Nordic religions in the viking age

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its authentic *replication*. While practicing a ritual sung in a language utterly unfamiliar to the bulk of their converts, the priests and bishops of the Viking Age worked to stem the absorption of their religion's most accessible or appealing symbols into preexisting systems of understanding and practice. That challenge will be examined in the following chapter.

SEVEN

The Coming of the Cross

Religious and Artistic Effects

Vexilla regis prodeunt:
fulget Crucis mysterium,
qua vita mortem pertulit,
et morte vitam protulit.

Abroad the royal banners fly,
And bear the gleaming Cross on high,
That Cross whereon Life suffered death,
And gave us life with dying breath.

In the above hymn to the Holy Cross, the sixth-century Gallo-Roman poet and bishop St. Venantius Fortunatus (535–605) distills the varying images of the holiest of sacred implements into a single expression of faith. For the medieval Christian, the Cross was a symbol to carry forth on banners, shields, and pendants: the emblem of a heavenly ruler as well as his Christian representatives on earth. Its presence over the breast or traced in the air could effect wondrous cures and banish evil. At the same time, the Cross was also a holy relic, discovered where it lay abandoned in Jerusalem and treasured ever after as a source of miraculous healing powers. Divided into myriad pieces and distributed across the Christian world, it retained the power and wonder of the materialized Christ it had borne. It was an animate friend, a conscious servant of God and intercessor for all of humanity until the Final Day. With its feast days, litanies, and myriad representations in Christian art, the Cross towered above the other symbols of the faith, a crucial material reminder of human redemption.

This chapter surveys the development of Cross symbolism, devotion, and display in northern Europe, focusing on the uses made of it in both Christian and pagan communities from Ireland across mainland Scandinavia. By examining manifestations of the Cross in Nordic cultures from the early Viking Age through the thirteenth century, we may observe the assimilation of Christian symbolism and belief in the region from three different sources: the British Isles, the eastern realms of Novgorod and Byzantium, and the continental realms of central Europe. In each case, particular ideas and images of the Cross arrived first as the products of trade and contact, only gradually acquiring a deeper significance in the religious outlooks of the Nordic peoples themselves. On the basis of archaeological and textual evidence, it is possible to ascertain how Nordic pre-Christian communities interpreted the Cross during this period and how they found counterparts to it in the pagan concept of divine implements. By the thirteenth century, however, much of the region had embraced the new faith, and orientations

toward the Cross reflected the growth of doctrinal orthodoxy among Christian populations. In this last stage of Christianization, we find accounts of Nordic kings who cannily use the Cross and its attendant symbolism in a manner reminiscent of the Christian monarchs of central and southern Europe. These narratives mark the final triumph of a truly Christian outlook, yet they comment as well on the continued prominence of paganism in the region and, perhaps, in the hearts of Nordic leaders.

Before examining the Cross in the North, we must understand its genesis and development as a symbol in Christianity itself. A common implement of public torture among the Romans, the cross emerged as a symbol of Christianity already in the second century.[1] Christians appear to have traced small crosses on foreheads, lips, or breasts, occasionally etching it on objects as a symbol of their faith. It was only with the advent of tolerance toward Christianity during the fourth century, however, that the symbol could become public. And when it did, it took three prime forms: the Cross of the Vision, the Cross of the Relic, and the gestural cross formed in the air, the *Crux usualis*. Each of these distinct aspects of the Cross became important in Nordic Christianity.

Constantine (c. 280–337) figures prominently in the rise of the Cross in official Christianity. He is credited with a vision of the Cross on the eve of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (*Ponte Molle*), October 28, 312. On that day, Constantine and his army saw a marvelous sight: a luminous X-shaped cross in saltire ("St. Andrew's Cross"), shining in the sky and bearing the inscription "In This Conquer." Later, in the evening, Constantine dreamed of Christ, who appeared to him again with the sign and commanded him to use it as an emblem.[2] Upon inquiring about its significance, Constantine learned that the symbol in his vision—which soon developed into a standardized *chi-rho* digraph crowned by a wreath—represented Christ. With this symbol emblazoned on the shields and helmets of his forces, Constantine won the battle, marching triumphantly into Rome behind his new emblem of adherence. His act made the Cross one with the divine right of the Christian king, a symbolism built on late Roman statecraft and extended by Constantine's Christian successors, particularly Charlemagne (742–814, r. 768–814), who revived the *chi-rho* digraph during his reign. Among all classes of medieval society, Constantine's visionary cross lived on in legends. It was echoed by the visions of later monarchs in the North, from King St. Oswald of the seventh century through King Valdemar II Sejr of the thirteenth.

While the age of Constantine gave Christianity a powerful Cross emblem, it also gave rise to the cult of the Cross as relic. This more material

aspect of the Holy Cross had an even greater popular appeal, shaping the religious ideas and experiences of Christians of all classes throughout the medieval era. The tangible Cross, drenched with the miraculous blood of the Savior, scarred by the nails driven through His limbs, hidden or buried after the Crucifixion, discovered, rediscovered, and preserved in the cathedrals of the Holy Land, motivated more than any other relic the pilgrimages and ex-votos of medieval history. Fractured into pieces and distributed across the Near East and Europe, it reached its peak of popularity during the thirteenth century.[3] The Cross's ability to heal the body as well as save the soul rendered it not simply a *symbol* of power but also a *repository* of it on earth.

The earliest account of the discovery of the True Cross (known as the "Invention") credits the Empress Protonica, wife of Emperor Claudius (41–54), with the act after her conversion and pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Protonica legend was soon overshadowed, however, by the legend of St. Helena (c. 250–c. 330), Constantine's mother, who visited Jerusalem in the early fourth century. St. Helena is said to have discovered three crosses, recognizing the True Cross by its miraculous power to restore a dead man's body to life. By the mid-fourth century, the Cross of the Relic had become commonplace enough for St. Cyril of Jerusalem to mention it in his catechetical lectures, and St. John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) noted in a homily of 387 that both men and women wear fragments of the Cross encased in jewelry about the neck. By the end of the fourth century, St. Jerome (c. 342–420) was criticizing women for the ostentation of such pendants, while the Roman pilgrim Aetheria (Silvia) recounted Good Friday services in Jerusalem that included the exposure and kissing of a portion of the Cross. Precautions must be taken, she notes, lest the faithful bite off pieces of the sacred relic for personal use. In 614, during a Persian invasion of Jerusalem, the Cross was seized and transported away from the Holy City. Its defilement became the subject of various legends and its return on May 3, 630, was celebrated as an occasion of great triumph and joy. This and other days became high feasts in the liturgical year, marking a fervent and widespread devotion to the material implement of the Crucifixion.[4]

Crusades and pilgrimages alike brought Europeans to the Cross in Jerusalem, but reliquaries and translation brought pieces of it back to Europe. The first relics of the True Cross to arrive in Europe reached Italy and Gaul by the beginnings of the fifth century.[5] St. Venantius Fortunatus composed his hymn to the Cross on the arrival of such a relic at Poitiers in the late sixth century. Charlemagne was celebrated as having received a piece of the True Cross from Patriarch George of Jerusalem in 799.[6] Pope Marinus I (882–84) presented a piece of the True Cross to the British King Alfred in 883 and King Athelstan received a piece enclosed in crystal from King Hugh of Brittany during his reign (871–99).[7] Bede credits the seventh-century St. Felix with owning a piece which he used to stop a terrible city fire, and Ælfric discusses fragments of the Cross and their powers in a tenth-century homily.[8] In Ireland, King Aed Finnlaith of the northern Ui Néill carried a fragment into battle in 867, defeating the Vikings at Drogheda and ending Scandinavian incursions in the region. In 1123, the western Irish King Toirdelbach Ua Conchubhair of Connacht commissioned the ornate processional Cross of Cong to house a fragment of the True Cross as well.[9]

As the cult of the Cross spread across Christendom, early reticence regarding the wearing of cross images faded. The Iconoclast Controversy was laid to rest doctrinally in the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, which upheld the principle of venerating images of "the precious and vivifying Cross," as well as depictions of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints. This decree was renewed at the Eighth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 869.[10] Medieval saints' lives frequently mention crosses as items of clothing, with or without the addition of a sliver of the True Cross. One of St. Ceolfriđ's (642–716) brethren is said to have made a golden cross for himself,[11] and Odo of Cluny notes that St. Gerald of Aurillac (c. 855–909) always wore a golden cross on his belt, forsaking all other jewelry or trappings of his estate.[12] Alcuin recounts the story of a deacon who stole a golden cross that St. Willibrord (658–739) had carried on his travels. In the narrative, the deacon grows seriously ill until he confesses his sin and returns the cross to the deceased saint's shrine.[13] The Anglo-Saxon St. Ælfheah (d. 1012) was said to have returned from the dead to punish a man who stole a pectoral cross from his grave.[14] In these accounts, the cross symbol—like the Cross fragment—figures as an implement of power, one used by the holy man to effect miracles, both before and after his death.

