

The Forgotten King of Denmark – Haraldr II

DENIZ CEM GÜLEN

ABSTRACT: King Haraldr II ruled the Kingdom of Denmark from 1014 to 1018; however, his reign is challenging to study due to a lack of source material. A detailed analysis of the written primary sources from Denmark and Iceland—such as Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*, *Chronicon Roskilde*, and *Knýtlinga saga*—gives the impression that the Danes wanted to forget Haraldr II by deliberately omitting his brief reign from these narratives. This article investigates the possible reasons why Danish historians of the eleventh and twelfth centuries may have wanted to collectively forget Haraldr. To demonstrate how Haraldr has been omitted from historical narratives, this study compares a variety of different primary sources from Scandinavia and England, in order to gather as much information as possible on the topic. The article subsequently explores three possible explanations as to why Haraldr has been omitted: (1) the possibility that Haraldr reverted to pre-Christian religious beliefs, contradicting medieval historians’ perspectives of a true king, (2) transmission of the sources in the medieval ages and (3) a lack of worthwhile events during the height of medieval Danish success.

RÉSUMÉ : Le roi Haraldr II a régné sur le royaume du Danemark de 1014 à 1018; toutefois son règne est difficile à étudier en raison du manque de sources. Une analyse détaillée des sources primaires écrites du Danemark et de l’Islande—comme le *Gesta Danorum* de Saxo, le *Chronicon Roskilde* et la *saga Knýtlinga*—donne l’impression que les Danois voulaient oublier Haraldr II en omettant délibérément son bref règne dans ces récits. Cet article étudie les raisons possibles pour lesquelles les historiens danois des XIe et XIIe siècles ont pu vouloir oublier collectivement Haraldr. Pour démontrer comment Haraldr a été omis des récits historiques, cette étude compare un éventail de sources primaires de Scandinavie et d’Angleterre, afin de rassembler le plus d’informations possible sur le sujet. L’article explore ensuite trois explications possibles de l’omission d’Haraldr : (1) la possibilité qu’Haraldr soit revenu à des croyances religieuses préchrétiennes, ce qui contredisait les points de vue des historiens médiévaux d’un vrai roi; (2) la transmission des sources à l’époque médiévale; et (3) le manque d’événements dignes d’intérêt à l’apogée de la gloire du Danemark médiéval.

Deniz Cem Gülen is a PhD graduate of the University of Aberdeen.

Introduction

The concept of collective memory is relatively new in the context of Old Norse studies. However, recent scholarship provides several interesting research directions. These studies usually focus on changes in social, cultural, and political circumstances in order to examine their effects on how, why, or what societies remember about the past (Glaser, Hermann, and Mitchell). Similar to its Scandinavian neighbours, Denmark claims the Viking Age as an important part of Danish collective memory (Hermann 2018, 771). Using this theory, scholars have demonstrated how remembrance of the Viking Age has influenced modern Danish society, while exploring how memory is preserved through time (Bønding 782). In the specific case of Denmark, is it possible that the same method for remembering history can also be used to consciously forget a portion of the past?

Between Sveinn Haraldsson's (960–1014) death in 1014 and Knútr inn ríki's (995–1035) ascent to the Danish throne in 1018, Haraldr II (ca. 980–1018) was the King of Denmark for the short span of four years. However, almost every primary source from Denmark, Iceland, and Norway omits his brief rule. Although the importance of Haraldr's death has previously been studied (Bolton 131), historians have yet to provide an extensive explanation for his omission from the primary sources, which is a research topic that is long overdue. This article demonstrates the lack of representation of Haraldr's reign in the medieval Scandinavian corpus, offers an answer as to why medieval historians omitted this period of time from their writings, and ultimately focuses on Haraldr's reception and what it meant for the identity of the Danes.

Haraldr in the Primary Sources

There is no mention of Haraldr's brief reign in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, Sven Aggesen's *Brevis Historia Regum Dacie*, Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, or in *Chronicon Roskildense*. Adam of Bremen does not mention any successor after Sveinn's death for Denmark. Nevertheless, the rest of the narrative implies that Knútr succeeds directly after his father:

Chnud, filius regis, cum exercitu reversus in patriam, denuo bellum molitur in Anglos. Olaph a Nortmannis electus in principem, separatus est a regno Danorum... Itaque mille navibus magnis Chnut armatus oceanum transivit Britannicum.
(Adam of Bremen 76)

[The king's son, Canute, who had returned with the army to his fatherland, in his turn plotted war against the English. When Olaf was chosen leader by the

Norwegians, he seceded from the kingdom of the Danes ... Equipped with a thousand large ships, Canute therefore crossed the British Ocean.]

