

## ST. RADEGUND AND ST. OLAV: MEDIEVAL CULTS OF RULERS IN THE SYSTEM OF PERCEPTIONS OF AUTHORITY

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### ABSTRACT

The cults of the saints rulers occupy a special place among the medieval cults. They were linked with the objectives of the political ideology and the sacralization of power. The connection between kingship and sainthood was common in Europe at the period VI-XI cc. In the research we focused our analysis on two medieval saints – Radegund, Frankish queen-nun, and Olav II, king of Norway. We used two types of sources, which reflect category of sainthood from different approaches: hagiographic (*Vitae sanctae Radegundis*) and literary (*Saga of st. Olav*). The analysis of these sources identifies the existence of two ideological traits: one, and more dominant, is tied up with the system of Christian religious conceptions, the other reflects both Christian and traditional Viking's observances. The image of a holy woman reproduced the traditional model of holiness and reflected more negative assessment of secular authority by the church consciousness. At the same time the Lives of st. Radegund represented her as a model of Christian ruler. The contrast between "secular" and "spiritual" in the image of St. Olav is less obvious. The Norwegian king is depicted not only as a carrier of the Christian virtues, but as a mighty and valiant ruler. So, the cults of the Saint rulers reflect different dominant social perceptions of authority.

**Keywords:** *Sainthood, holiness, Middle Ages, hagiography, Radegund, Fortunatus, Baudonivia, Olav, Saga, conversion*

### INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Holiness is not only typical of medieval religiosity, but also the quintessence of socio-cultural and spiritual life of this era. The study of the cults of Christian saints is today the area of focus for historians, since it contributes to a better understanding of General patterns of social and cultural development of society. Consideration of the cults of saints in terms of a broad historical and cultural context avoids theological and philological reductionism, and presents the phenomenon as an important aspect of the medieval world picture.

In the framework of this subject the study of the cults of Holy rulers is a separate aspect. The Holy kings were secular princes canonized due to their actions or lifestyle. As M. Y. Paramonova writes, "...the Holy kings ...is a relatively abundant group in the Pantheon of European medieval saints in the VI-XIV centuries" [1, p. 478].

### RESEARCH METHODS .

In this paper, we compare two of the cults of rulers: Frankish Queen-nun Radegund (VI c.) and Norwegian king Olaf II (XI c.). We use historical-comparative and historical-typological methods. Both

of these methods are based on comparison, which allows to identify the similarity of the phenomena and processes to understand and explain them. The cults of Holy rulers had arisen as a result of the interaction of Christianity and traditional cultures. The comparison of these cults can provide valuable material for understanding the ways of formation of perceptions of power and their rooting in the Christian discourse.

Today the study of political consciousness and political practices of the middle Ages became one of the most urgent problems of modern medieval studies. The medieval cult of saint rulers represent an important source for the study of political practices and ideas about authority. A systematic comparison of various Royal cults, which arose in different regions, is one of the ways to study the mechanisms of formation of religious discourses of power and their influence on practice of domination.

## DISCUSSION

Despite the fact that the saints kings were canonized and revered, as well as other Catholic saints, peculiarities of the formation of their cults were linked with the hallmarks of the life of the secular ruler. In accordance with them a particular image of the Saint was formed. In Western European practice, it is possible to note that, "...the Holy ruler, even if he was a typical figure, not so much as the embodiment of power and its charisma, but as the ideal of a Christian ruler and a personalized norm of a truly religious behavior..." [2, p.10].

It can be traced on the example of one of the famous and revered figures in the history of Merovingian Gaul – St. Radegund (between 518 and 521-587). She was the wife of the Frankish king Clotaire I, the patroness of the city of Poitiers, and founded one of the first convents in it. In the mid 50-ies of VI she left her husband and devoted herself to the service of God. Governing successfully the convent, which was founded with the funds, provided by her former spouse, she has achieved its prosperity. She managed to bring to her abode valuable Christian relics. The most significant of them was part of the tree of the Holy Cross, in honor of which her convent got its name of the Holy Cross [3, pp. 60-65].

