

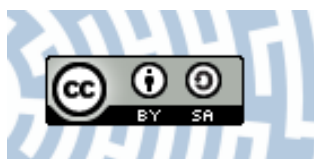


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Title: A skald in royal service – the case Þórarinn loftunga. Pt. 1, Ideological contexts of Hofuðlausn

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**A skald in royal service – the case Þórarinn loftunga.
Part 1: Ideological contexts of *Höfuðlausn***

Keywords: skaldic poetry, Christian doctrine, royal ideology

INTRODUCTION

Despite a limited scope of information on Þórarinn loftunga, an Icelandic poet, who was famous for his service for Knútr inn ríki, the king of England, Denmark and Norway, there is a reasonable ground to assume that the skald played an important role in events he described in his poetry. It mainly refers to taking over of Nor by Knútr in 1028 and efforts to establish Knútr's son Sveinn in Norway in early 1030s as a follower and heir of the king Óláfr Haraldsson whose status as saint was just about to rise¹.

Knútr, as other rulers of that time, was eager to use skaldic poetry as one of the main channels of royal propaganda. That's why his court in England gathered a substantial number of skalds who were delivering their compositions praising the king that served to legitimise both his status and achievements².

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- 1 Timothy Bolton, *Cnut the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 172–195; Jakub Morawiec, *Knut Wielki. Król Anglii, Danii i Norwegii (ok. 995–1035)* (Kraków: Avalon, 2013), 248–301.
 - 2 Matthew Townend, “Contextualising the Knútsdrápur. Skaldic Praise-Poetry at the Court of Cnut”, *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001): 145–179; Jakub Morawiec, *Między poezją a polityką. Rozgrywki polityczne w Skandynawii XI wieku w świetle poezji ówczesnych skaldów* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016), 407–446.

The first half of the 11th century was also marked by new serious challenges for the skaldic art. An advent of Christianity in the North in general and baptism of numerous rulers in particular, made skalds make efforts to implement symbolism of the new faith into their art. Poetry dated to the period shows that it was an utterly demanding and difficult task for many poets and it resulted mainly with temporary decline of sophisticated stylistics of pagan kennings. This very period brought also conditions for the emergence of a new kind of skald – a man who used his talent not only to praise his patron but also to voice his own opinions and views. Both Sigvatr Þórðarson and Arnórr Þórðarson are the best examples of this trend and it is tempting to investigate if Þórarinn loftunga could be classified under the same category of poets³.

Consequently, the main aim of my study is to contextualise Þórarinn's poetry as a whole and inspect if it can be treated as a sophisticated insight not only into the politics of Knútr inn ríki (and his son Sveinn) but also the skald's own artistic input that could have affected his place at the royal court. The present study on Þórarinn's poetry is arranged into three parts, each one devoted to a skald's different composition.

The first part is focused on preserved lines of *Höfuðlausn*. Despite its limited range⁴, it features very sophisticated vocabulary that points at skald as being an innovative and skilful poet. The kenning *gætir Gríklands* (defender of Greece) and a compound *himinríki* (the Heavenly Kingdom) will remain in the centre of my analysis. My aim of this part is to investigate to what extent these sophisticated stylistic devices reflect certain political and religious aspects of the ideological framework that accompanied Knútr during his reign in England.

THE POET

As in cases of numerous other skalds, all the information about Þórarinn we have today comes from Scandinavian sources, both poetry attributed to him and sagas referring to his works. Both *Heimskringla* and *Knýtlinga* sagas portray Þórarinn as a distinguished poet (*skáld mikit*) who gained success serving kings and other rulers and do not hesitate to note his nickname, Praise-Tonuge (*loftunga*)⁵.

Authors of both sagas, introducing the poet, attach an anecdote, that can be classified as a typical *höfuðlausn* episode. Þórarinn was said to compose a poem for Knútr,

3 Morawiec, *Między poezją a polityką*, 216–226, 236–241.

4 See below.

5 *Heimskringla II*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit 26–28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 2002), 307 (further cited as Hsk II); *Danakonunga sögur*, ed. Bjarni Guðnason, Íslenzk fornrit 35, (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1982), 124. The author of the latter text adds that Þórarinn was old when he came to Knútr's court.

that appeared to be a flokkur, a type of composition considered to be less prestigious. The king found it highly dishonourable and ordered skald to deliver a more prestigious drápa if Þórarinn wanted to save his life. The poet did his task and delivered a new composition the very next day, deserving a reward of fifty marks of silver⁶.

Although both narratives retell the very same story, both versions differ in one aspect. In Snorri's variant Þórarinn delivered his poem being already a member of the royal retinue, whereas in the Knytlinga saga version the incident happened when Þórarinn wanted to enter Knútr's court for the very first time⁷.

The Legendary Saga of St. Óláfr features an episode on another skald, Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, who is said to have visited the court of Knútr inn ríki during his journey to Denmark. The episode concentrates on the king's effort to attract Þormóðr with a vision of becoming a king's skald. The latter remains reluctant, voicing his doubt if he deserves such a grace and if Knútr will be generous enough. Then the king recalls other poets who stayed with him, including Þórarinn loftunga and offers Þormóðr the same payment he gave the former – a mark of gold. Although Þormóðr remarks that Þórarinn was no longer in Knútr's service, he finally accepts the invitation. The episode is further concluded by a stanza, attributed to Þormóðr, in which he recalls Þórarinn by his nickname and urges the king to reward his efforts at least equally⁸.

Flateyjarbók features another episode, on envoys sent by Knútr to Norway who were to provide Óláfr Haraldsson with the king's errand claiming his rights to rule over Norway. This episode is concluded by a note on two poets who remained at Knútr's court and were rewarded by the king, Sigvatr Þórðarson and Þórarinn loftunga. According to the author of the episode, the king of England and Denmark gave Þórarinn two rings, a half mark of gold and a sword⁹.

