantine and his mother, Empress Helena, where both illustrious leaders conceded their right to judge

²¹ Sverris saga, chapter 62.

²² Sverris saga, chapter 81.

²³ *Konungs skuggsjá*, chapter 42.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

in the synod to lesser, more learned and wiser men. The Son is reminded in *Konungs skuggsjá* that “God holds in His hand the tiller with which He turns and moves the hearts of great lords whenever He wishes, and controls all their thoughts according to His will.”²⁶ This implies that the power of God ought to be respected and feared by the king – who though high as Emperor Constantine, must know his limits – as well as by his subjects – who, just like in the example of Esther – may rise to a great and noble position owing to their humility and piety.

The issue of the relationship between the ruler and divinity is also discussed in relation to the instance of Jesus telling his apostles “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's”²⁷. *Konungs skuggsjá* ponders on this in two of its chapters, and the remark is made that:

“... God, while He was on earth, wished to honor earthly kings and kingdoms rather than disparage them in any way; for He would not deprive the earthly kingship of what He had formerly given into the control of earthly lords; but God showed a perfect obedience to Caesar. You should also observe that, just as God commanded His apostle Peter to examine the first fish that he drew and take a penny from its mouth (and God did not want him to examine the second fish or the third, but the first only), similarly every man should in all things first honor the king and the royal dignity. For God Himself calls the king His anointed, and every king who possesses the full honors of royalty is rightly called the Lord's anointed.”²⁸

Therefore, not even God would not honor the rulers since, according to the author, he himself had invested them with their power and right to rule, and God holds kings above all others as the interpretation of the example of the coin in the fish's mouth²⁹ shows. The hierarchy of power is emphasized by the author who points out that Jesus had told Peter to retrieve the penny out of the mouth of the first fish and none other. This explanation of the theory of divine right ends with the account of the ritual of anointment and the statement that each monarch is rightfully God's chosen and

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Mark 12:7.

²⁸ *Konungs skuggsjá*, chapter 44.

²⁹ Matthew 17:24-27.

anointed. The illustration of Jesus's humbleness to the Caesar serves as an example that humbleness and piety are qualities which should be acknowledged and that have been demonstrated by the actions of God's son.

In "The King's Prayer", Father continues with practical advice on how to show devotion to God. It is recommended that prayer should take place at night or in the early morning, and the Son is advised to take part in the holy mass, much like all Christian men should, and to keep the words of Psalm 16:8 in his head: "I shall ever see the Lord before my face, for He is always at my right hand." This means that the monarch is encouraged to always act as if God himself would, as He is present at his "right hand." After this call for continuous meditation, Father instructs that prayer should consist in four stages: confessing the true faith to God, acknowledging his preoccupation for his kingdom, declaring his transgressions and wrongdoings, imploring compassionate judgment and remission of sins and finally recognizing himself as a servant of God, who had given him his throne in his magnanimity. Prominently, the Son is taught to always remember his wife, his bishops, his chiefs (*hofðingia*) and warriors (*riddara*) "who assist him in the government,"³⁰ and all his husbandmen, householders and subjects. This mention of chiefs and warriors is almost incongruent with the religious character of this section of *Konungs skuggsjá* and is perhaps a remnant of the earlier times of instability, when the king's strength laid in his military entourage.

The prayer that follows after this advice to Son is written in Latin, standing out from the rest of the text in Old Norse. Some other aspects also point to a concern with the military, such as Jesus Christ being addressed as "most honourable conqueror (*strenuissime victor Jesu Christe*),"³¹ but overall this model of addressing God stands out as a monument of piety and humility on behalf of the future king:

"Even though I should mount to heaven, Thou art there before me; and though I crawl down into the lowest hiding places of hell, Thy spiritual dominion is there; and though I were to fly upon the wings of the winds and hide beyond the uttermost boundaries of the ocean solitudes, even there Thy right hand would seize me and lead me back into Thy control. For Thy mind has numbered the sands driven by the winds and by the

