PART FOUR

SECULAR LEADERS ASSOCIATED WITH SANCTITY IN THE TWELFTH-CENTURY SCANDINAVIAN LANDS

4.1. Introduction

An important development in the history of the cults examined so far took place when both ecclesiastics and temporal rulers joined forces in their promotion. Bishop Grímkel sought approval for St Ólafr’s cult from King Sven Álfísun, whereas Bishop Hubald of Odense and Archbishop Eskil of Lund co-operated with King Erik ejegod and King Valdemar I respectively in furthering the two major princely cults of twelfth-century Denmark. In Orkney, Bishop Vilhjálmr canonized Magnús Erlendsson and shortly thereafter Earl Rögnvaldr commenced the building of a cathedral in honour of the saint. In Sweden the likeliest scenario is that Archbishop Stephan worked with King Knut Eriksson in launching the cult of St Erik. Indeed the act of canonization or *translatio* is frequently presented in the sources as a symbolic expression of the alliance between the temporal and the ecclesiastical authorities. This is evident in Aelnoth of Canterbury’s description of Knud IV’s translation in 1100,¹ and a similar picture is presented of Knud Lavard’s *translatio* at Ringsted.²

Despite the unusual circumstances surrounding Ólafr Haraldsson’s local canonization the participation of the reigning king in the proceedings is not neglected:

På gekk til at sjá likama Óláfs konungs Sveinn konungr ok allir høfding-jar þeir, er þar váru.[ ] ... sían lagði hann [i.e. Bishop Grímkel] í eldinn hár Óláfs konungs, ok þá er brunnit var reykelsit allt, þá tók byskup upp hárit ór eldimum, ok var þá hárit óbrunnit. Lét byskup

¹ *Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, pp. 133–134.
Thereupon King Swend, and all the chiefs who were at the place, went out to see King Olaf’s body. [...] and then [he, i.e. Bishop Grímkell] laid King Ólaf’s hair on the fire. When all the incense was burnt the bishop took the hair out of the fire, and showed the king and the other chiefs that it was not consumed. [...] After the bishop’s recognition with the king’s approbation and the decision of the Thing, it was determined that King Olaf should be considered a man truly holy. [...]  

*Orkneyinga saga* mentions that although Vilhjálmr faced Earl Páll’s opposition to Earl Magnús’ canonization, he nevertheless involved leading men of the earldom in this procedure. The sources relating to the Scandinavian saints are not unique in stressing the harmony between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* in relation to the official recognition of a prince’s saintly status. In an early hagiographic text on the martyrs Boris and Gleb the very act of carrying Boris’ coffin is made to reflect the close relationship between the princes of Kievan Rus’ and the Church:

And having first raised Saint Boris in his wooden coffin, the princes raised the coffin to their shoulders, and proceeded by venerable monks with candles, and after them deacons, and then presbyters, and after them the metropolitans and bishops, they followed after them with the coffin.  

The patronage of the secular authority helped to secure the future success of the princely cults. Prior to achieving this status, however, the cults went through a preliminary phase during which the sanctity of the prince was upheld by ecclesiastics and/or the general population (though, as seen, the cult of Knud Lavard represents an interesting exception to this pattern). It is noteworthy that in the majority of cases hitherto examined the cults emerged in less than ideal political circumstances. In fact they appear to have served as focal points for opposition against those in power at the time. Thus

---

3 *Heimskringla* II, pp. 404–405.  
5 *OS*, p. 124.  