

DuBois, Thomas A., ed. 2008. *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 399 pages. ISBN: 978-0802094100.

The genre of hagiography in medieval Scandinavia has long been overlooked by scholars of the period in favour of the epic stories of Scandinavian kings, the tales of mythical heroes of the German migration age, and especially, the family sagas of medieval Iceland. Accordingly, little has been written on medieval Scandinavian saints' lives, especially in English, and aside from Birgitta of Sweden the majority of native Scandinavian saints are largely unknown to non-specialists. Fortunately, the last couple of decades have witnessed an upsurge in interest in both translated and natively produced saints' lives, particularly those composed in medieval Iceland. This collection of essays, edited by Thomas A. DuBois, is an excellent example of the increasing scholarly attention that has recently been paid to the genre of hagiography in medieval Scandinavia.

In his introduction, DuBois sets out the framework for the volume, tracing the history of the cult of saints in Western Christendom and describing its presence in the North for the five centuries preceding the Reformation. Particularly useful is the inclusion of a table listing and briefly describing all saints of Scandinavian origin. DuBois also outlines the aim of the present work, which is to bring together primary hagiographic materials produced in the Nordic region during the Middle Ages and to contextualize them as they related to saints and their cults in medieval Scandinavia. The book is divided into four sections, each of which presents original translations of hagiographic materials concerning native Scandinavian saints preceded by critical essays by specialists in the field.

In the first section of the book, "Missionary Saints," Scott Mellor presents a study of St. Ansgar, who came as a missionary in the ninth century to Denmark and Sweden. Mellor approaches the issue of how to classify Ansgar's *vita*, written by Ansgar's friend and colleague Rimbart, and argues convincingly that it should be considered not only the life of a missionary saint and would-be martyr but also an ecclesiastical history of the missions in Denmark and Sweden and, more broadly, of the archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen. The analysis and partial translation of the *vita* of St. Ansgar is followed by DuBois's chapter on St. Sunniva, the tenth-century Irish-born princess and virgin martyr who died in a landslide on the island of Selja, and St. Henrik, the English cleric who in the twelfth century accompanied King Eric IX of Sweden to Finland where he undertook missionary work and was ultimately murdered by a dissatisfied convert. Preceding his

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translations of parts of the Latin *Acta Sanctorum in Selio* and a Finnish ballad about St. Henrik, DuBois follows the development of the lives and cults of these foreign-born martyrs through five consecutive stages that take the cults of the saints from the periphery of Christendom to centres of secular and ecclesiastical power. DuBois also discusses the “nationalization” of the cults, wherein the saints become symbols of national identity; as he notes, the cult of St. Henrik underwent such nationalization in Finland, but that of St. Sunniva did not achieve the same status in Norway, where St. Olaf already fulfilled the role of the national saint.

The second and by far the largest section of the volume treats the lives of the so-called royal saints. John Lindow considers the patron saint of Norway, St. Olaf (d. 1030), with a focus not only on the prose legends but also on skaldic verses dedicated to Olaf, which constitute some of our earlier sources on the saint. Lindow also examines how these poems, two of which are translated in the chapter, present a valuable picture of St. Olaf (a skald himself) as he had been during his life, and considers the role played by the skalds in providing some of the first records of the king’s miracles and thus aiding in Olaf’s rise to national sainthood. Maria-Claudia Tomany deals in the next chapter with St. Magnus of Orkney. After presenting a history of the earldom of Orkney, Tomany examines the four medieval Scandinavian accounts of the life of Orkney’s national saint, which consist of three Old Norse sagas and one Latin *vita*. Tomany challenges previous claims that assign a later date to the longer and more verbose Old Norse saga of Magnus, *Magnúss saga lengri*, partly on the grounds that theological commentary would not have been added to a more succinct historical account, and that a more terse and concise account would have marked the endpoint of the development of the Old Norse *vita* of St. Magnus rather than its beginning. However, this argument is tenuous, as it essentially contradicts the commonly accepted notion that saints’ lives in medieval Iceland developed from straightforward accounts to much more verbally elaborated works in the so-called “florid style,” which almost always included extensive biblical and theological commentary. Tomany then examines the significance of Magnus’s refusal to fight in battle and his subsequent martyrdom at the hands of his cousin Hákon. The chapter concludes with translations of excerpts from *Magnúss saga lengri*.

The following chapter, co-written by DuBois and Niels Ingwersen, treats the life of St. Knud Lavard, a Danish duke who was treacherously murdered by his cousin, Magnus. DuBois and Ingwersen examine the life and martyrdom of Knud within the context of internal conflict and rivalry in the medieval Danish royal court and consider the establishment of Knud’s sanctity as a strategic tool used by Knud’s son, King Valdemar, to enhance the prestige of his lineage. The authors analyze and present translations of two Danish ballads of St. Knud, as well as a Latin play (*ludus*) concerning the duke—interestingly one of the few existing liturgical dramas from medieval Scandinavia. The final monarch covered in this

section is St. Eric of Sweden, the just and pious king mentioned earlier by DuBois in his discussion of St. Henrik. Tracey Sands looks at the functions and meanings of St. Eric's cult, especially its role in promoting and legitimizing two reigning dynasties of medieval Sweden as well as the archdiocese of Uppsala, which in the thirteenth century was moved to Östra Aros. Sands also examines the saint's national significance to Sweden, particularly during the period of the Kalmar Union, and concludes the chapter by presenting a translation of a fifteenth-century Old Swedish account of the saint's life and miracles, which was translated from a Latin original.