Episodes listed above suggest that for saga authors and compilers Þórarinn was a very convenient example of a famous poet in Knútr's service. Interestingly, a version of the Þormóðr episode in the Legendary Saga lists Þórarinn alongside another poet, Skapti, whereas a version in Flateyjarbók features Þórarinn only. It points at Þórarinn's status and fame as a convincing illustration of Knútr's riches and his generosity. The latter's willingness to spend money was a prominent motif in various compilations of Ólaf's saga explaining the way the King of England and Denmark was

6 Hsk II, 308; *Danakonunga sǫgur*, 125.

7 The version of the same story in Flateyjarbók repeats the scheme of Heimskringla. See *Flateyjarbók. En samling af norske konge-sagær*, vol. 2. (Christiana: P.T. Mallings Forlagsboghandel, 1861), 306.

8 *Óláfs saga hins helga. Die „Legendarische Saga“ über Olaf den Heiligen*, ed. Anne Heinrichs et al. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1982), 124–126; *Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga. Den store saga om Olav den hellige efter pergamenthåndskrift i Kungliga biblioteket i Stockholm nr. 2 4to med varianter fra andre håndskrifter*, ed. Oscar Albert Johnsen, Jón Helgason, 2 vols. (Oslo: Dybwad, 1941), 799–802; *Flateyjarbók II*, 199–200.

9 *Flateyjarbók II*, 253.

able to overcome Óláfr Haraldsson. Although representing two hostile sides, all three poets can be placed under the same category of prominent and talented skalds, whose art was highly needed by their patrons. From a perspective of saga authors and their audiences, Þórarinn's affiliation with the court of Knútr seems to be equally obvious and deeply-rooted as similar cases of Hallfreðr Óttarsson linked with Óláfr Tryggvason or both Sigvatr Þórðarson and Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld linked with Óláfr the Saint. Importantly, both latter skalds are illustrated in the sagas as the ones who did not fear to use their talent and position to voice their own thoughts on political matters. A question arises if Þórarinn could be placed within the same category of poets/members of a royal retinue. Such a problem should be analysed from two different perspectives. The first one refers to the literary image of Knútr and his relations with poets. The second, to historical status of skaldic art in his court. I will return to this issue in the final part of my study.

Þórarinn's association with both Knútr inn ríki and his son Sveinn is also marked by Skáldatal accords with preserved poetry that is attributed to him¹⁰. Still it is impossible today to state when exactly Þórarinn entered Knútr's retinue although it had to happen before 1028 when the King of England and Denmark invaded Norway. He described the expedition in one of his poems and one can assume he took an active part in that endeavor. His engagement in Sveinn Knútsson's instalment (together with his mother Ælfgifu of Northampton) in Norway proves that Þórarinn was considered not only as a good poet but also a trustworthy man. The poem he composed there, *Glælognskviða*, points at his personal engagement in attempts of young Sveinn's retinue to either initiate or take control of the emerging cult of St. Óláfr. One cannot rule out a possibility that it was the main reason why Knútr sent Þórarinn to Norway. His further dealings remain unknown. Perhaps he left Norway ca. 1035, accompanying Sveinn and his mother, who had to retreat under growing pressure of leading Norwegian nobles.

ÞÓRARINN'S WORKS AND THEIR PRESERVATION

Preserved poetry of Þórarinn features three poems: *Höfuðlausn* (Head-Ransom), *Tøgdrápa* (Journey *drápa*) and *Glælognskviða* (Sea-Calm *kviða*)¹¹. Although the title of the first poem (*Höfuðlausn*) has its medieval background, a context of its composition

10 A list of poets composing for Scandinavian rulers, attached to both *Snorra Edda* and one of manuscripts of *Heimskringla*. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar. Edda Snorronis Sturlaei*, ed. Jón Sigurðsson et al., vol. 3. Copenhagen, 1887, 258, 267. See also Morawiec, *Między poezją a polityką*, 72–77.

11 *Scandinavian Poetry of the Middle Ages, Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1. From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, vol. 2, ed. Diana Whaley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 849–876 (further cited as SPMA 1).

should be rather considered as a later literary construct. Snorri Sturluson in his *Heimskringla* and authors of other redactions of *Óláfs saga helga*, cite the refrain (*stef*)¹² of the poem which is the only preserved fragment of this composition. Despite its radically limited scope, the preserved refrain, referring to a concept of Knútr as a Christian monarch, accords with other means of propaganda employed by the King of England and Denmark. It allows to accept Matthew Townend's proposals of dating the poem to ca. 1027¹³. Doubts concerning the historical veracity of the *höfuðlausn* motif make it very probable that the refrain was a part of *drápa*, by which Þórarinn initiated his service for the king. Consequently, one can assume, that originally Þórarinn's poem was a *drápa* dedicated to Knútr and as such can be grouped among other preserved *Knútsdrápur*¹⁴.

Contrary to *Höfuðlausn*, it is possible to be more precise when it comes to chronology of another Þórarinn's poem – *Tøgdrápa*. Its content suggests that the skald composed it sometime between 1028 and 1030, i.e. between taking control over Norway by Knútr and the death of jarl Hákon of Hlaðir, who was predestined to represent the king in Norway¹⁵.

The poem depicts the route Knútr and his fleet took on his way to Norway in 1028. The skald enlists the spots, that either marked crucial stages of the campaign (e.g. Limfjord, where the king's troops from Denmark and England met), or made it easier for an audience to estimate developments of the royal fleet (e.g. Stad). The poem features eight stanzas. Þórarinn used a *klofastef* in his *drápa*. Its second part is missing, thus assumptions that the poem is partially preserved are justified¹⁶. Its beginning ("Knúts und sólar") leaves no doubt that, similarly to *Höfuðlausn* – Þórarinn composed *Tøgdrápa* being fully aware of ideological expectations of the king and his court concerning legitimacy of Knútr's power in England. Stanzas of *Tøgdrápa* are to be found in various narratives. Six out of eight preserved strophes are cited by Snorri in both redactions of *Ólaf's saga helga*. A sequence of the first four stanzas is to be found in redaction A of *Fagrskinna*. Stanzas 7 and 8 are to be found only in the *Knýtlinga saga* and *Snorra Edda* respectively¹⁷.