While the visionary and material Cross pervaded medieval legendry, the gestural sign of the Cross—the *Crux usualis*—became a constant part of daily Christian life. Nearly every important official act was begun or concluded with the sign of the Cross, which could be made over oneself, another person, or some object. *Jóns saga Byskups* advises Christians to make the sign of the Cross when rising, before going to sleep, and before eating and drinking.[15] In Snorri's *Hákonar saga Góða*, the Christian King Hákon makes the sign of the Cross over the drink which is forced upon him by his pagan supporters. Thus sanctifying the cup, Hákon seems to break its linkage with Óðinn.[16] Indeed, in the right hands, the *Crux usualis* could have all the

power and efficacy of the material relic in impeding the wiles of the devil: an early *Life of St. Bridget* tells of how the Irish saint stops a woman from perjuring through making the sign of the Cross over her. The woman's head and tongue immediately begin to swell until she admits her lie and repents.[17] Thus, it is no surprise that Alcuin (c. 735–804) posits that Christ chose crucifixion instead of some other form of death (e.g., stoning or the sword) for the express purpose of giving Christians a wondrous gesture of power and protection.[18]

The Cross Comes to the British Isles and Atlantic Settlements

The Cross came with the faith to northern Europe, first in Roman Britain and then in Ireland, from the era of Constantine onward. After the Anglo-Saxon invasion, England required reconversion, a task accomplished by missionary monks from both Rome and Ireland. Irish and Anglo-Saxon missionaries in turn converted the Scandinavians, both in the Atlantic settlements of the British Isles and, in part, on mainland Scandinavia. A distinctive embrace of the Cross in British Isles Christianity allows us to trace the pathways and effects of this missionization in the Nordic region as a whole. It differed from either the Christianity of the eastern church or that established in the region by the Frankish mission.

The earliest cross figures in Ireland are inscribed Latin crosses, executed on stone slabs and erected on monastic grounds by the time of St. Patrick (c. 389–461) onward. By the eighth century, the first true high crosses had appeared, carved from sandstone and ornamented on shaft and arms with tight interlace patterning reminiscent of metalwork and manuscript art of the day.[19] The characteristic Celtic ringed form had emerged, possibly in stone imitation of metal processional crosses, which would have had a ring to stabilize shaft and arms. These first Irish stone crosses, unique in Europe at the time, limit figural depictions to the base, where pictures of horsemen, deer, and hunts are placed in rectangular panels. During the ninth century, this figural decoration gradually extended up the shaft and across the arms of the cross itself, retaining, however the same aristocratic themes and even an occasional mysterious figure, such as the antler-headed man of the north shaft at Clonmacnoise, strongly reminiscent of the Celtic Cernunnos.[20] An aristocratic reading for the figural decoration is supported not simply by the strong links of patronage between ruling nobles and monasteries (characteristic of monastic economies in much of Europe) but also by the royal

character of many early Irish monks themselves, including the pivotal aristocratic monk-saints Enda (d. c. 530), Finnian (d. c. 579), and Columcille ("Columba"; c. 521–597).

With the tenth-century scriptural crosses of sandstone, along with their granite counterparts in southeastern Ireland, events from the Bible and saints' lives replace earlier aristocratic horsemen and deer. The high cross has now become more emphatically Christian, depicting in neat, rectangular panels scenes useful in the teaching of catechumens or reassuring to the ascetic monk. Portrayals of the Flight into Egypt or Daniel in the lions' den obviate in their clarity the nebulousness of the earlier cross depictions and prepare the way for the final late crosses of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which depict a crucified Christ or a bishop with miter and crozier. The process of "Christianizing" cross ornamentation has thus come to its completion with the attainment of the Crucifix and the triumph of the cleric, suppressing earlier aristocratic or syncretic influences. The same issues, however, would be replayed again in each of the places to which the Irish brought the Cross and the faith.

While the Irish St. Columba and the Briton St. Ninian (d. c. 432) both undertook missionary work in Scotland and Cumbria, the kingdoms of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes were initially left to Roman missionaries to evangelize. St. Augustine of Canterbury (d. 604), Pope St. Gregory's reluctant emissary to the English, began his mission in Kent, founding a monastery at Canterbury and sees in London and Rochester. For the history of the Cross, however, we look neither to St. Augustine nor to King St. Edwin (c. 585–633), the Northumbrian monarch who brought Christianity north from his Mercian exile. Rather, the decisive figure for the development of the Anglo-Saxon cross is Edwin's successor, King St. Oswald (605–642), who returned from his exile at Iona a Christianized and Celticized monarch.

Oswald demonstrates the continuity of the Constantinian Cross of the Vision in the distinctive social and cultural milieu of northern Europe. In a dream on the eve of his victorious battle for the throne of Northumbria in 634, the king recapitulates Constantine's vision, seeing a great cross and St. Columba, who explains its significance. If he erects a wooden cross on the battlefield, Oswald is assured, he will gain victory over the pagan Welsh king, Cadwallan. He does so and wins the battle, called ever after the Battle of Heavenfield. As king of Northumbria, he invited the Irish St. Aidan (d. 651) from Iona to Lindisfarne to missionize the Northumbrian people. The Venerable St. Bede (c. 672–735) retells the tale in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (731) and Ælfric describes it in memorable terms in his late tenth-

century homily on the life of Oswald.[21] The visionary Cross, when experienced by a king, comes to the whole of society through the rulership it announces and the monuments that promulgate it. For generations, Bede relates, the wooden cross of Oswald served not only as a reminder of God's endorsement of their ruler, but as a cure for common diseases: chips of the cross, put in one's cup, could cure men as well as cattle (see Chapter 5).[22] Oswald's notoriety in Iceland was great enough that some of the island's most noted families traced lineage to Jórunn hin óborna ("the illegitimate"), reputedly the natural daughter of the sainted king.[23]

The eighth century in particular saw the creation of distinctive Anglo-Saxon religious works that merged the heroic epic of Germanic paganism with the Christian message. The late eighth-century or early ninth-century poet Cynewulf retells the vision of Constantine as well as St. Helena's discovery of the True Cross in his masterful heroic poem *Elene*. Similarly, in his depiction of the Last Judgment in the poem *Christ*, Cynewulf presents the Cross in terms which unite its material essence as the gallows on which Christ died and its spiritual essence as the standard of the ruling God on high. The central presence of the Cross at the Last Judgment had become a standard part of Christian eschatology through the writings of St. John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), and Cynewulf's portrayal echoes accounts of the Last Judgment in Irish works of his era.[24] Nonetheless, it is hard to mistake the heroic overtones of Cynewulf's description, inherent in both the overall image of the shining Cross and the terms used to describe it and God:

Đonne sīo bȳman stefen
ond þæt hāte fȳr,
ond se engla þrym
ond se hearda dæg
ryht ārǣred,
folcdryht wera
ūsses Dryhtnes rōd
bēacna beorhtast
Heofoncyninges
bisēon mid swāte
scīre scīneð.[25]

ond se beorhta segn
ond sēo hēa duguð,
ond se egsan þrēa
ond sēo hēa rōd,
rīces tō bēacne
biforan bonnað . . .
ondweard stondeð
blōde bistēmed
hlūtran drēore
þæt ofer sīde gesceaft

Then the trumpets' strain
the fiery heat
the throng of the angels

and the shining standard,
and the heavenly host,
and the throes of fear

the Day of terror
upraised as a sign
shall summon mankind
The Rood of our Savior
over-run with bright gore
with radiant light
No shadows shall lurk
streams on all nations.[26]

and the towering Cross
of the Ruler's might
before the King . . .
red with His blood
upreared before men
shall illumine the wide Creation.
where the light of the Cross

If the Cross appears active in Cynewulf's poems, it is completely personified in the somewhat earlier *Dream of the Rood*, preserved both in the *Vercelli Book* and in an inscription on the red sandstone Ruthwell Cross of the Galloway Peninsula. Here, particularly in the manuscript version, we hear of a narrator's Constantinian or Oswaldian dream-vision, in which the Cross itself, towering in the sky above, recounts the Passion, Harrowing of Hell, and coming Last Judgment. The narrator is thankful for his vision, which consoles him as he awaits his dying day. Crucially, the bulk of the poem is presented in the voice of the Cross itself, an animate and feeling being, who mourns its role in the death of the Savior and looks forward to the coming judgment of mankind. At the end of the poem, the reader is assured that anyone bearing the Cross *in* or *on* the breast (the Anglo-Saxon is inconclusive here) will be saved:

Ne þearf ðǣr þonne ǣnig
þe him ǣr in brēostum bereð
ac ðurh ðā rōde sceal
of eorðwege
sēo þe mid Wealdende

anforht wesan
bēacna sēlest
rīce gesēcan
ǣghwylc sāwl
wunian þenceð.