(*Adam of Bremen-The History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* 91)

Chronicon Roskilde also omits Haraldr's reign. The chronicle states that after Sveinn's death in England, both Knútr and Saint Óláfr (995-1030) return to Denmark (20). Later, Knútr, as the King of Denmark, invades England and fights against King Æthelred the Unready (966-1016) for three years. Although there is no explanation of how Knútr succeeds to the throne, Haraldr is once again absent from the narrative. In *Brevis historia regum Dacie*, Sven Aggesen discusses neither Sveinn's nor Knútr's reign in detail, but he presents Knútr as Sveinn's successor: "Mortuo Suenone filius eius Canutus in regno successit, quam et Senem cognominabant" [When Sven died, his son Knut succeeded to the kingdom, and they also surnamed him the Old] (Aggesen 121-22; Christiansen 63). In a similar fashion, Saxo's *Gesta* follows the Danish tradition by suggesting that after Sveinn's death, the Norwegians and English, not wanting to have another foreign ruler, crowned Saint Óláfr and Edward the Confessor (1003-1066) as their kings (Saxo Grammaticus 729). For the succession in Denmark, Saxo's account is similar to the other chronicles and claims that Knútr is crowned as the Danish king (Saxo Grammaticus 728-29).

The Icelandic kings' sagas (*konungasögur*), also do not recognize Haraldr's brief reign. In *Fagrskinna*, the saga author mentions him as one of the sons of Sveinn and suggests that Haraldr is younger than Knútr: "Þau áttu síðan tvá sonu, ok var enn ellri kallaðr Knútr ríki, en annarr Haraldr" [They later had two sons, the elder called Knútr ríki (the Great), the second Harald] (*Fagrskinna* 123; *Fagrskinna, a Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, 96). Once again, Knútr becomes king following Sveinn's death: "Í Danmørk tók þá til ríkis <forráða> ungr hofðingi, sonr Sveins konungs, er Knútr hét" [In Denmark, a young chieftain called Knútr, son of King Sveinn, took over the rule of kingdom] (*Fagrskinna* 166; *Fagrskinna, a Catalogue of the Kings of Norway* 132). *Heimskringla* does not offer anything different than *Fagrskinna* as the saga author argues that Sveinn and his wife, Gunnhildr, had two sons, Haraldr and Knútr (*Heimskringla* II 253).¹ After this acknowledgement, Haraldr is no longer a part of the story.

Knyttlinga saga, on the other hand, offers a significantly different perspective on Haraldr by claiming that Knútr had to be crowned as the king since Haraldr was already dead: "Knútr, sonr Sveins konungs tjúguskeggs, var tíu vetra, þá er faðir hans andaðisk. Var hann þá til konungs tekinn í Danmørk yfir Danaveldi, því at Haraldr, bróðir hans, var andaðr" [Knut, son of King Svein Forkbeard, was ten years old when his father died. Since his brother Harald was already dead, Knut was made King of Denmark and all the lands that Denmark ruled] (*Danakonunga sögur* 100; *Knyttlinga saga* 27). In a recent article, I point out how unique this description of Haraldr is in comparison to other sources and suggest

that this might be due to the author's attempt to conceptualize the importance of Knútr for medieval Danish history (Gülen 53–60).

Haraldr's absence from historical writings is reflected in the Norwegian sources as well. The short Latin chronicle, *Historia Norwegiae*, suggests that Knútr succeeds his father: "Cum Canutus repatriavit, a Danis rex patris loco constituitur" [When Knútr returned to his homeland, he was made king by the Danes in place of his father] (*Historia Norwegie* 100, 101). Written by Theodoric the Monk, *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* is not very different from the other sources. Although the chronicle does not offer much information regarding Sveinn's death, Knútr is described as the King of Denmark after the last mention of Sveinn (*Theodoricus Monachus. Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium. An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings* 19).

As shown in the sources above, not only is his reign absent, Haraldr himself is mostly excluded by the chroniclers and saga authors. Contrastingly, in the *Annals of Ryd*, a thirteenth century Latin source from Denmark, Haraldr's reign is recognized by the chronicler. It claims that the Danes initially deposed Haraldr and elected Knútr as their king. Then due to Knútr's constant absence from Denmark, Haraldr is restored as king until his death:

Iste homo fuit effeminatus & totus libidini deditus, hac de causa Dani eum deposuerunt de regno, & Gamele Knut fratrem ejus Regem fecerunt, qvòd bellicosus homo fuit, sed tædio affecti super eo, qvòd raro in regno fuit, & continue extra regnum in bellis, qvòd tamen pro gloria regni libenter tolerare debuissent, Kanutun deposuerunt, & HARALDUM effeminatum & nihil valentem regno præfererunt, qvi tamen cito post mortuus est, & successit ei dictus Gamele Knut frater ejus. (*Scriptores rerum danicarum* 159)