12 As it features two lines only, one cannot exclude a possibility this couplet is a part of an original four-line refrain.

13 SPMA 1, 850.

14 Townend, "Contextualising the *Knútsdrápur*", 157.

15 SPMA 1, 851. For more about the poem see part 2 of this study.

16 SPMA 1, 851.

17 Stanza 8 is cited by all main redactions of *Snorra Edda*. Only redaction A attributes it to Þórarinn. See SPMA 1, 862.

Snorri used the poem while describing Knútr's expedition to Norway in 1028¹⁸. Providing a whole sequence of six stanzas, in fact he makes Þórarinn a dominant figure of the chapter. It is the skald, not the saga author, who "speaks" through his poetry and provides a proper account on the encounter of two monarchs. In this very case, Snorri did not feel obliged to either develop or explain the content of the stanzas and one can find it as a consequence of a good opinion he had of Þórarinn as a poet. He concludes the chapter in question with an intriguing comment. Snorri states that for he who composed the stanzas, an observance of these events was far more important than retelling them (*var sjón sögu ríkri*), as Þórarinn was very proud of being in the company of King Knútr when he came to Norway¹⁹. This unique statement can be interpreted in different ways. On one hand it could refer to Snorri's general acknowledgment of skalds as eye-witnesses of various events, articulated in the Prologue of *Heimskringla*²⁰. On the other, it could, rather indirectly, refer to Snorri's focus on Knútr's generosity as the key factor in a process of gathering followers, needed to overcome King Óláfr the Saint effectively. No matter which alternative one prefers, it is possible to assume that Snorri knew the remaining preserved stanzas of *Tøgdrápa*. Obviously, it is confirmed by the featuring of strophe 8 in *Snorra Edda* where it is used to provide an example a kenning of a generous man²¹. However, the above mentioned statement of Snorri clearly suggests that he had known also stanza 7, the very same used by the author of the *Knýtlinga* saga. Þórarinn underlines the fact of meeting the outstanding man (*mannbaldr*) – Knútr and fifty marks (*fimm tega marka*) he was given for his poem²². Snorri refers to the very same amount of silver, the poet was said to be given by the king, although according to *Heimskringla* it was a reward for *Höfuðlausn*²³. Besides, it seems very probable that Þórarinn's remark on meeting *mannbaldr* was enough for Snorri to comment on the poet's pride.

The author of *Fagrskinna* decided to cite a sequence of four strophes of *Tøgdrápa* (stanzas 2–5). Similarly to Snorri, he used them to corroborate his own account on Knútr's expedition to Norway in 1028²⁴. The author of the *Knýtlinga* saga, on the other

18 Hsk II, 307–310.

19 Hsk II, 310.

20 See Morawiec, *Między poezją a polityką*, 33–34.

21 Snorri Sturluson, *Edda, Skáldskaparmál 1–2*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), 63.

22 SPMA 1, 861.

23 Hsk II, 310.

24 *Fagrskinna*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, *Íslensk fornrit 29*, (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1984), 191–193.

hand, cited stanza 7 of the poem, just to fulfil his account on Þórarinn and his encounters with King Knútr²⁵.

A distinguished feature of *Tøgdrápa* is its metre – *tøglag* (journey metre). It differs from *dróttkvætt*, the most popular skaldic metre, by having four syllables (instead of six) in each line. Presumably, referring to the title of the poem, the metre was to be used in accounts on war expeditions, optionally other travels of the king. *Tøglag* seems to be especially bound to Knútr's court. Perhaps it was a result of numerous journeys undertaken by this monarch (Denmark, Norway, Rome, Saxony) that each time they were presented as an important and prestigious means of Knútr's reign. The same metre was used by Sigvatr in his *Knútsdrápa*²⁶. Matthew Townend argues that the latter poet invented the metre and used it for the first time but it was Þórarinn's *drápa* that made it well known²⁷.

Þórarinn composed *Glælognskviða* being already in Norway, presumably ca. 1032²⁸. The poem should be considered as an immanent element of policy undertaken by the Danish regime, represented by Sveinn Knútsson and his mother Ælfgifu of Northampton, aiming at strengthening the position of the young ruler in the country. It featured either initiating and/or stimulating the emergence of the cult of Óláfr Haraldsson, who, as a saint, was supposed to grant Norway to Sveinn as his spiritual heir. The fact that such a poem was composed by Þórarinn points at trust and recognition he enjoyed at the court²⁹. Early dating of the poem was questioned by Staffan Hellberg³⁰. He claims that Knútr had no interest in promoting the cult of his enemy³¹. Besides, it is impossible, in his opinion, to observe any traces of miracle tradition in newly christianised Norway. Moreover, Hellberg sees direct similarities between the poem and the earliest liturgy on St. Óláfr, dated to the mid-11th century. That's why he argues that the poem was composed later, based on the account of now-lost *Translatio Sancti Olavi* and used on the occasions of later translations of the holy monarch³². Hellberg's argument was criticised by Haki Antonsson, who claims that the mature state of Óláfr's cult as portrayed in *Glælognskviða*, a result of skald's observations in England, should be considered as an idealised picture. Moreover, Haki rightly claims that veneration of such

25 *Danakonunga sǫgur*, 125.

26 Morawiec, *Między poezją a polityką*, 234.

27 SPMA 1, 852.

28 SPMA 1, 864.

29 Jakub Morawiec, "Cnut the Great's conquest of Norway and beginnings of the cult of St. Olaf", *Gdańskie Studia z Dziejów Średniowiecza* 18 (2014): 157–168.