No one need be fearful
who already bears in/on his breast the best of beacons
for through the Cross each soul
who wishes to dwell with the Ruler,
leaving the ways of the world, will attain that kingdom.[27]

Irish and Anglo-Saxon poems and high crosses thus indicate a productive cult of the Cross in the British Isles by the eighth century, merging both the Cross of the Vision and that of the Relic. This cult pervaded monastic and liturgical life and entered into the religious experiences of the laity through

homilies, feasts, and prayer at stone monuments. That the custom of praying at high crosses was important in England but distinct from continental religious practice is reflected by Huneberc's eighth-century *Hodoeporicon of Saint Willibald* (700–786), in which the child Willibald, who has taken seriously ill when only a few years old, is laid at the foot of a stone cross in hopes that God will cure him. Writing in Latin for an immediate audience at Heidenheim, the Anglo-Saxon nun Huneberc notes that nobles and wealthy men in England regularly erect a cross on their property for the "convenience of those who wish to pray daily before it."[28]

In areas where Scandinavian settlers came in close contact with Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Christians, the Cross transferred with little modification. Such was the case on the Isle of Man, where Celtic and Scandinavian settlements appear to have merged with particular syncretic productivity.[29] It was also the case in other parts of the British Isles, Iceland, and southwestern Norway.

Inscribed Latin crosses first appeared on Manx slab monuments in the late seventh century, as Man acquired Christianity from Irish sources. Gradually, however, as the Scandinavian settlement on the island developed, Celtic high crosses with runic inscriptions and dedications began to appear. These incorporate interlace patterns in the Borre and Mammen styles of tenth-century western Scandinavia[30] and bear dedication formulas characteristic of continental Scandinavian monuments, apart from the use of the term *kross* for the more usual *steinn* (stone) when referring to the monument itself.[31] Perhaps the best known of these is the tenth-century Gautr's Cross of Kirk Michael, which includes the names of both its patron ("Mael Brigde, son of Aþakan the Smith") and its carver, Gautr (Fig. 1).[32] The bulk of these inscribed monuments were raised in the memory of a relative (male or female) and show a mixing of names indicative of intermarriage or intercultural influence. In this way, they carry on the tradition of memorial stones preexisting throughout Scandinavia while reflecting the Christian and Celtic influences of the Isle of Man in particular.

That Manx Scandinavians assimilated the Cross as a warrior standard and implement of power—akin to the implements of Nordic gods (see below)—is evident in the iconography of the tenth-century slate cross fragment at Kirk Andreas.[33] Here, flanking a depiction of the cross ornamented with interlace, we find two parallel figures: on the right, Óðinn with his spear and raven, treading on the jaw of a wolf (Fenrir); on the left, Jesus (or a saint), armed with cross and book, treading on a serpent, flanked by a fish (cf. *Genesis* 3:15 as a type of Christ). While the book and raven figure as

Figure 1. Gautr's Cross, Kirk Michael, Isle of Man, tenth century. Monument combines Christian Cross with Scandinavian interlace patterning and Norse runic inscription. Photo courtesy Manx National Heritage.

parallel sources of wisdom, the cross and spear are clearly intended as parallel sources of divine power. The Kirk Andreas Cross seems to assume a conversance with both Scandinavian and Christian religious systems and the willingness to compare them outright in terms of symbolism and imagery. It is a work scarcely imaginable but in the richly syncretic Celtic-Scandinavian, pre-Christian–Christian milieu of the Isle of Man. As Man developed into a cultural hearth for the western and northern islands of Scotland, and from there to the Faroes and Iceland, it appears that this embrace of the Cross spread to Scandinavian settlements throughout the region.

The mixture of Christian and pre-Christian symbolism evident on the Kirk Andreas Cross parallels the figural sculpture of the Gosforth Cross in Cumbria.[34] Here, in addition to interlace patterns, we find a variety of scenes drawn from Christian and Scandinavian sacred histories. A crucified Christ on the bottom of the east shaft is attended by both a man with a spear (probably the Longinus of medieval Christian legend) and a woman with a sweeping gown, who may represent Mary or Mary Magdalen but resembles iconographically similar valkyrie or queen figures on the pre-Christian picture stones of Gotland (Fig. 2). The rest of the scenes on the cross appear references to Ragnarök, the pagan version of the Last Judgment, in which the Æsir and their allies do final battle against the unleashed powers of Loki and his ilk. The Gosforth Cross may represent a Scandinavianized Christian eschatology, one merging pre-Christian and Christian figures and reflecting the popularity of the subject in missionary homilies.[35] It was, as we have seen, an event in which the shining Cross of the Vision played a central role, and thus its appearance on a carved high cross makes good thematic sense, even if its imagery may seem strikingly pagan today.

Although the crosses at Kirk Andreas and Gosforth epitomize syncresis between Scandinavian paganism and British Isle Christianity, they are certainly not alone in this respect. Stone sculptures with analogous content abound in northern England, Scotland, and the western and northern islands.[36] Another stone at Gosforth may depict Þórr fishing for the world serpent.[37] Several crosses in Leeds and Sherburn may include depictions of Völundr/Wayland.[38] Stone monuments were probably paralleled by wooden sculptures as well, although these have failed to survive.

Textual as well as archaeological evidence indicates the spread of this Cross tradition from the British Isles north into Iceland and western Norway. *Landnámabók* includes an account of the Orkney migrant Einarr Þorgeirsson, who marked his new territory in Iceland with three divine symbols—an ax (symbolizing Þórr), an eagle (symbolizing Óðinn), and a cross.[39] High

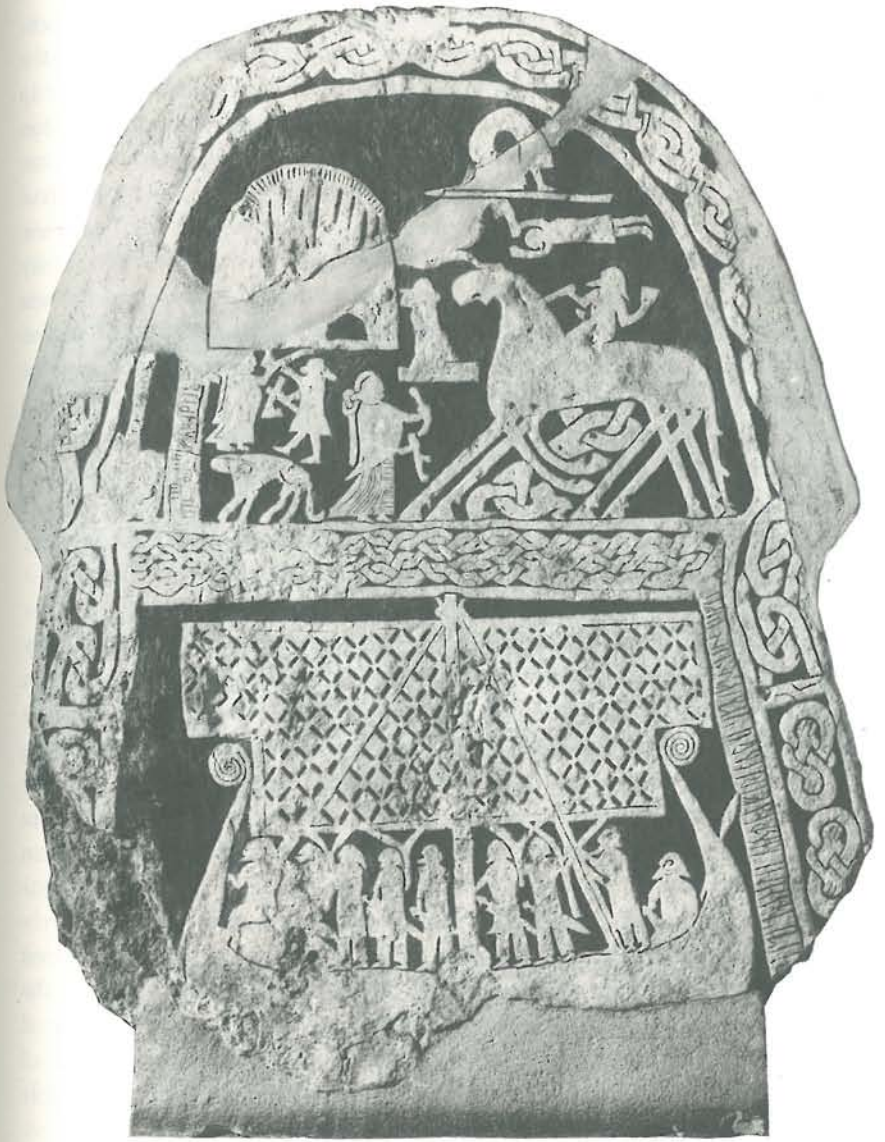

Figure 2. Pagan Picture Stone, Alskog, Tjängvide, Gotland, probably eighth century. Monument shows stylized depictions of elements of Scandinavian paganism, including Óðinn's eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, a valkyrie figure, and a ship. Photo courtesy Antikvarisk-topografiska arkivet, Stockholm.