Several works, written in the late VI – early VII centuries narrate about her life and deeds. Two Lives, written by contemporaries of Radegund, are of special interest to us [4, p. 447-449]. The first of them, created presumably in 595, (1) authored by Venantius Fortunatus (Venantius Fortunatus, between 530 and 540 is about 600 years) – a Bishop, a poet from the “Last of the Romans”, a spiritual advisor and a close friend of Radegund (F.). The second Life of Radegund was written in the beginning of VII century by Baudonovia (Baudonivia, dates of life are unknown), a nun of the convent of the Holy cross (B).

Fortunatus drew attention to austerity, charity, and piety of her character. Being the Queen, she avoided any of the attributes of royalty (f, 3, p. 366; 9, p. 368), (2) giving alms to the poor and made rich offerings to various monasteries. In addition, she saved from death those condemned to death by her husband or fussed about the release of prisoners from prison (F., 10, p. 368; 11, p. 368). Here Fortunatus puts the motive of mercy from the course of social philanthropy, to the course of discussing social practices, typical for the ruler. These include generosity in donations and protection.

Fortunatus, describing the economic activities of the heroine in the convent, turns the influential Queen to the humble servant (F., 24, p. 372). This is done in order to diminish her high status in the civil life, which could prevent the perception of his heroine as an exemplary Saint. Baudonivia, the author of the second Life of Radegund, on the contrary, emphasizes the noble origin of his character, telling us in the first Chapter that Radegund is of “Royal descent, and inherited the nobility” (“...regalis vel origo dignitas” (B., 1, p. 379)). For Baudonivia nobility is an important component in a person's ability to rule. In this you can see the contrast with the text of Venantius Fortunatus, for whom the high status of Radegund was more an obstacle to the attainment of Holiness. However, for Baudonivia there is no contradiction between

Christian faith and the exercising of authority in the mortal world. Piety of Radegund is consistent with her social status as the Queen.

The Saint, of course, has to be an owner of religious merits and virtues. So Radegund in Baudonivia's writing embodies not only the "nobility of blood", but the religious perfection that, in general, is typical of the hagiography of that time (B., 5, pp. 381-382). Baudonivia also concludes that the inherent nobility of Radegund revealed more clearly because of her faith in the Christian God (B. 10, p. 385). Being the Christian Queen, she strongly contributes to the eradication of paganism and spreading of Christianity in the Kingdom (topos care about the Church and the clergy) (B., 2, p. 380). Thus, Baudonivia in her Life creates the image of a righteous ruler, emphasizing pastoral duties of Radegund.

It can be concluded that the image of a Holy ruler was idealized and was subordinated to the Christian notions of morality and righteousness. Was it typical for other areas of Europe, for the peripheral regions? Studying issues relating to Christianity and the Church, for example, in the countries of Northern Europe, particularly in Scandinavia, you should always consider some special aspects of their historical development. The main factor is, of course, a later time of the adoption of Christianity, due to the geographical remoteness of these regions and the peculiarities of political development. This circumstance could not fail to influence the process of formation the cults of Holy rulers in this part of Europe.

In remote parts of Europe, which are the Scandinavian countries, a special type of the king, the Holy, was formed, which was widely spread in the Anglo-Saxon tradition too: "...in the early period of the Anglo-Saxon tradition of veneration of saints the emergence of a new model reveals – the Holy king, martyred in battle with the Gentiles..." [2, p. 36]. The image of St. Olav in Norway is partly an example of this type of a Holy king, but at the same time it is necessary to mind, that he died from the hands of his political opponents.