30 Staffan Hellberg, „Kring tillkomsten av *Glælognskviða*”, *Arkiv for Nordisk Filologi* 99 (1984): 14–48.

31 *Ibidem*, 18.

32 *Ibidem*, 18–25.

saints in England, like St. Edward the martyr, could have inspired Knutr to promote the cult of his former enemy³³.

The poem features nine stanzas. Again, it is very probable, it was longer originally. All stanzas are cited by Snorri in both redactions of his *Óláf's saga helga*. Stanza 1 is cited in *Fagrskinna*. *Glælognskviða* is composed in *kviðuhátt*. The choice of this very metre could have been dictated by the fact that, although it was addressed to Sveinn Knútsson, it was not typical *lofakvæði*³⁴. Townend's suggestion that Þórarinn was under the influence of earlier *kviðuhátt* poetry, first of all *Ynglingatal*, sounds interesting even if it is not well documented³⁵.

Þórarinn depicts the greatness of Sveinn and his retinue. The skald, in following stanzas, addresses the young ruler, pointing at St. Óláfr as his example to follow. Sveinn is supposed to celebrate the sanctity of his predecessor and show his own generosity and willingness to keep peace. Þórarinn refers to pilgrims visiting the shrine of St. Óláfr, experiencing miracles occurring due to the intervention of the holy monarch. Sveinn, according to the poet, should show his respect to the saint, visit his shrine and pray there. One can assume, that the delivery of the poem accompanied such a manifestation. Spiritual unity of both monarchs served to underline the distinguished status of the fallen king and to strengthen the position of the current ruler³⁶.

A STATUS OF THE KING IN HO FUÐLAUSN

As has been already noted above, there are only two lines of Þórarinn's *Höfuðlausn*, that have survived to our times, a part of the refrain of the poem:

“Knútr verr grund sem gætir Gríklands himinríki” – “Knútr defends the land as the guardian of Greece [defends] the Heavenly Kingdom”.

On the one hand, as Matthew Townend declares in his edition of the couplet, such state of its preservation makes it impossible to date the poem by internal references³⁷. On the other hand, these two lines feature intriguing elements that distinguish Þórarinn's composition within the poetic corpus. The first one is a kenning *gætir Gríklands*. A reference to Greece that plays a role of determinant in this kenning is

33 Haki Antonsson, “The Cult of St. Óláfr in the Eleventh Century and Kievan Rus”, *Middelalderforum* 3 (2003): 146. For other examples, strengthening such an argument, see Morawiec, *Knut Wielki*, 300–301.

34 SPMA 1, 863; Morawiec, *Między poezją a polityką*, 234.

35 SPMA 1, 864.

36 SPMA 1, 863–876; Morawiec, “Cnut the Great's conquest of Norway”. For more about the poem see part 3 of this study.

37 SPMA 1, 850.

probably the oldest surviving instance of this kind³⁸ and usually the whole phrase is explained as a kenning of God³⁹. The second distinguished element is a word himinríki – the Heavenly Kingdom. Again, it is the oldest known example of such a term in the corpus⁴⁰. Both cases point at the skald being an innovative artist not afraid to implement new and original elements into his art.

As it has been already noted, the two lines resemble very closely refrains of other poems composed at Knútr's court and dedicated to the king, namely Sigvatr Þorðarson's and Hallvarðr háreksblei's Knútsdrápur⁴¹. As Roberta Frank noted, all three refrains depict the king of England and Denmark in high relief placing the monarch above other humans and just next to God⁴². Indeed, kennings employed by Sigvatr and Hallvarðr, *höfuðfremstr jöfurr* (the most eminent ruler) and *dróttinn ítran fjalla sal* (lord of the splendid hall of the mountain), symbolically accord well with the phrase used by Þórarinn. As Elaine Treharne has recently argued, Sigvatr's *höfuðfremstr jöfurr* echoes a process of transformation of Knútr from Viking king to venerated northern emperor that should be linked with the king's trip to Rome in 1027 and the ideological framework of his letter to English subjects issued the same year⁴³. The poetic message can be linked, according to Treharne, with a tendency to define Knútr's status as *vicarius Christi*, resembled also by other accounts, especially *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and contemporary visual depictions of the king (Stowe 944)⁴⁴. Elsewhere, Treharne, following the argument of Timothy Bolton, points at Knútr's pilgrimage to Rome, attending the imperial coronation of Conrad II and meeting the Pope as key events that influenced certain changes in royal imagery focusing on Knútr's monarchical supremacy, spiritual validation and imperial ambition. The king wanted to be both depicted and treated as equal to Roman emperors like Charlemagne, of Otto I, and, his contemporary, Conrad II⁴⁵.

38 Hellberg, "Kring tillkomsten", 36; Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age. The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), 100.

39 See SPMA 1, 850.

40 Ibidem, 851.

41 SPMA 1, 649–662; *Scandinavian Poetry of the Middle Ages, Poetry from Treaties on Poetry*, ed. Kari Ellen Gade, Edith Marold (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 239.

42 Roberta Frank, "King Cnut in the Verse of his Skalds", in: *The Reign of Cnut, King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. Alexander R. Rumble (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), 116–117.

43 Elaine Treharne, "The Performance of Piety. Cnut, Rome, and England", in: *England and Rome in the early Middle Ages. Pilgrimage, Art, and Politics*, ed. Francesca Tinti (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 356.

44 Ibidem, 352. See also Elaine Treharne, *Living Through Conquest. The Politics of Early English 1020–1220*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13.

45 Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, 14; Timothy Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great. Conquest and Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009), 290–300. See also Morawiec, *Knut Wielki*, 325.