crosses of stone appear in coastal Norway in the tenth and eleventh centuries,[40] sharing rune type with the crosses of Man.[41] In *Eiríks saga*, Auðr the Deepminded leaves the Hebrides for Caithness, migrating subsequently to the Orkneys and eventually to Iceland. There, the saga writer states: "Hon bjó í Hvammi. Hon hafði bœnahald í Krosshólum; þar lét hon reisa krossa, því at hon var skírð ok vel trúuð"[42] [She made her home at Hvamm and had a chapel at Krosshólar, where she had crosses set up, for she had been baptised and held the Christian faith].[43] References in the twelfth-century Icelandic Homily Book as well as in an early version of *Jóns saga Biskups* indicate the custom of prayer at outdoor crosses. St. Guðmundr is also portrayed as having erected a standing cross as a site for prayer at Hólar. As *Guðmundar saga* records: "People go there as they do to holy places and burn lights before the cross outside just as they would inside a church, even if the weather is bad."[44]

The Cross in Eastern Scandinavia: Influences from the East

The story of the Cross in the eastern Nordic region, like the story of Christianization itself, differs substantively from that of the Atlantic settlements. Archaeological evidence shows that Nordic chieftains and traders along the Baltic coast met with the symbols of Christianity long before understanding or accepting their theological meanings. Christian art had developed for centuries before arriving in the North, and the pervasive, persistent nature of Christian symbolism in southern and eventually also western and eastern Europe made the adoption of Christian motifs inevitable in those communities that carried on trade with the Christian world. Thus, from a purely art-historical perspective, we can note the arrival of the Cross in Sweden and Finland as early as the sixth century.[45] Only gradually, however, does the Cross begin to carry the supernatural weight associated with it in medieval Christianity. The shift is reflected archaeologically through different uses of the cross in burials, uses which subsided as Christianity itself became firmly established.

The Cross as talisman and motif becomes prominent in Nordic art, graves, and hoards well before the full embrace of Christianity. A survey of cross pendants and icons in gravefinds from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries in the Lake Beloe and Kargapol area of Russia shows the adoption of the cross as a sacred object, despite the apparent continuation of a pagan belief system, and may illustrate pagan responses to the Cross throughout

northern Europe.[46] In this region at the periphery of the Viking world, crosses do not occur randomly; they are found in only a minority of graves, perhaps those of persons or families nominally Christianized. Further, they appear around the necks of those persons viewed as the society's most vulnerable: women, teenaged boys, and especially children. That these burials are pagan, or only marginally Christian, is indicated by burial type, and by irregularities in the burial site, for example, the placing of a cross at the foot of the deceased, an act incongruous with the Christian burial rite of the era.[47] Significantly, crosses disappeared from graves in the Kargapol region in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as Christianity became established as the dominant faith.

Orthodox style and motifs came with cross pendants from Russia and eastern Europe into the entirety of the Baltic region during the ninth and tenth centuries. By the eleventh century, local Nordic and Baltic artisans had begun manufacturing their versions of such objects in Novgorod, Gotland, and the Gulf of Riga area.[48] Where burial with cross pendants appears a function of status, travel, and wealth—as in the still strongly pagan Turku region of Finland in the eleventh century—such objects are associated with male graves and hoards.[49] A single man might be buried with an array of talismans, Christian and pagan alike, a feature paralleled in graves in Eura[50] and Staraja Ladoga[51] and in Sámi graves and hoards throughout Sweden and Norway.[52] Where Christianity appears to have been taking root as a faith through local missionization, on the other hand—as in Birka, Sweden—the cross pendants tend to appear in women's graves (as in the Russian case), strung about the neck with a chain and clearly worn as a source of luck or intercession.[53]

The importation of Mediterranean and Eastern Christian influences into Nordic art and belief can be traced in the remarkable picture stones of Gotland, a leading center of Viking trade in the east. Trade connections brought Gotlanders in contact with the highly developed commemorative sculpture traditions of the Christian Mediterranean as well as of southeastern Europe, and these soon became translated into pagan monuments on the island.[54] Early cryptic symbols, such as spirals and triangles, gave way in time to more recognizable iconography, as on the eighth-century Alskog, Tjängvide stone (Fig. 2). Here Óðinn's eight-legged steed, Sleipnir, shares ground with figures reminiscent of valkyries, gods, warriors, horses, battles, and a ship under sail. While such monuments give the impression of a thriving but mysterious late pagan religiosity on Gotland, more emphatically Christian imagery soon begins to intrude. In the monuments associated

with the eleventh century, we find a cross formée, sometimes encircled or taking on floral details, occupying the same upper position once filled by spirals or Óðinnic emblems. Such designs are almost certainly copied from the pendants that they resemble, and they apparently announce the religious identity of the persons honored by the stone. The mysterious ship motif of earlier centuries becomes replaced with an interlace design and runic inscription comparable to those found on Christian stones on mainland Sweden from the same period. The cross symbol functions as an insignia of Christianity, but in so doing it differs from the high crosses of the British Isles. No longer the animate object of fervent devotion, the Cross here appears but a simple emblem of religious membership, paralleled exactly by similar demarcations of pagan allegiance on stones of the same form.

Eastern religious influences, strong in Karelia as well as Gotland, lessened in importance in areas further to the west. Sweden and Denmark reflect a combination of influences from east, south, and west, and Norway in particular shows influences from England. Production of crosses with western motifs and styles and arms of equal length was well established in various parts of more westerly Scandinavia by the eleventh century, and many of these cross types—especially those found in Norway—have close counterparts in England.[55] The lack of high crosses of the type common in the Atlantic settlements anywhere in the eastern Baltic tells us that we are dealing with a different brand of Christianity, one tied to the prestige trade and political centers to the east and south.

The Frankish Mission and the Arrival of State Christianity

We have seen thus far that the Cross—and with it, Christianity—came to the Nordic region both through the Atlantic settlements of the British Isles and through trade and contact with the eastern Christians of Novgorod and Byzantium. The first of these pathways is fondly and frequently remembered in Nordic hagiography: accounts of British missionary-saints like St. Willibrord (c. 658–739) and St. Boniface (c. 680–754) of Friesland, St. Willihad (d. 789) of Saxony, St. Sunniva (tenth century) of Selja, St. Eskil (died c. 1080) of Södermanland, St. David (early eleventh century) of Västmanland, and St. Henrik (d. c. 1156) of Uppsala and Finland—all point to an almost constant flow of devout Christians from the British Isles. The English sojourns of King Hákon the Good (919–61, king of Norway 934–61), the Swedish St. Botvid (d. 1120), and King Óláfr Tryggvason (968–1000, r. 995–1000) are also cited as the causes of conversion for each of these important

Nordic men. In contrast, the second of these pathways—that of the East—receives little credit in the textual accounts of Nordic Christianization, a fact which probably reflects both the Icelandic biases of our written sources and the deteriorating relations of eastern and western Christianity during the thirteenth century. In any case, both the limited distribution of British Isle high crosses in the Nordic region and the strong archaeological showings of eastern cross pendants should caution us to read the textual history with some reservation.

A third important source of Christian influence in mainland Scandinavia, however, came from the south. Although the continental Christianity arriving from Hamburg-Bremen evinced significantly less devotion to the Cross, it helped establish the notion of a Christian monarchy in the region and the idea of mass conversions. The concept of Christianity as a politically motivated public cult took shape particularly in Denmark and spread north and east. Its influence can be traced in yet another manifestation of Cross iconography, the Christian rune stones of Denmark and Sweden. Although derived in a distant form from the high crosses of the British Isles, these mainland Scandinavian monuments possess their own distinctive form and symbolism and their own apparent functions in the social life of Christianizing Scandinavians. They are functions reflective of public cult membership and a religiosity diffusing into the region from the south.

For Charlemagne (742–814) and his successors, Christianization represented a key means of controlling and potentially subjugating pagan populations to the north. It is clear that by the time of King Haraldr Bluetooth Gormson (baptized c. 965, d. 985), royal conversion was necessary to prevent hostile invasion from the south.[56] By the time of Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen, c. 1075), Scandinavian clerics and kings alike had come to resent this southern dominance. But in the figure of St. Ansgar (c. 801–865), we see the effort at its start. Although initiated originally by English exile monks such as Willihad (d. 789; founder of the see of Bremen) and Alcuin (c. 735–804; Charlemagne's adviser at Aachen), and linked to a king strongly associated with the Cross of the Relic, the Carolingian missionary effort of St. Ansgar proved far less interested in spreading devotion to the Cross than its British Isle counterparts.