Olav Haraldsson (Olaf II Haraldsson, 995-1030) was a prominent figure in Norwegian history, his reign accounts for 1014-1028 years. This period of Norwegian history was marked by the struggle for the unification of the country and the centralization of power and by decisive measures for the Christianization of the population of the whole country. However, the efforts made by Olav, were not successful, he was killed in the battle at Stiklestad, and Norway came under the rule of Danish kings. The death of Olav dates back to 1030. Soon there appears a tendency to his canonization, after which Olav becomes not just a Saint, but a King - a Patron of Norway: "...after that day both royal and religious power in Norway began to be defined around the royal martyr, St Olaf..." [5, p. 67].

The first sources that contain information about the life of Olav, his politics, and the events that followed his death, are sagas and skaldic poetry. Among these sources, the main and the most informative is the "Saga of Saint Olav's" (C.(

As it is noted by T. Jackson, "...the institution of the cult of St Olav entailed not only the creation of a local liturgical texts... but also the emergence of the Life (Vita) of St. Olav, and collections of his miracles (miracula)..." [6, p. 231]. Their texts are the most important to the study of the cult of St Olav. Thus, the sources on this issue can be divided into two groups:

1. Secular works – works of skaldic and the Sagas; (3)
2. The Church works - hagiographic literature and writings about the miracles of St. Olav.

Taking into account the fact that sagas are secular literature, and, therefore, more accessible to wide layers of the population, we can assume that they will embody the ideal of a Holy king more tailored to the values of Northern society.

During the study of the text of the Saga it becomes clear that there are two trends in it: on the one hand, St. Olav appears as a classic Scandinavian king, a brave warrior, without mercy; on the other hand, he is presented as a King - Missionary who is doing a lot of efforts for the Christianization of the country, and as a generous ruler, possessing the gift of healing.

Initial characteristics of the Olav as a whole corresponds to how the Sagas usually describe their characters: "...Olav, Harald 's son was short, stocky and strong... His look was sharp and it was scary to look in his eyes when he was angry. Olav had many skills: shot with bow well, perfectly possessed the spear, was a good swimmer. He was skilled in all sorts of crafts and taught others..." (P, III) in this passage Olav corresponds to the masculine ideal of the Scandinavian society; in the sagas one can find many similar descriptions.

The character of Olav is a weave of traditional Scandinavian traits, and qualities, appreciated by the Christian community. In some passages Olav acts like a brave soldier, fighting with the Vikings, seizing their property and so, partly being a Viking himself: "...in autumn in Swedish skerries at Skerries at SOTI Olav was first in the battle. There he battled with the Vikings..." (P, VI); "...Olav konung sailed East to Sweden. He entered Lag and began to plunder on both banks..." (P. VII).

At the same time we see the king as a good Christian. Konung devoted a lot of time to prayers and often hoped for the help of God. "...Usually the king would get up early in the morning, dressed, and washed his hands and then went to Church for the morning service." (P., LVIII), "...on the day of ascension Olav went to mass. The Bishop at the head of the procession circumvented the Church, and the king followed him. When they returned to the Church, the Bishop led the king to his place to the North from the door in the altar..." (P., LXXXIV). In addition, from the Saga, you can see that the construction of new chambers for the king was usually accompanied by the construction of the Church nearby. Also the Saga called bishops, who accompanied the King, who acted as advisers when making new laws and for the solution of litigation.

Along with the qualities, characteristic for the secular ruler, the Sagas Olav endow with Christian virtues: "...Olav king was a man virtuous, reserved and laconic. He was eager to distribute property richly ..." (P., LVIII).

An important aspect of the activities of the king was a baptism of population throughout the country. This, of course, is one of the main storylines in the Saga, and here the king acts as a rigid, inflexible ruler. "...In every thing he told me to read the Christian laws and commandments. He forbade many bad customs and the commandments..." (P, LX).