Although, in my opinion, both Bolton and Treharne are not right limiting the process in question to immediate effects of Knútr's visit in Rome, the latter's analysis seems to support earlier assumptions that all three Knútsdrápur should be placed together not only from a perspective of its rhetoric but also their similar chronology⁴⁶. All three extravagant kennings can be seen as both a response of skalds to the needs of sophisticated ideological framework employed at the royal court and the result of their artistic efforts to face these expectations. Individuality of the refrains in general and kennings in particular could have been a result of either cooperation or competition between skalds. Both alternatives seem to be equally possible, pointing at a relatively high level of artistry as a necessary factor allowing a poet to enter Knútr's retinue.

Trying to contextualise Þórarinn's kenning, especially the reference to Gríklánd, it would be, of course, hard to forget about the significance of the king's visit in Rome in 1027. It seems reasonable to argue that all three poets were expected to reflect properly Knútr's ambitions in their compositions. Considering both sophistication of the refrains and later tradition on the king's generosity towards his poets, one can assume they did their job. Still, looking for potential ideological inspirations for these skalds in general and Þórarinn in particular, it seems worthy to focus on a specific kind of data, previously ignored in this context, namely Knútr's charters.

There are 36 diplomas, issued in the name of Knútr, that have survived to our times. A half of them is considered authentic, another half either dubious or clear forgeries⁴⁷. In the context of preserved lines of Þórarinn's *Höfuðlausn*, both arengas of particular charters and the king's titles are especially interesting. The latter can help in a proper contextualising of *gætir Gríklánds*. Eleven out of thirty six Knútr's chapters present the king as:

- imperator Knuto,
- inclite ac speciosae gentis Anglorum regnator basileius,
- rex totius Albionis ceterarumque gentium triuiatim persistentium basileus,
- misericordia dei basileus, omnis Britanniae regimen adeptus⁴⁸.

Six of these charters are considered authentic. More importantly, they come from various stages of Knútr's reign, both before and after the postulated date of the composition of Þórarinn's *Höfuðlausn*⁴⁹. These examples leave no doubt that the king of England and Denmark did not hesitate to employ and use imperial nomenclature,

46 Frank, "King Cnut", 116–117; Townend, "Contextualising", 176–178. See also Morawiec, *Między poezją a polityką*, 54.

47 On Knútr's diplomas see Peter H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters. An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London: Beekman Books Inc, 1968), 285–297.

48 For the full list of this group of diplomas see Morawiec, *Knut Wielki*, 327.

49 Two of them, considered as authentic, are dated to 1019 (S 956) and 1024 (S 961) respectively. See Morawiec, *Knut Wielki*, 328.

showing him as sovereign not only in England but in the whole region ranging from Ireland to Sweden.

Partly agreeing with both Bolton and Treharne, I would argue that the visit in Rome in 1027 intensified and cemented, rather than initiated, Knútr's ambitions to present himself as equal to emperor and another vicarius Christi. The king found it an important and useful ideological framework, crucial not only for his plans, for instance towards Norway, but also to strengthen his and his successors' position in England itself.

The latter aspect seems to be confirmed by the fact that very similar titles are to be found in diplomas issued by Knútr's predecessors, Edgar and Æthelred II. The former, in numerous cases, is titled: *tocius Britannie basileus, Christo conferente tocius Anglicæ regionis basileus*⁵⁰. Such a tendency is not surprising as Edgar is considered a monarch, who was very willing to adapt imperial ideology as his coronation in Bath, showing a king as *decus ducum et totius Albionis imperator*, in 973 indicates⁵¹.

One can observe usage of the same nomenclature in diplomas issued by Æthelred II. Three cases feature direct references to imperial ideology. The king is titled:

- *famosus totius Britannicæ insulæ imperator*,
- *totius Albionis Dei providentia imperator*,
- *dei fauente clementia Angligene nationis imperator*⁵².

This very short review shows that certain elements of imperial ideology were part of English kingship already in the 10th century and were results of contacts between the dynasty of Wessex with Liudolfings. In 929 Otto I married Edith, half-sister of Æthelstan, king of the English. Starting in mid-930s, Æthelstan's diplomas present him as *anglorum basyleos et curagulus totius Bryttannie*. Such rhetoric was found useful in a process of unification of England, undertaken by Æthelstan and his successors⁵³. Knútr, on the other hand, since the very beginning of his reign in England, did his best to present himself as legal heir of his predecessors, especially Edgar⁵⁴. The introduction of new law, royal coinage and titles used in diplomas, were meant to make his English subjects believe that Knútr's regime represented continuity of the golden era of Edgar.

50 See Simon Keynes, "A Conspectus of the Charters of King Edgar, 957–975", in: *Edgar. King of the English 959–975. New Interpretations*, ed. Donald Scragg (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), 60–82; Morawiec, *Knut Wielki*, 329.

51 See Simon Keynes, "Edgar, rex admiralibus", in: *Edgar. King of the English 959–975. New Interpretations*, ed. Donald Scragg (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), 4.

52 See Morawiec, *Knut Wielki*, 329 for details concerning the charters.

53 See Catherine E. Karkov, *The Ruler Portraits of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 14.

54 See Michael K. Lawson, "Archbishop Wulfstan and the Homiletic Element in the Laws of Æthelred II and Cnut", *The English Historical Review* 107/424 (1992): 568 and especially 571, where Lawson recalls one of Ælfric's homilies, confronting the times of the heathen (Scandinavian) army harassing the country with the times of Edgar, when the whole kingdom enjoyed peace, as a good example of this sentiment.

His visit in Rome in 1027 brought an additional argument for such a view, fully used by the king and his retinue⁵⁵.