We know of the life of St. Ansgar through Rimbert's ninth-century *Vita Anskarii*, which details the saint's missionary work in Denmark and Sweden and his final death as archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen.[57] Rimbert's text comments on the sanctity of its subject and the evil of his rivals, and thus its details on the history of the Birka mission in particular must be read with

reservation.[58] On the other hand, critics concur that the accounts of Ansgar's visions—which are identified in the text as firsthand testimony from Ansgar himself—probably represent the saint's perceptions as recounted later in life. These show little evidence of devotion to the Cross or embrace of its symbolism. When the saint experiences visions, they involve Jesus, Mary, St. Peter, and John the Baptist. A vision of Mary and female saints (including his mother) leads the young Ansgar toward the religious life, and visions of Peter, John the Baptist, purgatory, heaven, and Christ help build up his resolve to persevere at the monastery thereafter. Where the poet of *Dream of the Rood* takes comfort in his memory of the Cross in his final days, the dying Ansgar's mind turns toward his human intercessors.[59] And where the Rood poet listens to the Cross's account of the Passion, Ansgar experiences the Scourging himself. Stretching his own body out behind Christ's, Ansgar bears the blows of the soldiers' whip and replaces imagistically as well as experientially, the animate, feeling Cross.[60] It is not surprising, then, that Asgar's *Vita* makes no mention of cross amulets or sculptures. The holy objects stolen, desecrated, or recovered in this narrative are all books, which hold the same capacity to punish thieves that earlier *vitae* attributed to pectoral crosses.[61]

Perhaps the pagan ownership of crosses, long commonplace among Scandinavians of status, as we have seen, made narratives of crosses falling into pagan hands less intriguing or incensing than stories of pagan acquisition of books. Perhaps, too, the association of the Cross with the British Isles—promoted on the continent by emigrant missionaries and the popularity of the cult of King St. Oswald[62]—made the symbol less appealing to the hagiographers of Hamburg-Bremen. Whatever the case, however, it is clear that Ansgar and his biographer show little of the devotion to the Cross that so inspired the missionary saints of the British Isles.

Crosses, however, did make their way into mainland Scandinavia, and often in striking monuments. Such is the case with the Jelling Stone, King Haraldr Bluetooth's (c. 958–87) monument to Danish conversion (Fig. 3).[63] Haraldr's acceptance of Christianity in 965 was prompted by two factors, neither of them the Cross. On the one hand, Widukind and Snorri tell us, the powerful Emperor Otta to the south threatened to invade Denmark if he refused the faith.[64] On the other hand, the priest Poppo/Poppa proved the power of the new religion by gripping a red-hot iron with his bare hand and showing it unharmed to the king. In the Jelling Stone, Haraldr identifies himself as the monarch who brought Christianity to the Danes. More than that, however, the stone brought to mainland Scandinavia the sculptural

Figure 3. Jelling Stone, Denmark, late tenth century. Commissioned by King Haraldr Bluetooth Gormson, this monument depicts a Christ in crucifixion and credits Haraldr with the conversion of Denmark. Photo courtesy National Museum, Copenhagen.

tradition characteristic of the British Isles. For the next two centuries, Christian as well as pagan Scandinavians imitated the monument, creating hundreds of similar sculptures in Denmark and Sweden.[65] The Jelling Stone can truly be called a turning point in the history of Cross iconography in mainland Scandinavia.[66]

Like St. Ansgar's vision of the Scourging, however, the Jelling Stone removes the Cross itself from the Passion. Here, we find a central, nimbed Christ, arms outstretched in crucifixion, but without any supporting cross at all. Rather, the space surrounding Christ has been filled with coils of serpents, a decorative choice that links the stone imagistically to an eighth-century Irish book cover from Athlone, County Westmeath. In this cast bronze representation of the Crucifixion, Christ's body dominates the scene, with the cross peaking out only a little at the extremities and elaborate spirals and interlace patterns adorning the Savior's clothes and those of his surrounding attendants.[67] But the Jelling Stone takes this stylistic choice to the extreme, as if to say that the Cross—so central to Christian sculpture and religiosity along the shores of the Irish Sea—holds no interest for the Scandinavian artist at all.

In the two centuries which followed, Haraldr's Jelling Stone served as the model for an unprecedented production of rune stones in central Scandinavia, some two thousand in all. Crosses figure frequently in these monuments, but here the cross is simplified and conventionalized in form, appearing most often as a simple Latin or palmette cross (often apparently modeled on a pendant) surrounded by some interlace patterning and a serpent-shaped runic inscription. Like Haraldr's monument, these later stones present the Cross more as an emblem of religious allegiance than as an object for religious meditation. As in Haraldr's Jelling Stone, they commemorate the deeds and lives of local individuals rather than more distant holy intercessors.[68]

The Divine Implement in Pre-Christian Religion

Where Swedish Christians embraced the Cross as an insignia of religious adherence on memorial stones, their pagan counterparts embraced the symbol of Þórr's hammer in much the same way.[69] Such can be seen in the rune stones of Christians and Þórr worshipers in Södermanland. Here, the cross depiction often combines with an image of a bearded man's head, probably Christ's. On the pagan Þórr stones of the region, this head-and-cross arrangement becomes directly paralleled in a head-and-hammer depiction, pointing again to the Christ-Þórr juxtaposition discussed in previous chapters. The hammer symbol appears as well in numerous late pagan amulets and inscriptions and can in many senses be termed an "anti-cross."[70] Scandinavian metalsmiths' dies from the period show that the same craftsmen made either cross or hammer amulets, depending, presumably, on the religious adherence of customers (Fig. 4).

The apparent equation of the Cross and Þórr's hammer demonstrates the late-pagan tendency to match attractive aspects of Christianity with equally attractive pagan counterparts. The close parallels in size, use, and even form of cross and hammer images from this era make this equation evident, and the survival of cross-and-hammer dies reveals the extent to which the two symbols became viewed as parallel religious items. At the same time, however, equating the Cross and Mjöllnir signals a key demotion of the Cross from the category of animate sacred intercessor to that of inanimate divine implement. In most respects, this demotion was entirely expectable given Nordic paganism, and it goes hardly noticed by modern interpreters unfamiliar with the Christian cult of the Cross during the ninth through thirteenth centuries. But it is an important development for what it tells about the interpretation of Christianity within Nordic pagan communities at this time.

Divine implements play a prominent role in Scandinavian mythology, especially as recounted by Snorri in his *Skáldskaparmál*.[71] Here, a single myth accounts for the origins of Þórr's hammer (Mjöllnir), Óðinn's spear (Gungnir), Sif's hair of gold, Óðinn's golden ring (Draupnir), Freyr's ship (Skíðbladnir), and Freyr's golden boar (Gullinborsti). All are created by dwarves at the behest of the mischievous Loki, who thus attempts to escape the wrath of an irritated Óðinn. As is often the case with Snorri's accounts of Scandinavian mythology, this rendering may present too unified and consistent a picture of these implements, glossing over changes or disputes regarding deities' properties and interests over time. Yet it is clear that the implements described relate centrally to each god's sphere of interest or action. Óðinn's roles in warfare as well as in chieftainship are reflected aptly by the unerring spear, Gungnir, and the ring of plenty, Draupnir. Þórr's hammer, Mjöllnir, becomes crucial to the god's activities in fighting the frost giants who threaten the Æsir. As such, the implements are more than simple possessions: they share integrally in each god's sacred functions.

As with the gods, however, so also their implements vary in the regions and versions of Scandinavian mythology left to us today. While Þórr may be primarily associated with his hammer, for instance, he also possesses a belt of strength and powerful iron gauntlets.[72] Saxo describes the god's primary weapon as a club, and the *Landnámabók* includes an account of Einarr

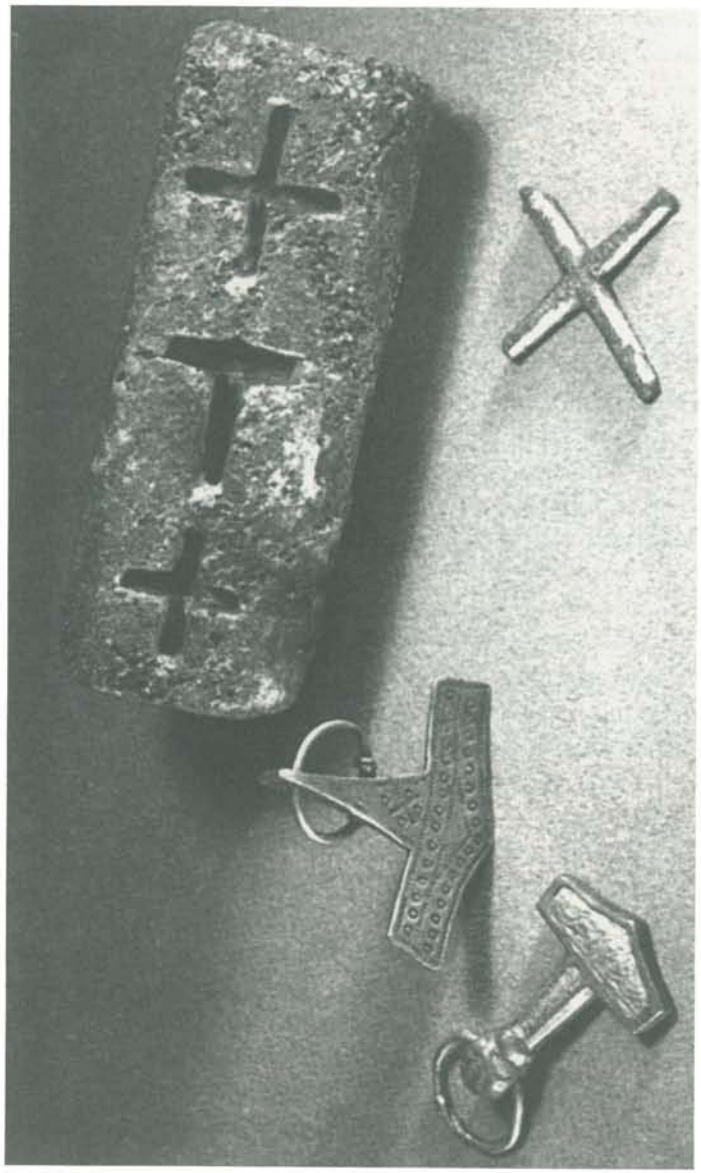

Figure 4. Mold for making both cross and Þórr's-hammer amulets, tenth century. Items such as this indicate the close association of the Christian Cross and Þórr's hammer in late pagan Scandinavia and the production of both types of amulets by the same smiths. Photo courtesy National Museum, Copenhagen.