[Haraldr was effeminate and totally devoted to lust, for this reason, the Danes deposed him from the kingdom and made his brother Knútr the Old the king, because he was a warlike man; but becoming tired of him, because he was continually out of the kingdom in wars, (which) they had to tolerate willingly for the glory of the kingdom, they deposed Knútr and put in charge of the kingdom the effeminate and weak Haraldr who, however, died soon after and his brother, the aforesaid Knútr the Old, succeeded him.²]

Outside of Scandinavia, Haraldr and his brief reign are mentioned by one other source, *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. Although the intentions of *Encomium* are highly debatable,³ in relation to Haraldr this Latin source is perhaps one of the most detailed extant accounts that we can use, because, unlike the Icelandic and Scandinavian sources, the *Encomium* refers to Haraldr as a king (*Encomium* 17). When the author of the *Encomium* describes Sveinn, he states that Sveinn had two sons and took the older one, Knútr, in his company to England. He placed his younger son, Haraldr, at the head of the whole kingdom, in addition to leaving a

military force and a few of his chieftains to instruct Haraldr wisely (*Encomium* 13).

By relying on currently available sources, it is difficult to establish a proper timeline for Haraldr's reign. Johannes Steenstrup provides a brief overview of what can be discerned about Haraldr and his reign:⁴

1018, Konge, Søn af Svend Tveskjæg og Gunhild, hvem Svend senere forskød; strax efter Faderens Død førte H. og hans Broder Knud (d. store) Gunhild tilbage til Danmark. H. var af sin Fader indsat til Konge i Danmark og nægtede at dele Magten med Knud, hvorimod han ydede ham Hjælp til Gjenerobringen af England. H. døde 1018, næppe mere end 20 Aar gammel.
(Steenstrup 73)

[1018, King, Son of Sveinn Haraldsson and Gunnhildr, who succeeded Sveinn; right after his father's death. Haraldr and his brother Knútr (the Great) brought Gunnhildr back to Denmark. Haraldr was installed as regent by his father and refused to share power with Knútr, but helped with his preparation for reconquering England. Haraldr died in 1018, barely more than 20 years old.⁵]

This begs an important question: why would medieval writers completely omit Haraldr from these early texts and, by doing so, erase him from Danish history? While Haraldr's influence on Norway may have been minimal given his young age, it is noteworthy that not only the Danish sources but also *Knýtlinga saga*, one of the few Icelandic sources that focusses on medieval Danish history, neglects Haraldr's reign. I believe there are three possibilities that could potentially explain this question: Haraldr's religion, the transmission of the sources, and the lack of significant events during his reign.

Haraldr as a Pagan

The first reason for the reticence around Haraldr and his reign might be his religious beliefs. One of the important topics for the primary sources from Denmark mentioned above, as well as *Knýtlinga saga*, is religion and to what extent the kings followed Christian belief (Phelpstead 163–77).⁶ *Knýtlinga saga*, for example, starts with Haraldr Gormsson (ca. 911–986) and his attempts of converting Denmark. The saga only spends three chapters on Haraldr Gormsson but his constant efforts to convert Denmark and Norway can easily be observed (*Danakonunga sögur* 95–96; *Knýtlinga saga* 24). Although the saga of Sveinn Haraldsson does not indicate anything relating to his religious beliefs, Sven Aggesen and Saxo Grammaticus claim that Sveinn eventually converted to Christianity and, especially in Saxo's *Gesta*, reaches his full potential after he becomes Christian (Aggesen 61; Saxo Grammaticus 705). Yet Knútr inn ríki's devotion and generosity towards the Church is shown several times not only in

Knýtlinga saga, but also in all other Danish sources (*Danakonunga sögur* 121–27; *Knýtlinga saga* 40–43). It is possible that among these pious and rather successful Christian kings, Haraldr II Sveinsson was pagan and did not convert to Christianity. As a result, his brief reign may have been omitted by the early writers and this tradition was continued by later historians in attempt to forget Haraldr II as a pagan king.

A similar situation can be observed with regard to the saga of Hákon inn góði (920–961). In the early chapters of *Heimskringla*, the saga refers several times to Hákon's attitude towards Christianity. In chapter thirteen of the saga, for example, Snorri writes that although Hákon was a good Christian when he came to Norway, he had to practice his Christianity in secret due to the overwhelmingly pagan population of the Kingdom (*Heimskringla* I, 166). Additionally, the following chapters also focus on Christianity and demonstrate Hákon's struggle with the pagans when he tries to convert them and explains this new set of beliefs, only to face the disapproval of the group. When Hákon invites people to convert to Christianity at the *Frostþing*, they immediately reacted with disapproval and proceeded to ignore Hákon (*Heimskringla* I, 169).