It shows that Þórarinn, in fact no matter when exactly he started his service for Knútr, had many chances to learn about aspects of imperial ideology used by the king of England and Denmark and learn how to use it in his poetry for his patron. Unfortunately, our deduction has to be based on two lines of *Höfuðlausn* and two other *Knútsdrápur*. Still, the kenning *gætir Gríklands* seems to resemble a certain knowledge on the concept of the most ultimate ruler, sovereign of all Christians and their rulers, so visibly depicted in both writings and visuals showing Carolingians and Liudolfings in general and Otto III as *dominator mundi* (the Aachen Gospels) in particular⁵⁶. On the other hand, one cannot exclude a possibility, that Þórarinn, constructing the kenning, was at least equally motivated by an ambition to distinguish his art from his peers at the royal court. First of all, the kenning *gætir Gríklands* could have been the skald's response to refrains of other *Knútsdrápur*. As Matthew Townend rightly notes, *Hallvarðr háreksblesi's Knútr verr jörð sem alls dróttinn ítran fjalla sal* (Knútr defends the earth as the lord of all [defends] the splendid hall of the mountains) is the closest parallel⁵⁷, although one cannot be exactly sure who inspired whom. Additional inspiration could have also come from phrases like *kærr keisara* (dear to the emperor) and *klúss Pétrúsi* (close to Peter) *Sigvatr Þórðarson* used in his *Knútsdrápa*⁵⁸. All these phrases point at an important aspect of imperial ideology, namely a junction of secular and religious matters. Apart from strictly military/political duties, emperor was supposed to take care of ecclesiastical matters – alongside the pope, he was considered responsible for building and keeping harmony in Christian ecumene, defending the Church and eventually, leading his subjects into salvation⁵⁹. All three skalds seem to mirror this dichotomy in their compositions. Consequently, keeping its potential strictly divine symbolism in mind (God, Heaven), I would argue that the phrase *gætir Gríklands* could have been also a kenning of emperor, the very same way *ítran fjalla sal* that could have designated an imperial palace. That's why the twofold symbolism of these phrases

55 Morawiec, *Knut Wielki*, 330–331. See also Karkov, *The Ruler Portraits*, 137–139.

56 See for example a poem composed by Leo of Vercelli and dedicated to both pope Gregory V and Otto III. Treharne (*Living through Conquest*, 13) points also at similarities between the visual depiction of Knútr in Stowe 944 with a similar image of emperor Basil II, known from one of the psalters, being crowned by archangels, standing on a mound, under which are prostrate subjects. See also Karkov, *The Ruler Portraits*, 6, 9, 15.

57 SPMA 1, 850.

58 SPMA 1, 661.

59 See Lawson, “Archbishop Wulfstan”, 565–566 and 568 where a relevant example of Archbishop Oda of Canterbury's *Constitutio*, dedicated to king Edmund, is recalled. See also Franz Reiner Erkens, “Vicarius Christi – sacratissimus legistaltor – sacra majestas. Religiöse Herrschaftslegitimierung im Mittelalter”, *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Kanonistische Abteilung* (2003): 18–20.

seems to reflect advanced artistic skills of Knútr's poets, able to mirror sophisticated aspects of imperial ideology in their art⁶⁰.

Previous reading of *gætir Gríklands* as a God kenning seem to be justified by a term *himinríki* (the Heavenly Kingdom) used by Þórarinn in his refrain⁶¹. I do not intend to question this well-established interpretation, rather to investigate a potential background that enabled the poet to include a concept of Heavenly Kingdom in his composition.

An idea of God as a sovereign of the eternal dominion and the ultimate example to follow for all earthly rulers is one of essential elements of Christian doctrine. It is not surprising at all that one can find traces of the idea in Anglo-Saxon England. As the topic is too vast to be explored fully here, I will limit myself mainly to sermons of Wulfstan, archbishop of York, occasionally referring to other relevant examples. This choice seems especially reasonable considering the fact of the crucial role Wulfstan played in the first part of Knútr's reign in England⁶².

Apart from being an important ecclesiastical official and a law-maker, Wulfstan is remembered and recognised for his religious writings, especially sermons, composed both in Old English and Latin. One of his three homilies preserved in the York Gospel Book features a summoning to a prayer to God *ealmihtine, heofena heah cyning* (God almighty, high king of heaven)⁶³. In one of the Latin sermons, preserved in an 11th-century manuscript known as Copenhagen 1595, Wulfstan addresses his readers this way:

Cogitandum nobis est, fratres mei, et cum grandi intentione agenda est penitentia ne nos mors subitanea eueniat, sed dum tempus habemus conuertamur de malo ad bonum, ut de ista uita misera et decepta transeamus ad patriam regni caelestis perpetuam et ad uitam sine fine mansuram, et cum omnibus sanctis accipere mereamur immortalitatis gloriam.

But while we have time, let us convert from wickedness to goodness so that we can pass from this miserable and deceitful life into the perpetual homeland of the Heavenly Kingdom and into the enduring life without end, and we shall deserve to receive the glory of immortality with all the saints⁶⁴.

60 See Karkov, *The Ruler Portraits*, 133, about similar symbolism attached to both the cross Knútr and Emma donated to the New Minster in Winchester and the key of St. Peter that appears on the frontispiece of the *Liber Vitae*.

61 See Jesch, *Ships and Men*, 100.

62 Bolton, *Cnut the Great*, 93–94; Morawiec, *Knut Wielki*, 152–156.

63 E. Treharne, *Living through Conquest*, 58–59.

64 Thomas N. Hall, „Wulfstan's Latin Sermons”, in: *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York. The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, red. Matthew Townend (Turnhout: Brepols 2004), 130–131. On the manuscript see Dorothy Whitelock, „Archbishop Wulfstan, Homilist and Statesman”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 24 (1942): 31.

According to Helen Foxhall Forbes, Wulfstan wanted his audience to treat *caelestis regnum*, a residence of God, as an example for an order of earthly society, based on law and penance as two complementary means, unnecessary to please God⁶⁵. This society, as Elaine Treharne points out, Wulfstan found in his texts as still remaining in turmoil and in need of moral and political change, associated with an advent of Knútr's reign⁶⁶.