Þorgeirsson's marking of his new territory with three symbols: a cross, an eagle, and an ax, the last of which is said to represent Þórr.[73] Visual representations of the hammer Mjöllnir itself vary from the earliest iron amulets attached to neckrings[74] to the stylized, sweeping silver hammer amulets of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, and, finally, to ambiguous, cross-and-hammer objects, such as the Foss Amulet.[75]

Óðinn's relation to divine implements presents a further difficulty. For while Þórr's hammer-club-ax shows certain variation, Óðinn is known by an array of key implements, including his eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, his wolves, Geri and Freki, his ravens, Huginn and Muninn, his valkyries, and his afterlife hall.[76] Thus, while the god is called by skaldic epithets such as Egill's *geirs dróttinn* (Lord of the Spear) and Bragi's *Gungnis váfaðr* (Gungnir's Shaker),[77] Gungnir cannot be seen as Óðinn's sole or even most representative divine implement.

This variation in the form or type of divine implement appears to lessen under the influence of Christianity. In fact, such symbols appear to conventionalize, apparently in imitation of the Christian iconographic tradition. Such is certainly reflected in the portrayal of Óðinn on the Kirk Andreas Cross, discussed above, where Óðinn's depiction with raven and spear is placed in direct juxtaposition to Christ's with cross and book. The system of easily recognized visual symbols developed in western Christian art to identify saints and evangelists spread through manuscript art, stained glass and wall paintings, carvings, and jewelry and became very familiar to artisans of the Viking Age.[78] Similar processes of conventionalization almost certainly underlie the depictions of warriors on horseback and ships under sail on Gotlantic picture stones. And while Þórr's hammer amulets show a good deal of variation in form and style in the early Viking Age, the figures have grown relatively uniform by the late tenth century. The same stylized hammer that develops on silver amulets also comes to dominate Swedish stone monuments of the era.[79] While such relative uniformity can be attributed to craftsmen copying prestige works from trading centers, it may also be viewed as an indication of the development of a notion of standardized iconography, or at least the notion of standardization as a goal and norm.

While divine implements conventionalized in form in late pagan art, the tendency to compare gods through juxtaposition of their tools—apparently an ancient aspect of pagan religion—remained strong. Snorri's account of the creation of Gungnir, Draupnir, and Mjöllnir demonstrates this comparative trait: the gods themselves meet to judge which of their new imple-

ments holds the greatest value.[80] The same notion also underlies the battle of Þórr and Hrungnir as depicted in Þódólfr of Hvin's *Haustlöng* and recounted by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál*. Here, god and giant duel, each hurling his weapon of power at the other. Mjöllnir's victory is also Þórr's:

Sá hann [Hrungnir] þá Þór í ásmóði; fór han ákafliga ok reiddi hamarinn ok kastaði um langa leið at Hrungni. Hrungnir fœrir upp heinina báðum höndum ok kastar í mót; mœtir hon hamrinum á flugi, ok brotnar sundr heinin, fellr annarr hlutr á jörð, ok eru þar af orðin öll heinberg; annarr hlutr brast í höfði Þór, svá at hann fell fram á jörð; en hamarrinn Mjöllnir kom í mitt höfuð Hrungni ok lamði hausinn í smá mola, ok fell han fram yfir Þór, svá at fótr hans lá of háls Þór.[81]

Hrungnir saw Þórr in his godly rage; he strode out furiously and swung the hammer, throwing it from afar at Hrungnir. Hrungnir lifted his hone up with both hands and threw it in return. It hit the hammer in flight and burst into pieces: one part fell to earth and from that has come all flint; the other piece hit Þórr's head, so that he fell down. But the hammer Mjöllnir hit Hrungnir in the middle of the head and smashed his skull into little bits. And he fell over on top of Þórr, so that his feet lay on on Þórr's neck.

These crucial divine implements could also be loaned from one god to another or even from a god to human adherents. This tendency, too, probably reflects Christian influences, particularly when we see humans using surrogates of the divine implement in ritual actions of their own, much as Christians used surrogates of the Holy Cross in their acts of sanctification or prayer. In the Eddaic poem *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana önnor*, Óðinn lends his spear to Dagr so that he can avenge himself on Helgi.[82] Implements can be stolen (as with Þórr's hammer in *Þrymsqviða*) and loaned to other gods (as with Freyr's sword in *För Scirnis*).[83] Þórr's hammer seems to have a function in sanctifying both funeral pyres (as in Snorri's account of Baldr's death) and brides (as in *Þrymsqviða*) and both of these mythic acts appear paralleled in human rituals connected with burial and weddings.[84] Use of a surrogate implement probably underlies Steinþórr's casting of a spear over his enemy's forces in *Eyrbyggja saga* "as in the custom of old,"[85] apparently to designate the men as sacrifices to Óðinn. Finally, Snorri notes at the end of his *Gylfaginning*[86] that Þórr's sons Móði and Magni will recover Mjöllnir where it lies abandoned after the events of Ragnarök, the twilight of the gods. This image strongly resembles King Magnús the Good's recovery and later use of the ax Hel, which had belonged to his father King St. Óláfr.[87] In both cases, the transfer of the sacred weapon to the new generation marks a crucial continuity in power and sacral role within the world.

In some respects, all of these characteristics are shared by the medieval Cross. It too, could be lent and stolen, and its imagery indicated the deity associated with it. It was used ritually to sanctify as well as to protect. Many of these similarities in use may derive from pagan adaptions of Cross-related rituals. In other respects, however, the divine implements of pagan gods are nothing like the Cross. For while the Cross is both independent of Christ and fully conscious, Mjöllnir and Gungnir have no real power to stand on their own. Mjöllnir possesses the ability to withstand Þórr's mightiest blows but exercises no independent harmful effects on the giants who steal it in *Þrymsqviða*. Nor do we see depictions of either hammer or spear as conscious entities, with descriptions of their views during battle or afterward. They are mere vehicles for each god's triumphant power. Thus, it is unlikely that anyone ever wore a Þórr's-hammer amulet as a symbol of devotion to Mjöllnir; devotion to the Cross, on the other hand, pervaded Christian practice of the day.

Cnut the Great and Mixed Religious Symbolism

Attention to the Cross in its various forms can map the pathways of Nordic Christianization and give us a glimpse of pagan interpretations of this complex Christian symbol. With the rise of a Christian monarchy, however, new uses of the Cross developed, drawing on the noble associations that attended both the Cross of the Vision and the Cross of the Relic in European culture. In the statecraft of Cnut, Óláfr, Sigurðr, and Valdemar II, we find both the canny use of Cross symbolism and cogent reminders of the nearness of paganism in the last centuries of the Viking Age.

Given what we have seen regarding Cross devotion in the British Isles, it is natural that King Cnut the Great (c. 995–1035)—grandson of King Haraldr Bluetooth—would turn to the Cross as an attractive imagistic tool in ruling his newly consolidated realm of Denmark-England. Like Constantine, Charlemagne, and Oswald before him, Cnut used religious symbols advantageously. For his English and Anglo-Scandinavian Christian subjects, Cnut proved the model Christian; for his pagan troops and supporters, however, he remained an Óðinnic king.