³⁰ *Konungs skuggsjá*, chapter 54.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

power of the ocean about all the earth, and Thine eye knows all the drops of the dewy rain. Therefore, I implore Thee, Oh my Lord, do not enter into the seat of judgment with me, Thy servant, to search out my righteousness; and do not number the multitude of my sins, but turn Thy face away from mine iniquities and cleanse me from my secret faults and wash away all my guilt. For my sins are great and lie heavy upon my head; they are so many that they seem numberless to me in their multitude, - sins that I have committed in vain thinking, in foolish words, in neglecting Thy commandments and forgetting Thy holy law in every way, in indiscreet testimony and thoughtless oaths, in judging unjustly between men, in excessive avarice, and in all manner of useless and evil works. I acknowledge and confess to Thee, Oh Lord, calling all Thy saints to witness, that I am so guilty of misdeeds and evil works, that I am already condemned by the multitude of my transgressions, unless I may share in the benefits of the exceeding abundance of Thy mercy and of the good and meritorious intercessions of my Lady, the holy Virgin Mary, and of all the saints in whom Thou hast been well pleased since the world began.”³²

After the beginning of the prayer we notice this confession of the Son’s humility where the omnipresence of God is demonstrated. Hiding “in the lowest ... places of hell” or mounting to “heaven” or flying “upon the wings of the winds... beyond the uttermost boundaries of the ocean solitudes” cannot escape God’s presence. Perhaps the geographic extremities mentioned by the author here to exemplify remote location where God’s

³² “Et ego si nossem celum ascendere tertium tu ibi presides; et si in infimas latebrarum baratri tenebras serpsero super eminent et illic tua virtuosa potestas. Et si evolare scirem supra paennas ventorum ut laterem extra metas marine solitudinis ultimas tamen et iude sumeret dextera tua sub tuamque iusticiam reduceret. Tu namque dispersam ventis arcuam ineffabili sciencia dinumeras commotam eciam maris in cessanti motu peramplium orbis spacium. Pluniales quoque roris guttas omnes oculus tuus numero comprehendit. Ideoque te deprecor domine mi ut cum servo tuo non intres in sessionem iudicij ut sic perseruteris equitatem meam. Sed et ne con numeres multitudinem scelerum meorum immo pocius anequicijs meis faciem tuam averte. Ab occultis meis munda me domine facinora mea dele. Quia super capud meum magna sunt peccata mea et ponderosa et pre multitudine michimet in numerabilia. Ea precipue que commisi in cogitacionibus vanis in verbis in compositis in inprovida circa legem tua sanctam negligencia improvises testificationibus in iuramentis in plurimis operibus malis et minus utilibus. Confiteor et concede coram te domine mi sub omnium sanctorum et electorum tuorum testimonio. Adeo me reum delictorum et in iquorum actuum quod ex eorum numero sum dampnabilis nisi summa et prepotenti copia misericordie tue muniar nec non meritis et intercession sacra special domine mee dei genitricis mariae et omnium sanctorum qui tibi ab exordio mundi plecuerunt. ...”, Konungs skuggsjá, chapter 54.

presence is still felt are similar to the remote voyages illustrated in the Eddas. For example, in *Vafþrúðnismál*, Óðin – in his hypostasis as Gagnrad (Journey-counsel) – asks *Vafþrúðnir* “Whence the wind comes,/ that over ocean passes...”³³, to which he is told that “*Hræsvelgr* he is called,/ who at the *end of heaven* (emphasis mine) sits,/ a *Jötun* in an eagle’s plumage:/ from his wings comes/ it is said, the wind,/ that over all men passes”³⁴. Here we can more clearly see the similarity between the “end of heaven (*himins enda*)” in the Poetic Edda and the place “beyond the uttermost boundaries of the ocean solitudes (*extra metas marine solitudinis ultimas*)” invoked in the king’s prayer in *Konungs skuggsjá*. The comparison is not surprising if we also take into consideration that sailing was such an important occupation for the Old Norse, so, for them, an unreachable destination would be somewhere beyond the oceans.

Furthermore, the power of omniscience that is attributed to God – who “has numbered the sands driven by the winds and by the power of the ocean about all the earth”³⁵ – in order to show the king’s humility quite matches the wisdom of Odin, who went to challenge *Vafþrúðnir* on his knowledge of cosmogony.

The prayer continues with the king confessing his wrongdoings and asking for them to be blot out by God, which matches the rising importance of confession at the beginning of the high middle ages, owed to the spread of monastic orders and generally the better organization of the Church in the wake of the eleventh century reforms³⁶. Next, the Son is instructed that when he prays he should admit that “mercy has appointed me to Thine office and has exalted me, though unworthy, to the royal dignity and the sacred chieftainship; and Thou hast appointed me to judge and to govern Thy holy people.”³⁷ It is noteworthy that the Son was instructed in the theory of divine right in such a precise manner, whose model does not only act upon kingship but upon sacred chieftainship (“*in sacro principatu*,” in original) as well, decreeing that not only the rule of the king but of all chiefs derives from

³³ „Hvaðan vindr of kemr,/ svá at ferr vág yfir...”, stanza 36, *Vafþrúðnismál* in the Poetic Edda.