The third section, "Holy Bishops and Nuns," considers two saints who dedicated their lives to the Church, St. Þorlákr Þórhallsson, a twelfth-century bishop of Skálholt, and St. Katarina of Sweden, the daughter of the well-known and, as DuBois describes her, "indomitable" St. Birgitta of Sweden. Kirsten Wolf argues that the *vita* and *cultus* of St. Þorlákr, the first native saint of Iceland, should be examined in the context of medieval Iceland's need for its own native patron saint. She also considers some logistical reasons which made Þorlákr the ideal choice for Iceland's first patron saint, including his support of reform policies of the Norwegian archbishops and his strict stance on sexual morality. Selections from *Þorláks saga A*, which cover the death, translation, and miracles of St. Þorlákr, are then presented. In the following chapter DuBois examines the life of St. Katarina, the first abbess of Vadstena who is typically overshadowed by her famous mother, St. Birgitta. Much of the chapter focuses on Katarina's relationship to Birgitta—the humble and dutiful yet overlooked daughter who played a critical role in promoting her mother's mission and, later, her sanctity. DuBois also considers interesting aspects of Katarina's spirituality, including her spiritual marriage to St. Sebastian rather than to Christ, which DuBois astutely points out reconciled the potential conflict of competing with a mother who herself claimed a spiritual marriage to the Saviour. DuBois also examines the development of a *vita* of Katarina by Ulf Birgersson, and considers the miracles associated with the push for Katarina's canonization, which was formalized just over a century after her death. DuBois then presents translated selections from Ulf's *Vita cum miraculis beatae Katherine*, which dates from the late fifteenth century, as well as from *Diarium Vadstenense*, which relates the translation of Katarina's relics in 1487.

The final section of the work, entitled "Saints Lives in Lived Context," treats the lives and miracles of saints as they relate to the cultures that produced them. Marianne Kalinke looks at *Hendreks saga og Kunegundis*, one of the saints' lives contained in the sixteenth-century legendary, *Reykjahólabók*, which contained translated legends from a now lost Low German source. Kalinke provides a fascinating analysis of the legend of Saints Henry and Cunegund, reviewing the legend in Latin, German, and Icelandic and focusing especially on the bridal-quest narrative and the issue of a chaste marriage within these traditions. More specifically, Kalinke highlights the importance of Cunegund's self-determination

(*sjálfráð*) and consent to marriage and conjugal chastity, which are central issues in the Icelandic version of the *vita*. Those sections relating to the wooing of Cunegund and the couple's discussion of a chaste marriage, as well as the ordeal of Cunegund after she is accused of adultery, are translated. In the final and perhaps the most loosely related chapter of the volume, Margaret Cormack analyzes and translates eight different childbirth miracles from medieval Iceland, one of which is recorded in the annals but the rest of which are found in *Maríu saga* and in the lives of Bishops Þorlákr Þórhallsson and Guðmundr Arason. Cormack examines more specifically those childbirth miracles that relate a saint or the Virgin Mary relieving a woman of an unwanted or unusually long pregnancy. Cormack notes that such miracles solve the problematic issue of infant baptism, as well as the more pragmatic issue of how to deal with what Cormack refers to as the "perennial problem" of unwanted children.

DuBois acknowledges the limitations of this work in his introduction, and stresses that the volume is meant to be representative rather than exhaustive. However, while the texts and studies presented are important and very useful, the choice of saints examined in this volume still seems somewhat arbitrary and slightly eclectic. Why were some saints chosen as subjects of this volume, and not others? Since much scholarly attention has already been devoted to St. Olaf of Norway, why dedicate a chapter to his life rather than to a Scandinavian saint about whom little has been written? Consider, for example, the cases of Hallvarð, the patron saint of Oslo, as well as the various native female saints of Scandinavia, such as Helena of Skövde or Margareta of Roskilde, whose *vitae* are extant but whose stories have yet to be told in the English language.

Overall, however, this book is an excellent and valuable contribution to the field of Scandinavian Studies and, more specifically, scholarship on the genre of medieval Scandinavian hagiography. It will be especially useful for non-specialists wishing to have access to parts of the corpus of medieval Scandinavian saints' lives, and will prove a valuable resource for students wishing for an introduction to this type of medieval Scandinavian literature in a translated format. The work will hopefully also bring attention to the hitherto overlooked native Scandinavian saints and prompt scholars to examine further the lives of those mentioned only in passing in this volume.

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