Cnut, baptized sometime prior to his ascension to the English throne in 1016, used his religious affiliation to advantage in a country weary of pagan Viking invaders. The celebrated miniature portrait of Cnut and Emma in the *Liber vitae* of the New Minster at Westminster (Fig. 5) encapsulates Cnut's knowing usage of the Cross in his political career. The monarch is de-

Figure 5. King Cnut and Queen Emma at Westminster. *Liber vitae*, Westminster New Minster, England, eleventh century. The portrait was commissioned to celebrate Cnut's gift of a golden cross to the monastery and reflects the king's use of Christian symbolism in appealing to his British subjects. Photo by permission of The British Library.

picted beside a gold cross which he donated to the church circa 1031, his right hand outstretched to touch it. His left hand, however, still grasps his sword: he is a king of action and crusade, not a passive recluse. A hovering angel crowns Cnut, completing the visual invocation of the Constantinian formula: a divinely endorsed ruler standing beside his shining emblem of the Cross, at the very foot of an approving Christ in majesty.[88]

When combined with other acts of royal piety—generous endowments of churches and monasteries, and impressive acts of humility—Cnut could scarcely be mistaken for a ruthless pagan king. Often, his public acts of sanctity involved crosses or saints associated with the Cross or martyrdom. On one Easter, for instance, the monk Goscelin writes, Cnut refused his crown, preferring to place it on a crucifix in honor of the King of all and abandoning it there as a gift to the church. He commissioned reliquaries for the remains of St. Vincent at Abingdon and St. Cyriacus at Westminster Abbey and instigated the translation of relics of St. Ælfheah and St. Edmund of East Anglia. Cnut's association with these latter cults almost certainly had political purposes: both saints had been murdered by Viking invaders, and Cnut could find no better way of demonstrating his break with his pagan past.[89]

On the other hand, Cnut's Norse skalds rely on pagan metaphors and imagery in their poems of praise, many of which must have been performed in the hearing of the king's largely pagan forces. Hallvarðr Háreksblesi, for instance, asserts in his *Knútsdrápa*:

> Knútr verr jörð sem ítran
> alls dróttinn sal fjalla.
>
> Cnut protects the land as the
> Lord of all [does] the splendid
> hall of the mountains [= heaven].[90]

This skaldic image could be as easily interpreted in Óðinnic as Christian terms, with Jörð figuring as the sacred bride of the Scandinavian *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage). Óðinnic imagery was common in skaldic court poetry even after Christianization, and Hallvarðr employs kennings (skaldic metaphors) that link the king to both Freyr and Höðr as well.[91] The fact that many of Cnut's soldiers remained pagan or only nominally Christian gives added significance to these allusions. Cnut seems to have been willing to let his image cross religious lines, appealing to both his Christian subjects and pagan retainers in terms acceptable to them, uniting all in reverence for the divinely ordained warrior-monarch.

Fram, Fram, Kristsmenn, Krossmen, Konungsmenn!

Despite his Christian predecessors Hákon the Good and Óláfr Tryggvason it is King St. Óláfr (995–1030, r. 1015–30) who becomes known as the true Christianizer of Norway. By the close of Snorri's masterful *Óláfs saga Helga* (written c. 1230–35), we have an image of a steadfastly Christian King St. Óláfr, guided by God and firmly devoted to the Cross. Óláfr has white crosses painted on his soldiers' helmets and shields and marches beneath a banner of white marked with a cross of gold. Further, he instructs his men to invoke the Constantinian threesome—Christ, Cross, and King—in their battle cry, which they do to some confusion in the ensuing Battle of Stiklastaðir, Óláfr's last. The visionary king speaks to his soldiers:

> Vér skulum marka lið várt allt, gera herkumbl á hjálmum várum ok skjöldum, draga þar með bleiku á krossinn helga. En ef vér komum í orrostu, þá skulu vér hafa allir eitt orðtak: "Fram, fram, Kristsmenn, krossmen, konungsmenn!"[92]
>
> We shall mark all our forces, making a battle emblem on our helmets and shields, drawing with white paint the Holy Cross. And when we enter the field, we shall all have one battle cry: "Forward, forward, men of Christ, men of the Cross, men of the King!"

Here, then, it would seem we have the typical invocation of the Cross of the Vision, little altered from either Constantine or Oswald, even if the ruler now sets his forces against supporters of King Cnut, also a Christian monarch. As if to mitigate this lack of congruence, Snorri dwells on Óláfr's insistence that his men be baptized. The king turns away Gauka-Þórir and Afra-Fasti, for instance, until they consent to baptism, and likewise he turns away some five hundred other pagans who offer him help. He promises to punish pagan traitors more harshly than Christian ones, and he forgives the skald Sigvátr his absence since he has gone on pilgrimage to Rome. Finally, he converts Arnljótr to the faith just before the battle is to begin.[93]

Examining the saga as a whole, however, it becomes clear that this attention to the Cross and the role of the Christian leader gains prominence only as the text moves from being a saga based on accounts of King Óláfr's deeds and relations as a Viking leader to a legend designed to make the case for Óláfr's sainthood. For while daily Mass and the feast days of the Church are constant settings in the saga as a whole, and conversion by force a constant theme throughout, the Cross per se plays little role in the narrative until the later chapters of Óláfr's exile to Russia and attempted return to power in Norway. Prior to this point, Snorri describes Óláfr's banner and

manner in other terms: although Óláfr's men wear French helmets and shields adorned with the Cross, his standard is white with a dragon.[94] Such seems appropriate for a king described as faithful in principle to Christianity but ruled utterly by his desire for power and his harsh, impulsive nature.

Óláfr is not portrayed as a pagan in Christian clothing by any means, nor is he without his visions. These, however, like those of St. Ansgar, focus on other intercessors or images than the Cross. At the beginning of his career, for instance, Óláfr has a dream-vision of a man "marvelous but also fearsome" who counsels him not to sail to Palestine but to return to Norway where he will rule as king forever.[95] This interlocutor, possibly Christ himself but more likely a previous king of Norway, is paralleled at the close of Óláfr's career by a vision of Óláfr Tryggvason, who appears to assure Óláfr that God supports his quest to recapture Norway from King Cnut. Óláfr's right to regain his throne will be supported by God, since he has received it both by inheritance as well as by divine choice: "God will bear witness that the realm is yours."[96] In contrast to Constantine and Oswald, however, Óláfr sees no Cross with the man.

As Óláfr's fortunes begin to fall at the close of his career, he considers becoming a monk and making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. While visiting the Russian court, he heals an afflicted boy, a miracle which involves Cross imagery (see Chapter 5).[97] After massaging a boy's swollen boil for some time, the king places pieces of bread in the shape of a cross and feeds these to his patient. The boy's ailment soon disappears.

As Óláfr's sanctity rises in the narrative, so does his association with the Holy Cross, culminating in his strong invocation of the Cross in his final battle. Cross imagery in Snorri's text correlates directly with the intrusion of the European saint's legend as a narrative model and thematic reference point for the later chapters. Where Snorri is writing kingly saga, as in the bulk of his work, he depicts a warrior-king who uses religion as an effective tool for the management and promulgation of allegiance between himself and his subjects. But the Scandinavian St. Óláfr sees himself in direct concourse with his God, even if his cult became associated with a mediating Cross and other more standard images of sainthood through the writings of later hagiographers. It is Óláfr—not the Cross—whom subsequent Norwegian rulers and peasants invoked as their favored intercessor. Armed with his ax, Hel, as his saintly attribute or divine implement, this St. Óláfr becomes the friend to those who call his name, including his son King Magnús the Good, who helps establish the cult in the years immediately following his father's death.[98] Magnús builds Óláfr's shrine and has Sigvátr the Skald compose praise poetry in honor of his father's miracles.[99] And when it

comes time for him to have a vision intimating his own divine right to conquer and rule, Magnús sees his father, not the Cross.[100]

Sigurðr the Crusader

If King St. Óláfr's legend marks the true arrival of the Cross of the Vision in mainland Scandinavia, it is King Sigurðr the Crusader (1090–1130; r. 1103–30) whose legend brings the Cross of the Relic. Preserved at length in Snorri's *Magnússona saga* and in brief in Theodric's *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwegiensium* and the *Ágrip*, this account brings the Crusades and its intimate association with the Cross into the world of Scandinavian kings.[101] As an act of devotion or vehicle for political image-making, however, Sigurðr's receipt and translation of a fragment of the True Cross represents one of the greatest non-events of Scandinavian religious history. Whether out of pride, lack of piety, or difference in devotion, Sigurðr's failure with respect to the Church of the Cross tells us much about the ways in which the Cross was received and ultimately marginalized in conversion-era Scandinavia. Only in the sequel to the Sigurðr tale—Snorri's account of the destruction of the Church of the Cross at Konungahella and the rescue of the Relic from the invading pagan Wends (see below)—do the typical images of Cross devotion enter into the story.[102] This event, however, postdates Sigurðr's life by five years (1135) and only underscores the king's indifference.

Sigurðr and his men travel to Palestine in pursuit of glory. After a long series of battles and visits in England, Spain, and Sicily, Sigurðr and his men arrive in Jerusalem. There they are greeted by King Baldvini (Baldwin), who eventually entrusts the king with a fragment of the True Cross:

Baldvini konungr gerði veizlu fagra Sigurði konungi ok liði miklu með honum. Þá gaf Baldvini konungr Sigurði konungi marga helga dóma, ok þá var tekinn spánn af krossinum helga at ráði Baldvina konungs ok pátríarka, ok sóru þeir báðir at helgum dómi, at þetta tré var af inum helga krossi, er guð sjálfr var píndr á. Síðan var sá heilagr dómr gefinn Sigurði konungi, með því at hann sór áðr ok tólf menn aðrir með honum, at hann skyldi fremja kristni með öllum mætti sínum ok koma í land erkibyskupsstóli, ef hann mætti, ok at krossin skyldi þar vera, sem inn helgi Óláfr hvíldi, ok hann skyldi tíund fremja ok sjálfr gera.[103]

King Baldwin prepared a fine feast for King Sigurðr and many of his men. Then King Baldwin gave King Sigurðr many holy relics and a sliver was taken from the Holy Cross at the decision of King Baldwin and the patriarch, both of whom swore on that holy relic that this wood was from the very Holy Cross on which God had suffered. Then the holy relic was given to King Sigurðr provided that he, along with twelve of his men, swear that he would work with all his might to further Christianity and bring an archbishop's seat into his land if possible, and that the Cross would be placed where St. Óláfr rests, and that he would advance the cause of tithing and pay tithe himself.