In addition to the wonders that occurred after the death of Olav and which enabled his contemporaries to consider him a Saint, Saga also mentions that king Olav had the gift of healing. This is evidenced by the fragment that tell about the healing of a boy during the stay of king in Russia at the court of Yaroslav "...the King came to the boy, held his hands over the boy's neck and groped it long before the boy opened his mouth. Then the king took a piece of bread, soaked it and put a cross on the palm. Then he put this piece of bread into the little boy's mouth and he swallowed it. The pain has immediately stopped, and after a few days he was quite healthy..." (P., CLXXXIX).

After the Saga describes the battle of Stiklestad and the death of the king, a description of various wonders follows. Among them, a miracle by healing the blind, healing the wounds of the bond of Thorir,

as well as the miracle of the body of the king: despite the fact that he was buried, his body has not undergone decomposition within a year: "...When the day of the death of king Olav passed twelve months and five days, the coffin with his Holy remains was opened... When Grimkel Bishop walked up to the coffin of king Olav, it smelt fragrance. The Bishop opened the face of the king. It hasn't changed, and his cheeks were rosy, as if the king has just fallen asleep... his hair and nails had grown, almost as if he continued to live in this world after he had felt..." (P., CCXLIV). Descriptions of all these wonders can be linked with the influence of Church traditions – such fragments are characteristic for hagiographic literature. Meanwhile, ..."About the origin of the collection of miracles (miracula) of St. Olav can be spoken only a century after the death of the king" [6, p. 232] , and assessment of the role of Olav as King-Baptist of Norway is given much later: "...Olav's role in the conversion of Norway is first elucidated in the "Passio et miracula beati Olav" (probably composed in the 1170s) and Theodoricus Monachus's..." [7, p. 18].

Thus, the study of the text of the Saga of Saint Olav allows us to understand that it is a confluence of tradition characteristic for pre-Christian Scandinavian society, with the traditions instilled by the Christian faith. Starting the journey of life as a Viking, he eventually becomes one of the most revered saints in Scandinavia. In his character, on the one hand, the firmness and steadfastness, bravery in a battle, and on the other hand, the Christian virtues, piety, and missionary activity are combined.

## RESULTS

Summing up, it should be noted that this study was focused on the problem of formation of images of Holy rulers in the context of medieval Christian ideas about power. In the paper the images of two saints are compared – Merovingian Queen-nun Radegund and the Norwegian king Olav Haraldsson, belonging to different time periods (VI. and XI. respectively) and regions (Frankish Gaul and Scandinavia), as well as to different genres (literary and hagiographic). The image of the Holy woman reflects the traditional models of Holiness and rather a negative assessment of the secular power by the Church's consciousness is reflected. I.e., the Holy ruler was "Holy" because he ceased to be a real ruler. Along with this, in the Lives of Holy Radegund there is a desire to present her as an exemplary Christian ruler, protecting Christianity and the Church and marked by personal piety – humility, charity, contempt of the worldly for the spiritual. In the image of St Olav the opposition between "secular" and "spiritual" can be seen to a much lesser extent. The Norwegian king is depicted not only as the bearer of Christian virtues, but as a powerful and brave ruler.

In this paper we attempt to address the complex interaction of the two realms of consciousness – the political and religious on the example of two such different images of saints. Undoubtedly, to elucidate the relation between religious Holiness and the sacred status of the earthly ruler is required to attract much more material, relating to various regions of Western, Northern and Central Europe. The task of comparatively study of different societies and cultures is an important research and methodological problem. Studying and comparing of the medieval cults of the saint rulers will help to understand dominant in a particular society's ideas about power and the problems of its functioning.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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2. *Here and below in brackets the number of the Chapter of the Life and the page from a published source used.*
3. *When referring to the materials of the sagas, it is worth remembering that for centuries in Norway and Iceland there are several varieties of the Saga of Saint Olav, and getting to the study, based on this source type, you must specify which one of the sagas is the material for the study. So, in this study, as the source will be used in the Saga of Saint Olav's included in the corpus of sagas "Heimskringla" by Snorri Sturluson*