The aforementioned Knútr's charters, that feature numerous references to the concept of *caelestis regnum* and God as its ultimate ruler, point at Wulfstan's and other authors' impact at the royal court in this respect. The diploma catalogued as S 950, dated to 1018, issued by the king at the request of Queen Emma for Archbishop Ælfstan, who was granted a property in Sussex, features an arenga that seems to accord fully with Wulfstan's rhetoric confronting a failure of all that attracts a human eye with an eternal life with holy angels⁶⁷.

S 959, dated to 1023, that features a grant of the port of Sandwich for Christ Church in Canterbury, is kept in the same vein. Its arenga states that, although humans are laden with the burden of this mortal life and defiled with the transitory property of this world, yet they may purchase the eternal reward of heavenly life with these perishable riches⁶⁸.

S 963, dated to 1031, issued for minister Æthelric, granted a half hide in Devon, is another example of this trend. The arenga features reference to sacred writings that make it clear that things that are seen are temporal, whereas those which are not seen are eternal⁶⁹.

S 969, dated to 1033 and issued by the king to Bovi, one of his ministers, continues the same line of reasoning. It recalls desires of the world and gives preference to the

65 Helen Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England. Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 173.

66 Treharne, *Living through Conquest*, 62.

67 "Uniuersa quae in seculo presenti humanis uidentur oculis cito deficient, quae uero superis locantur montibus amoenitate uigent continua. in summitonantis regmine aeternaliter fixa manentia et idcirco nobis inueterati filiis seculi studendum est ut operibus iustis frui mereamur bonis caelestibus semper uicturi cum angelis sanctis". Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, p. 286. For English translation of this diploma see Michael K. Lawson, *Cnut. England's Viking King 1016–1035* (Stroud: The History Press, 2011), 221–222.

68 "Ideoque subtilissima mentis certatione illum imitari satagamus, licet mortalis uitae pondere pressi et labentibus huius saeculi possessionibus simul infoecati, tamen miserationis eius largitate caducis opibus aeterna caelestis uitae praemia mercari queamus". *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, ed. John M. Kemble, vol. 4 (London: S.&J. Bentley, 1846), 21; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 288–289.

69 „[...] secundum illud quod prece gentium in sacris scripturis paginis clara promulgat predicatione. Dicens omnia que uidentur temporalia sunt. Que autem non uidentur eterna". *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, vol. 4, 35; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 290.

blessed and wise men, who hasten to acquire the eternal and everlasting joys of the heavenly patrimonium (celestis patria)⁷⁰.

S 966, on the other hand, dated to 1032 and issued to the church of St. Mary in Glastonbury to confirm previous privileges, seems to echo the same rhetoric concluding Knútr's donation in reference to the ultimate reign of eternal Lord⁷¹. God, as rex regum omniumque subsistentium uisibilium atque inuisibilium creator et suae creationis discretissimus dispositor, is also referred to in S 970, dated to 1033 in which Knútr grants a property in Overton to earl (dux) Godwine⁷².

The link between strict following of the ultimate Lord and a prospect of eternal reward is to be seen in S 984, dated ca. 1020/22 and being a grant to the Abbey of St Benet of Holme. Knútr is able to make a donation [to?] Christo omnipotenti, qui est omnium regum rex. His motivation to be generous to the abbey is clearly articulated: pro consequendo praemio coelestis haereditatis⁷³.

A concept of the eternal reward in celestis regnum is also used in some of his diplomas to threaten those who would dare to question the king's will. Those shall be outlawed from heaven and condemned to everlasting fire of hell. One can enlist S 978, issued to Ælfwine, bishop of London, confirming of the lands of St Paul's and S 981, issued to Christ Church in Canterbury as examples of such rhetoric⁷⁴.

Perhaps even more importantly, a concept of the Heavenly Kingdom is used in both preserved letters written by Knútr to his English subjects, in 1020 and 1027 respectively. The first one, issued during the king's journey to Denmark, is concluded this way: so that we may and might all together through the mercy of that eternal God and his

70 „[...] cum cuius imperio hic labentis saeculi prosperitas in aduersis successibus sedulo permixta et conturbata cernuntur, et omnia uisibilia atque desiderabilia ornamenta huius mundi ab ipsis amatoribus cotidie transeunt; ideo beati quique ac sapientes cum his fugitiuis seculi diuitiis aeterna et iugiter permansura gaudia coelestis patrie magnopere adipisci properant”. *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, ed. John. M. Kemble, vol. 6 (London: S.&J. Bentley, 1848), 180–181; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 291.

71 „Regnante in perpetuum domino, qui sua ineffabili potentia omnia disponit atque gubernat [...]”. *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, vol. 4, 40; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 290–291.

72 *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, vol. 4, 48; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 291.

73 *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, vol. 4, 28–29; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 295. Such motivated generosity was nothing new in times of Knútr. One can recall an example of Æthelwulf, king of Wessex (795–858), who justified one of his grants (S 92): ‘pro amore caelestis patriae et pro redemptione animae meae’. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 95. See also Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 227.

74 S 978: „Si quis uero harum terrarum condonationem contradicere presumpserit, a paradisiaco consortio exul existat”. *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, vol. 6, 184; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 293. S 981: „[...] avertat illum Deus omnipotens a gaudiis regni coelestis in profundum inferni; nisi ante finem perfectius emendaverit”. *Diplomatarium Anglicum Aevi Saxonici*, red. Benjamin Thorpe (London: MacMillan & Co., 1865), 326; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 294. These diplomas seem to echo Wulfstan's descriptions of hell as territory of everlasting pain, fire, sorrow and lamentation, one can trace in his sermons. See Whitelock, „Archbishop Wulfstan”, 28.

saints' intercession come to the joy of the Heavenly Kingdom and live with him who lives and reigns, ever without end. Amen⁷⁵.