³⁴ „*Hræsvelgr* heitir,/ er sitr á *himins enda*,/ *jötunn* í *arnar ham*,/ af hans *vængjum*/ *kvæða* vind koma/ alla menn yfir”, stanza 37, *Vafþrúðnismál* in the Poetic Edda.

³⁵ *Konungs skuggsjá*, chapter 54.

³⁶ See Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, *Kristninga í Norden 750-1200*, Det Norske Samlaget, Oslo, 2003, pp. 89-90. Joseph H. Lynch, Phillip C. Adamo, *The Medieval Church. A Brief History*, 2nd edition, Routledge, New York, 2014, pp. 71-75.

³⁷ *Konungs skuggsjá*, chapter 54.

God's authority. In *Konungs skuggsjá*, on the one hand, the outcomes of prayer are spiritual, the Son is instructed to pray as in the above examples so that he is granted "right understanding, self-control and sense of justice, eloquence, purpose, and good intentions,"³⁸ while, on the other hand, in *Sverris saga*, prayer often results in miracles. One very good example is the naval battle at Nidaros, where King Sverrir's prayer to Saint Óláfr resulted in the apparition of a miraculous mist that delivered the king's ships from danger.³⁹ This incredible illustration of the effects of prayer in *Sverris saga* rather matches the pagan model of piety, in which devotion was supposed to be immediately rewarded by the gods. King Sverrir appeals to Saint Óláfr, the patron saint of the kingdom he is trying to reclaim for himself, and his successful escape means that he is favoured both by God and Saint Óláfr, which is a double legitimacy.

Conclusion

This comparative analysis of piety and humility in *Konungs skuggsjá* has started from the principles set out in the *Hómilíubók* which acclaimed the mentioned qualities as essential for the salvation of any Christian. This consideration is important when looking at the ideology of power in high medieval Norway because earlier sources, such as *Sverris saga*, though include and depict acts of devotion to God, are less productive in this respect. The nature of devotion in *Sverris saga* is much more direct, and closer to the old Viking beliefs, in which gods were addressed different requests on the occasion of religious ceremonies or other devotional acts. To give one more example, at the launching of the long ship that he dedicated to the Virgin Mary, king Sverrir makes gifts of priestly robes to the archbishop and has relics fixed on the new ship in order to bring "help and good fortune to the ship and the crew, and to all who sail upon it"⁴⁰. Also, King Sverrir uses his piety – for example, the episode at the beginning of his campaign for the throne of Norway, when, after prayer, Saint Óláfr himself protected and delivered him from danger – as a mean of legitimization. In contrast, what *Konungs skuggsjá* recommends to kings stands out as much closer to the Christian European model of pious kingship. Perhaps due to the influence

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *Sverris saga*, chapter 32.

⁴⁰ *Sverris saga*, chapter 80.

of Smaragdus of St. Mihiel's *Via regia* or other earlier *speculi principiorum*⁴¹, the Son in Konungs skuggsjá is advised by his father to behave in the most pious way possible: he must attend church in the morning, recite the psalms, confess his faith, let God know of his continuous worry for leading God's people the right way, confessing his own wrongdoings and begging for kind judgment before declaring himself a servant of God (it was King Magnús Erlingsson who had first called himself king by the grace of God, *dei rex gracia*⁴²). Having done this, the mind of the monarch must be preoccupied with examples of meekness and punishment of arrogance, such as those told by the commanding Father in Konungs skuggsjá: how Joseph rose from being a slave to becoming second in rank to the Pharaoh in Egypt, how Queen Vashti lost her position when she showed exceeding pride and humble Esther took her place and how the powerful Emperor Constantine and his mother, Helena, conceded their right to judge in a synod to less powerful yet wiser men. In the following subchapter the focus of the analysis will change to institutional relations between the king and the Church.

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⁴¹ At Smaragdus of St. Mihiel (c. 760 – c. 840) the king appears as a semi-ascetic figure. Other similar writers are Sedulius Scottus (fl. 840-860, his work is *De rectoribus christianis*), John of Salisbury (c. 1120 – 25 October 1180, famous for his *Polycraticus*) and many others. Joseph R. Strayer, *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*. Vol. 7, *Italian Renaissance-Mabinogi*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1986, pp. 264-269.

⁴² Hans Jacob Orning, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

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