Sverre Bagge's article from 2007, "A Hero between Paganism and Christianity," offers a good exploration of Hákon's situation. Bagge argues that the authors of *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* used *Ágrip* as one of their primary sources, thus inheriting *Ágrip*'s description of how King Hákon struggles against pagans, which offers significant amounts of information on Hákon's belief in comparison to other sources, namely *Historia Norwegiae* (Bagge 189–90). In *Ágrip*, although Hákon is Christian, his unnamed wife follows pagan traditions, and in order to please her Hákon takes part in her customs (*Ágrip* 8–9). The king continues to follow Christian teachings; he builds churches, considers Sunday as a holiday, and fasts on Friday. However, his actions are constantly challenged by pagans and eventually Hákon agrees to participate in pagan customs. Before his death, he refuses to have a Christian burial since he did not follow Christian traditions as much as he should have (*Ágrip* 8–9). While *Fagrskinna* follows this tradition, *Heimskringla* differs from them and narrates that Hákon lets it be up to his followers to decide how to bury him. Nevertheless, *Hákonar saga góði* reaches its end swiftly. Although Hákon's attempts at explaining Christian faith and trying to convert pagans are well represented, once Hákon starts to engage with pagan rituals, the saga entries about him are shortened and the saga ends without offering too much information on Hákon's later life (*Heimskringla* I, 181–98).

A direct comparison between the representations of Haraldr II and Hákon is challenging due to the lack of sources on Haraldr. However, from the primary sources in which Hákon is mentioned, we can see that the change of faith to paganism, or practicing pagan rituals, is neither well-received by the authors nor presented in detail in the same narrative. Although the authors of these primary sources could not ignore the reign and events that occurred in Hákon's reign due

to the length of his rule, Haraldr's short reign may have been easier to ignore or merge with that of his predecessor or successor.

The hypothesis that Haraldr may have been a pagan is not an impossibility and may indeed help explain why historians of the age created a narrative that omitted him from the extant sources. His religious beliefs may have given him a bad reputation among medieval writers, representing a problematic backslide in Danish monarchical support for Christianity and their newly founded identity as a Christian kingdom. Furthermore, due to his short reign, Haraldr was a king who could be ignored without disrupting the sequential progress of Danish history; especially if he was contradicting the Danish identity that the medieval authors were trying to build (Hermann 2018, 774).

If Haraldr was indeed a pagan, from a collective memory perspective, it is not surprising that we do not see mention of his reign in the primary sources. It has been suggested that religion can be seen as a primary element of collective memory and an important aspect for forming a group identity as well as tradition (Nygaard and Schjødt 72). Jan Assmann suggests that there are three vital steps that need to be completed in order to have a sustained collective memory in oral societies: (1) preservation (usually through a ritual and preserved via poems), (2) retrieval (the poems are transmitted through act of ritual to a broader audience) and (3) communication (the poems are transmitted via conversation between individuals) (J. Assmann 39). Since one of the fundamental differences between the pre-Christian and Christianized Nordic world is the transition from oral to written society, it is only logical to think that after this transition, these concepts (preservation, retrieval, and communication) experienced some changes. Although we can still label them with the same adjectives, their meanings and functions become somewhat more aligned with the written society. Nevertheless, the increased production of saga literature must have been very useful for transmitting and preserving collective memory. Pernille Hermann's article, "Saga Literature, Cultural Memory, and Storage," highlights these changes and demonstrates saga literature's relation with collective memory by using examples from different sagas, such as *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Laxdæla saga*, and *Kormáks saga* (Hermann 2013, 345, 349). Hermann points out that these sagas contain phrases like "*sem fyrr var ritat*," which she translates as "as written previously" and argues that the memorialization methods of this new society were highly different than those of the pre-Christian Nordic world (Hermann 2013, 345). Furthermore, Hermann maintains that the sagas became a crucial tool for collective memory as they transmit and disseminate memory (Hermann 2013, 344). If we follow Hermann's logic, it is not improbable that the authors omitted Haraldr's reign on the grounds of his pagan tendencies. However, one must ask: Was there a reason why Haraldr would prefer the pagan belief to Christianity?

According to *Knýtlinga saga*, Haraldr Gormsson's biggest accomplishment was his constant efforts to convert Denmark and force Norway to accept

Christianity (*Danakonunga sögur* 93–98; *Knýtlinga saga* 23–25). Even though *Knýtlinga saga* fails to mention Sveinn Haraldsson's initial pagan beliefs, Adam of Bremen claims that Sveinn only achieved great success after his conversion (*Adam of Bremen-The History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* 72). Despite the fact that Knútr is described as a barbarian early in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (145), many other previously mentioned sources describe him as a true Christian king (*Danakonunga sögur* 121–27; *Knýtlinga saga* 40–43; *Encomium* 34–37). Furthermore, while Haraldr's exact birth year is highly disputable (Steenstrup 73), one can argue that Haraldr experienced Sveinn's successful reign in Scandinavia and by extension the prosperity associated with his religious beliefs. Under these circumstances, there is no reasonable explanation why Haraldr would have accepted pagan traditions over Christianity, especially since he would have experienced the success of a Christian king over a pagan one.⁷ In light of these considerations, there seems to be few satisfactory answers as to why Haraldr's religion might be different from the rest of his family's and the surviving primary sources alone are not comprehensive enough to allow further investigation.