In the second letter, written after Knútr's visit in Rome, the king explains the reason of his sojourn:

The most particular reason why I did this was that I learnt from wise men that St Peter the Apostle received from God the great power of binding and loosing, and carries the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and so more particularly I considered it very profitable to seek his special advocacy with God diligently⁷⁶. Concluding his letter, the king states, that he appeals to all his bishops and the reeves of the kingdom: by the loyalty that you owe to me and to God⁷⁷.

Both letters were addressed to the wider public and at least their distribution among English ecclesiastical and lay circles provided a chance for Þórarinn and other skalds to get acquainted with Knútr's propaganda, the notion of both imperial ideology and Christian aspects of the king's status. Referring again to the argument of both Bolton and Treharne, one would claim that especially the second letter could have made a huge impact on poets and the way they depicted the king in their compositions. However, in my opinion, it seems justified to claim that this ideological framework, including both secular and religious ingredients, was so crucial and vital for the king and his court that Icelanders approaching Knútr's court had many opportunities, both before and after 1027, to learn about it and include it in their art dedicated to the king. Both charters and two preserved letters point at the constant flow of this framework – a result of close and direct cooperation of the king with the hierarchy of the English Church. It especially refers to archbishop Wulfstan, responsible, among other things, for the king's law codes⁷⁸. If Simon Keynes is right, and the archbishop should be credited for writing the last part of the 1020 letter, the part featuring the reference to the concept of Heavenly Kingdom, it would be natural to point to him as the one responsible for the transfer of the framework in question to the royal court⁷⁹. The main elements of this framework, featuring, as accounts cited above indicate, a prominence of heavenly mat-

75 "þæt we magan and moton ealle samod þurh þæs ecean Godes mildheortnesse, and his halgena þingrædene, to heofena rices myrhðe becuman, and mid him wunian þe leofað and rihsað, a butan ende. Amen". *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. Felix Liebermann vol. 1, (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 275; Treharne, *Living through Conquest*, 18–19.

76 "Ob id ergo maxime hoc patraui, quia a sapientibus didici, sanctum Petrum apostolum magnam potestatem a Domino accepisse ligandi atque soluendi clauigerumque esse celestis regni, et ideo specialius eius patrocinium apud Deum diligenter expetere ualde utile duxi", *Die Gesetze*, 276. See also Treharne, *Living through Conquest*, 30.

77 "[...] per fidem Deo et mihi debetis", *Die Gesetze*, 277. See also Treharne, *Living through Conquest*, 32.

78 See Lawson, „Archbishop Wulfstan”, 580–583.

79 Simon Keynes, "The Additions in Old English", in: *The York Gospels. A facsimile with introductory essays by Jonathan Alexander, Patrick McGurk, Simon Keynes, and Bernard Barr*, ed. Nicholas Barker (London: Roxburghe Club, 1986), 95–96. M.K. Lawson, "Archbishop Wulfstan", 584, points out, on

ters over earthly ones, the status of the Heavenly Kingdom (celestis regnum, celestis patria) as the ultimate aim of all Christians and the king's concern over redemption of his soul, could have easily and naturally influenced Þórarinn composing his lines of *Höfuðlausn*. It refers to both gætir Gríklands as kenning of the emperor-like, vicarious Christi-ruler and himinríki as the ultimate and ideal regnum he should not only defend but also emulate.

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English version: Mark Atkinson

SUMMARY

The first half of the 11th century was marked by serious challenges for the skaldic art. An advent of Christianity in the North in general and the baptism of numerous rulers in particular, made skalds make efforts to implement symbolism of the new faith into their art. This trend is clearly reflected in the poetry of Þórarinn loftunga, an Icelandic poet, who is known for his compositions for Knútr inn ríki, the king of England, Denmark and Norway. The article investigates preserved lines of one of Þórarinn’s poems, *Höfuðlausn* (Head-ransom). Special attention is paid to its sophisticated stylistic features, namely references to Byzantium (*Gríklands*) and the Heavenly Kingdom (*himinríki*) and a kenning “defender of Byzantium” (*gætir Gríklands*). The article argues that the presence of these features, juvenile in the skaldic art, in Þórarinn’s poem, was an effect of skald’s both ability and willingness to adopt certain elements of Christian doctrine and royal ideology present at Knútr’s English court as a response to particular expectations of the king towards his skalds and their poetry.

SKALD W SŁUŻBIE KRÓLEWSKIEJ – PRZYPADEK ÞÓRARINA LOFTUNGA. CZĘŚĆ I: IDEOWE KONTEKSTY HÖFUÐLAUSN

Słowa kluczowe: poezja skaldów, doktryna chrześcijańska, ideologia królewska

STRESZCZENIE

W pierwszej połowie XI wieku poezja skaldów musiała zmierzyć się z poważnymi wyzwaniami. Coraz większe wpływy chrześcijaństwa na Północy, znaczone chrztem kolejnych skandynawskich władców, postawiły poetów przed koniecznością zaimplementowania w swojej sztuce symboliki związanej z nową wiarą. Proces ten znajduje swoje odbicie między innymi w poezji Þórarina loftunga (Pochwalny Język), islandzkiego skalda działającego na dworze Knuta Wielkiego, króla Anglii, Danii i Norwegii. Artykuł poświęcony jest zachowanemu fragmentom jednego z wierszy Þórarina, zatytułowanego Höfuðlausn (Okup za głowę). Szczególna uwaga poświęcona jest stylistycznym elementom utworu takim jak nawiązania do Bizancjum (Gríklands) i Królestwa Niebieskiego (himinríki) oraz kenningowi „obrońca Bizancjum” (gætir Gríklands). Celem artykułu jest wykazanie, że elementy te były efektem gotowości ze strony poety zaadoptowania w swojej sztuce określonych aspektów doktryny chrześcijańskiej i ideologii królewskiej obecnych na angielskim dworze Knuta. Gotowość ta była odpowiedzią poety na oczekiwania ze strony króla adresowane do skaldów działających w jego otoczeniu.