Transmission of the Sources

Another possibility of Haraldr's omission from the sources may be related to the transmission of these sources. It is possible that by the time the sources I described above were composed, their authors were experiencing a similar issue that we are facing today: not knowing what to write about him due to the lack of available sources.

It has been argued that the Danish royal archive was established during the twelfth century after King Valdimarr I became the sole ruler of Denmark in 1157. Michael Gelting argues that after the civil war period in Denmark, one of the first things Valdimarr worked on was restructuring the Danish administrative system (Gelting 330). In order to succeed, Valdimarr hired an Anglo-Norman, named either Ralph or Radulf, who later became the first person to carry the title of chancellor in Denmark and implemented the reforms Valdimarr wanted (Skyum-Nielsen 176). Like Denmark, England had its share of civil wars, and after the Anarchy (1135–53), the newly crowned English king Henry II actively worked to restructure and modernize the kingdom's financial administration—efforts that would prove to be a great success. It therefore made sense for Valdimarr to hire an Anglo-Norman. Radulf seemingly continued his task of restructuring the financial administration successfully since he was rewarded with the episcopal see of Ribe in 1162 (Kroman 58). According to Gelting, the restructuring of financial administration likely helped the establishment of the national archive, and one can imagine that these practices were continued by the successors of Radulf (Gelting 330–31). Unfortunately, since only a very limited amount of material survived from the twelfth-century Danish archives, we are uncertain about the

sources it held. In addition, although Valdimarr's predecessor Eiríkr III also tried to establish a royal archive, it is doubtful how much of it survived after the eleven years of subsequent fighting among his potential successors (Gelting 328). Could it be that the problematic establishment of the royal archives is the reason we have very limited information on Haraldr?

One potential argument that can be made is that since Haraldr's reign was rather short, the sources portraying him were not extensive to begin with. In the aftermath of his death, these sources would be lost due to the lack of proper archival production, and nothing survived for the twelfth- and thirteenth centuries historians to rely on. If this is true, then it is understandable why we do not see Haraldr in the works of Adam of Bremen, Sven Aggesen, and Saxo Grammaticus. While this possibility may not seem to be a farfetched explanation, as mentioned above there are sources that refer to him as the king of Denmark, such as *Encomium* and *Annals of Ryd*.

In *Encomium* it is described how, after the death of Sveinn Haraldsson, Knútr inn ríki returns to Denmark and asks Haraldr to divide the kingdom between them (*Encomium* 17). Haraldr refuses Knútr's demand and continues to rule alone until his death in 1018 (*Encomium* 17). In *Annals of Ryd*, Haraldr is described as an inefficient king and the chronicle suggests that Knútr replaced him but that the Danes consequently re-crowned Haraldr due to Knútr spending most of his time in England (*Scriptores rerum danicarum* 159). Although one can argue that the Danish historians may not have had access to *Encomium* on account of geographical reasons, *Annals of Ryd* is a source written in Denmark. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that all the potential sources that mention Haraldr were lost while Saxo and other authors had enough material to compose on Sveinn and Knútr. This unsatisfactory hypothesis leads us to my final discussion.

Haraldr the Eventless

A more suitable and convincing response to the question relates to the lack of any significant events during Haraldr's reign. As previously mentioned, Haraldr was around twenty years old when he died. Before his reign of only four years, he was regent during Sveinn's last campaign in England (Steenstrup 73). Although Sveinn and Knútr had extremely eventful reigns, the same may not have been true for Haraldr. *Knýtlinga saga* does not present Sveinn's reign in great detail but his uprising against his father and several of his campaigns are documented (*Danakonunga sögur* 96–99; *Knýtlinga saga* 25–27). Other Danish sources, namely Adam of Bremen and Saxo's *Gesta*, also offer some information on Sveinn's reign, including his conversion and his last English campaign. These allow us to create a timeline for Sveinn's rule as king (*Adam of Bremen-The History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* 72–108; Saxo Grammaticus 695–729). Knútr's reign is also documented in several different sources, and although individually they do not

represent every aspect of his reign, a compilation of the sources helps us to study his reign in detail (*Danakonunga sögur* 100–27; *Knýtlinga saga* 27–43; Saxo Grammaticus 729–73; *Encomium* 14–38).

As already suggested in this present study, the same cannot be said for Haraldr. It would appear that between two great kings, Sveinn and Knútr, Haraldr and his rather brief reign were deliberately omitted by the authors. Both Sveinn and Knútr elevated Denmark over Norway with their successful reigns so, during this particular period of Danish history, Haraldr's reign may be seen as uneventful. It is, therefore, likely that he could have been seen as an easy sacrifice in the name of narrative continuity. His brief years as king were omitted by Danish historians, thus preserving what they believed as to be new Danish identity; a strong empire ruled by influential kings. Similar to Hákon inn góði, the representation of another Norwegian king, Óláfr kyrri (1050–1093) in the Norwegian-centric sagas is a great example of this.

Although the reign of Óláfr lasted for 26 years, his rule does not take too much space in *konungasögur*. There are only a handful of chapters detailing his reign and in addition to them being short, they do not offer a lot of information about Óláfr. For instance, in *Morkinskinna* his reign is summarized in only one long chapter (*Morkinskinna* II, 3–12) and in *Fagrskinna*, after becoming the King of Norway, Óláfr is not mentioned in the following four chapters and he only becomes a part of the narrative in some brief subsequent chapters (*Fagrskinna* 290–302). *Heimskringla* follows this tradition by offering only eight chapters that are in total no longer than *Morkinskinna* (*Heimskringla* III, 203–9). All of these sources describe similar aspects about Óláfr and his reign by starting with a description of his physical appearance and then point out his taciturn attitude. Apart from *Heimskringla*, the sources mostly focus on the Danish attack on Norway. According to both *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna*, the Danish King Sveinn Ástríðarson (1019–1076) decided to attack Norway upon the death of Haraldr harðráði (1015–1066) because he believed that the peace agreement between the two kingdoms was no longer valid (*Morkinskinna* 3–6; *Fagrskinna* 297–302). The potential war is prevented by King Óláfr when he proposes the same treaty to Sveinn and agrees to marry his daughter, Ingiríðr. The sources, including *Heimskringla*, also focus on Óláfr's excessive amount of retainers, along with the developments of towns in Norway (*Heimskringla* III, 207–9). As Ármann Jakobsson suggests, one would imagine that the reason for these short and modest sagas of Óláfr kyrri is due to the peaceful period Norway experienced during his reign (Jakobsson 81–84). As *Fagrskinna* narrates, the kingdom experienced its most quiet era: “Þessi friðr stóð langa ævi milli Dana ok Norðmanna, hafði þá Óláfr konungr kyrrsetu ok hœglífi ok allir hans menn meira en fyrr hafði verit í Nórgei” [This peace between Danes and Norwegians lasted for a long time; then King Óláfr and all his men had a more peaceful and easy life than there had previously been in Norway] (*Fagrskinna* 299; *Fagrskinna, a Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, 239). While the long

reign of Óláfr is by no means unimportant, it was a rather eventless period of time in comparison to the reigns of his predecessors and successors. Yet the reigns of his successors were highly complex and led to the start of the long Norwegian civil war period, which lasted over a century and thus received a lot of attention from the saga authors. Following this example, one must ask: Could a similar comparison be made for Haraldr?

Paul Connerton's article, "Seven Types of Forgetting," describes the different forms of forgetting in relation to collective memory. The case of Haraldr, I believe, is a suitable fit for what he defines as: (1) repressive erasure and (2) forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity (Connerton 59).⁸ Connerton traces repressive erasure back as early as to the Roman era and suggests that this form of forgetting was inscribed in Roman constitutional and criminal law as a punishment that applied to rulers and other powerful figures (Connerton 60). He claims that after their deaths these influential individuals were declared as the enemies of the state and therefore their images were destroyed, their names were taken out of inscriptions, and their statues were razed in order to cast their memory into oblivion (Connerton 60). Connerton argues that repressive erasure can be used to deny a historical continuation in the narrative even if it means a break in the narrative. He concludes that although repressive erasure does not always take place in malign forms and could be done without violence, the historical evidences show that in repressive erasure violence is usually involved. The second form, wherein forgetting is constitutive in the formation of a new identity, focuses on how forgetting could be something positive, particularly in the case of forming a new identity. Connerton articulates that it is possible to discard memories that serve no purpose in the creation of a new identity (Connerton 63). Connerton also points out that this form of forgetting usually takes places with regard to people or events that had political or religious affiliation that have been superseded by consciously embracing an alternative affiliation (Connerton 63). In this form, forgetting is in itself a part of the creation of a new shared identity (Connerton 63).

Although both of these forms are applicable for Haraldr, for this hypothesis the second form is the most relevant. As opposed to the repressive erasure, Connerton's description of a form of forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity is more peaceful and does not suggest aggressiveness. In addition to Connerton, Aleida Assmann also offers a similar perspective in her study called "Canon and Archive." She states that "the passive form of cultural forgetting is related to non-intentional acts such as losing, hiding, dispersing, neglecting, abandoning, or leaving something behind" (A. Assmann 98). Similar to Connerton's second theory, in passive form the objects are not materially destroyed but they do not receive attention due to their lack of value and use (A. Assmann 98–99). As demonstrated above, our knowledge about Haraldr is very limited. However, there is nothing to indicate that repressive erasure took place after his death.

Although it is extremely scarce, there is some information describing Haraldr and his reign through primary sources. Furthermore, due to the primary focus on his family ties with Knútr inn ríki, the contemporary literature does not suggest any aggressive retaliation against him.

As previously discussed, both *Knýtlinga saga* and the Danish sources barely mention what happened in Denmark from 1014 to 1018. In most cases, the sources depict the Danes immediately crowning Knútr as their king and the new king organizing his forces before starting his English campaign. It seems to me that by assessing the varying types of primary sources that mention Haraldr during the years that he was king, it is logical to conclude that nothing substantial happened in Denmark during this short time period. I believe that in order to preserve the narrative of a dominant Denmark on the Scandinavian Peninsula, the author of *Knýtlinga saga* and chroniclers chose to omit Haraldr from their writings and thus caused a short, intentional gap in Danish history. In my opinion, there is a strong possibility that Haraldr was seen as an easy sacrifice for the sake of keeping a form of narrative unity and his brief rule was, therefore, not recorded by those documenting this period.

Conclusion

In this article, I have demonstrated that, by using the primary sources we have on medieval Danish history, it is almost impossible to properly study the reign of Haraldr or his character. Particularly seen in the Scandinavian sources, Haraldr is either barely mentioned or completely ignored, and only a handful of sources such as *Encomium* and *Annals of Ryd* offer brief information on his short-lived reign. In order to showcase this, I have suggested three potential explanations for his exclusion, contradicting the Danish identity of the age: Haraldr's religious beliefs and customs, problematic transmission of the sources, and the probability that he was simply omitted altogether due to his uneventful reign. All of these suggestions were critically analyzed using theories of collective memory.

For the first suggestion, through examining Hákon inn góði's reign, I argued that due to a different set of beliefs, historians omit or simply ignore some rulers. However, I concluded that, although this suggestion makes sense from a collective memory perspective, historically speaking there was no reason for Haraldr to follow a pagan set of beliefs. Second, a discussion on the transmission of the sources is presented where I discussed the possibility of sources relating Haraldr did not survive by the time the above-mentioned sources were composed. Like the first hypothesis, this one is also dismissed mainly because, while there were several sources on Sveinn and Knútr available, there were no sources on Haraldr. Lastly, I compared Haraldr II with Óláfr kyrri and asserted that although Óláfr had a long reign, the saga authors did not give him much attention due to the

time of peace and prosperity experienced in Norway. I concluded that it is highly likely that historians decided to omit Haraldr due to the lack of any significant events occurring in his reign, thus contradicting the new Danish identity they were trying to build.

NOTES

1. Their [Sveinn and Gunnhildr's] sons were Haraldr and Knútr inn ríki. At that time Danes were making great threats to go with an army to Norway against Jarl Hákon.
2. Translated by the author.
3. *Encomium Emmae Reginae* is commissioned by Queen Emma after the death of Harold Harefoot (r. 1035–1040) during the political instability in the English court. *Encomium* is widely accepted as biased due to Emma's involvement during the writing of it. For more information, see *Encomium Emmae Reginae* xl-l; Stafford 29.
4. Due to the lack of secondary sources, Steenstrup's study is the most recent one.
5. Translated by the author.
6. For a detailed discussion on the influence of Christianization on these sources see Carl Phelpstead.
7. Although due to the nature of the aforementioned sources the lines between pagan and Christian appear to be easy to distinguish, during the conversion-era of Scandinavia, these lines were not as clear as one might imagine. Here, I am suggesting that even if Haraldr was a Christian, he was not as devoted to the religion as the rest of his family. For further information on conversion and Christianization see Christopher Abram.
8. The other forms of forgetting are: prescriptive forgetting, structural amnesia, forgetting as annulment, as planned obsolescence, and forgetting as humiliated silence (Connerton 59).

REFERENCES

- Abram, Christopher. 2014. "The Two Modes of Religiosity." In *Conversion and Identity in the Viking Age*, 21–48. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Adam of Bremen—*The History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*. 2002. Translated by Francis Joseph Tschan and Timothy Reuter. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Adam of Bremen. 1876. *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*. Edited by George Waitz. Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani.
- Aggesen, Sven. 1917. *Brevis Historia Regum Dacie*. In *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii aevi ex codicibus denuo recensuit*. Edited by Marin Clarentius Gertz, 121–22. Copenhagen: I Kommission hos G.E.C. Gad.
- Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum: A Twelfth-Century Synoptic. 2008. Edited by Matthew James Driscoll. London: Viking Society for Northern Research.

- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Translated by Michael Swanton. 1996. London: J. M. Dent.
- Assmann, Aleida. 2010. "Canon and Archive." In *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*. Edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, 97–107. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Assmann, Jan. 2006. *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. Stanford: Stanford University Press. [German original published in 2000.]
- Bagge, Sverre. 2007. "A Hero between Paganism and Christianity. Håkon the Good in Memory and History." In *Poetik und Gedächtnis: Festschrift für Heiko Uecker zum 65*, 185–210. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Bolton, Timothy. 2017. *Cnut the Great*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Bønding, Sophie. 2018. "Danish Perspectives – N.F.S. Grundtvig" In *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies*. Edited by Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann, and Stephen A. Mitchell, 782–87. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Christiansen, Eric, ed. and trans. 1992. *The Works of Sven Aggesen: Twelfth-century Danish Historian*. London: Viking Society for Northern Research.
- Chronicon Roskildense*. 1917. In *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii aevi ex codicibus denuo recensuit*. Edited by Marin Clarentius Gertz, 1–33. Copenhagen: I Kommission hos G. E. C. Gad.
- Connerton, Paul. 2008. "Seven Types of Forgetting." *Memory Studies* 1: 59–71.
- Danakonunga sögur*. 1982. Edited by Bjarni Guðnason. Íslenzk fornrit 35. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.
- Encomium Emmae Reginae*. 2008. Edited by Alistair Campbell and Simon Keynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fagrskinna*. 1984. In *Ágrip af nóregskonunga sögum: Fagrskinna: Nóregs konunga tal*, Íslenzk fornrit 29. Edited by Bjarni Einarsson. Reykjavík: Íslenzka fornritafélag.
- Fagrskinna, a Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*. 2004. Translated by Alison Finlay. Leiden: Brill.
- Gelting, Michael. 2012. "Saxo Grammaticus in the Archives." In *The Creation of the Medieval Northern Europe*. Edited by Leidulf Melve and Sigbjørn Olsen Sønnesyn, 322–45. Oslo: Dreyers forlag.
- Glauser, Jürg, Pernille Hermann, and Stephen A. Mitchell, eds. *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Gülen, Deniz Cem. 2018. "The Most Powerful King in Scandinavia – The Representation of Knútr inn Ríki in *Knýtlinga saga*." *Scandia* 1: 48–68.

- Heimskringla* I. 1941. Edited by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Íslenzk fornrit 26. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
- Heimskringla* II. 1945. Edited by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Íslenzk fornrit 27. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
- Heimskringla* III. 1951. Edited by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Íslenzk fornrit 28. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
- Hermann, Pernille. 2013. "Saga Literature, Cultural Memory, and Storage." *Scandinavian Studies* 85: 332–54.
- . 2018. "Danish Perspective." In *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies*. Edited by Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann, and Stephen A. Mitchell, 771–81. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Historia Norwegie*. 2006. Edited by Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen. Translated by Peter Fischer. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Jakobsson, Ármann. 2000. "The Individual and the Ideal: The Representation of Royalty in *Morkinskinna*." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 99: 71–86.
- Kroman, Erik, ed. 1980. "Annales Lundenses." In *Danmarks middelalderlige Annaler*. Copenhagen: Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til dansk historie.
- Morkinskinna* II. 2011. Edited by Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson. Íslenzk fornrit 24. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
- Nygaard, Simon, and Jens Peter Schjødt. 2018. "History of Religion." In *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies*. Edited by Jürg Glauser, Hermann Pernille, and Stephen A. Mitchell, 70–79. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Knýtlinga saga*. 1986. Translated by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards. Odense: Odense University Press.
- Phelpstead, Carl. 2005. "Converting to Europe: Christian Themes in *Knýtlinga saga*." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1: 163–77.
- Saxo Grammaticus. 2015. *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, vol. 1. Edited by Karsten Friis-Jensen and Peter Fisher. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scriptores rerum danicarum medii ævi: partim hactenus inediti, partim emendatius editi, quos collegit, adornavit, vol. I. 1772*. Edited by Jacob Langebek. Copenhagen: Typis vidææ A. H. Godiche, per F. C. Godiche.
- Skyum-Nielsen, Niels. 1971. *Kvinde og slave Danmarkshistorie uden retouche*, vol. 3. Copenhagen: Munksgaard.
- Stafford, Pauline. 1997. *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power on Eleventh-Century England*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Steenstrup, Johannes C. H. R. 1893. “Harald.” In *Dansk Biografisk Lexikon*, vol. VII. Edited by Carl Frederik Bricka, 73. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag.

Theodoricus Monachus. Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium. An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings. 2006. Translated by David McDougall and Ian McDougall. London: Viking Society for Northern Research.