The dream of a Norwegian archbishopric was not realized in Sigurðr's lifetime; rather, it took until 1152 for the English-born papal legate Nicholas Breakspear (later Pope Adrian IV) to establish the archbishopric of Nidaros/Trondheim, freeing the Norwegian church from the control of Lund and giving it authority over Iceland and Greenland.[104] Nor did Sigurðr make good on his promise to deposit the relic near the shrine of St. Óláfr. Rather, he started construction of the wooden Church of the Cross for it at Konungahella (Kungälv) around 1116, fully six years after his return from the Holy Land. Snorri writes reproachfully of the king's decision:

Kross inn helga lét hann vera í Konungahellu ok hélt í því eigi eiða sína, er hann sór á Jórsalalandi, en hann framði tíund ok flest allt annat, þat er hann hafði svarit. En þat er hann setti krossinn austr við landsenda, hugði hann þat vera mundu alls lands gæzlu, en þat varð at inu mesta óráði at setja þann helgan dóm svá mjök undir vald heiðinna manna, sem síðan reyndisk.[105]

He kept the Holy Cross at Konungahella and thus broke the oath which he had sworn in Palestine, but he did further the tithes and accomplished most of the other things to which he had sworn. By placing the Cross at the eastern edge of the realm, he thought it would protect the entire land, but it was most unwise to place the holy relic so nearly under the power of pagan men, as it turned out later.

The church was not completed until 1127, seventeen years after Sigurðr's return to Norway and three years before his death. Its eventual destruction and the near loss of the relic are recounted in stirring terms in Snorri's *Magnúss saga Blinda ok Haralds Gilla* (see below).

What kept Sigurðr from keeping his solemn oath of devotion to the Cross and what became of the relic during the many years before the completion of its church? It may be that Sigurðr kept the fragment as a personal talisman, much as other kings before him had done. It may also be that Sigurðr, who by 1116 had become embattled with his brother and co-regent, Eysteinn (1089–1123), wished to set up a separate sphere of sacred power for himself apart from his brother's seat of support at Trondheim. But Sigurðr does not mention receiving the Cross as a great accomplishment in the same way that he boasts of having defeated pagans, swum the Jordan, and tied willow

branches along its shores in his altercation with his brother over their relative merits.[106] Thus it is difficult to read his acts as motivated by any fervent devotion, despite the best efforts of Baldwin and the patriarch to inspire one in him. Sigurðr is a soldier, not a saint. The hoped-for devotion to the Cross does little to displace or compete with the already thriving cult of St. Óláfr.

Saving the Cross and Other Crusader Tales

Whatever the realities of the devotional experiences of Scandinavian monarchs and peasants during eleventh and twelfth centuries, the saga texts of the thirteenth century display all the narrative images of Christian devotion and heroism typical of continental literature of their era. In the exciting tale of the pagan Wendish sack of Konungahella in *Magnúss saga Blinda ok Haralds Gilla*, we see a stalwart cleric's defense of the relic of the Cross along with miraculous signs of its power.[107] In accounts of the Danish King Valdemar II Sejr's crusade against the pagan Estonians, Constantine's grand vision becomes recapitulated yet again in the legend of the cross-emblazoned Danish flag. These and other narrative accounts of the Cross reflect the full embrace of Cross symbolism in the region as a product of both religious and cultural adjustment.

Snorri's rendering of the sack of Konungahella follows the lines of typical Crusader tales. The settlement's impending doom is signaled ahead of time by an outbreak of disease and a run of ill fortune, leading many to abandon the city altogether.[108] Then the Wendish King Réttiburr (Ratibor of Pommern, Prussia) arrives with his pagan forces, storming the town and precipitating a fierce battle. Snorri probably knew of the battle through the reminiscences of his foster father, Jón Loftsson (d. 1197), who had been fostered himself at Konungahella and was eleven years old at the time of the siege. In the account, a priest named Andréás plays a notable part in the events of the day, blessing a flaming arrow that kills one of the enemy's otherwise invincible magic soldiers. As the Wends eventually win the victory, however, Andréás manages to save the relic of the Cross from burning and desecration, bearing it in its reliquary into bondage:

Þá fóru þeir Andréás prestr á konungsskipit ok með krossinn helga. Þá kom ótti yfir heiðingja af þeiri bending, er yfir konungsskipit kom hiti svá mikill, at allir þeir þóttusk nær brenna. Konungr bað túlkinn spyrja prest, hví svá varð. Hann sagði, at almáttigr guð, sá er kristnir menn trúðu á, sendi þeim mark reiði sinnar, er þeir dirfðusk þess at hafa með höndum hans píslarmark, þeir er eigi vilja trúa á skapara sinn. "Ok svá mikill kraptr fylgir krossinum, at opt hafa orðit fyrr þvílíkar jartegnir yfir heiðnum mönnum, þá er þeir höfðu hann með höndum, ok sumar enn berari." . . . Síðan fór Andréás prestr með krossinn um nóttinna til Sólbjarga, ok var bæði hregg ok rota. Andréás flutti krossinn til góðrar varðveizlu.[109]

Then Andréás the priest and the others went aboard the king's ship with the Holy Cross. The pagans were seized with fear of them because so great a heat came over the king's ship that they thought it near burning. The king commanded the interpreter to ask the priest why this had happened. He said that Almighty God, in whom the Christians believe, had sent them this sign of his anger at those who refused to believe in their maker and yet would dare hold in their hands the sign of his crucifixion. "And so much power is connected with the Cross, that often signs such as this have appeared to pagan men who have handled it—and some signs even clearer." . . . Then Andréás the priest journeyed by night to Sólbjargir [a town to the north of Konungahella] amid both wind and rain. Andréás transported the Cross to a place of safety.

Andréás is portrayed as a fearless servant of the Cross, armed with the miraculous assistance of God. In the related account in *Ágrip*, the priest proposes to bring the relic to the shrine of St. Óláfr and the Icelandic Annals record its arrival in Nidaros in 1234 (a century later).[110] It is possible that the ornate Scandinavian reliquary currently housed at the Kammin Cathedral in Pomerania (modern Kamień Pomorski, Poland) represents the original reliquary of Sigurðr's relic of the Cross.[111] Ratibor later converted to Christianity.

While the tale of the pagan sack of Konungahella recapitulates continental accounts of the Persian theft of the Cross in 614, the miraculous vision of the Cross in the Danish crusades against the Estonians recapitulates the Constantinian-Oswaldian sacred vision. In 1219, the Danish King Valdemar II Sejr ("The Victorious," 1170–1241), fighting the pagan Estonians for control of the eastern Baltic coast, was said to have received the red-and-white cross-shaped Danish flag (the *Dannebrog*) as it fluttered down from heaven just before battle. Held aloft during fighting by Valdemar's archbishop Andreas Sunesen, the miraculous emblem of God's favor assured the Danes' triumph over their pagan opponents.[112] Narratives of this type reflect the full assimilation of the Cross as emblem and object of devotion in Nordic Christianity.

Njáls saga reflects this assimilation in its shorthand use of Cross imagery as a device for characterization. Once Christianity has arrived in the narrative (midway through the saga), good characters treat crosses well; evil characters desecrate them. When the villainous Mörðr Valgarðsson returns to Iceland to find the land converted, he attacks his father's crosses to test the

new religion. As a result, Mörðr's father soon sickens and dies. When the impetuous but heroic Skarp-Heðinn Njálsson is found dead amid the ashes of his father's estate, he is seen to have burned crosses into his chest, a final act of allegiance to the new faith at the moment of his death.[113]

By the end of the thirteenth century, the Holy Cross had become a normal part of Nordic Christianity, following the same lines and tendencies found in Europe as a whole. A relic of the Cross made its way to Skálholt, Iceland, by 1242,[114] and Hattula Church in Finland became a pilgrimage center for devotees of the Cross during the High Middle Ages.[115] Further fragments arrived in the centuries which followed leading up to the Reformation. Homilies regarding the Cross are found in the Icelandic Homily Book as well as the Old Norwegian Homily Book, and throughout the North, the various feast days of the Cross were honored as holy days of obligation.[116] Never, however, did such devotion to the Cross overshadow pilgrimage and prayer directed toward favored local saints.

The Cross, the most Christian of symbols, became enmeshed in the North in a complex web of interreligious, intercultural exchange so deep-seated and far-ranging that neither pagan nor Christian would have found it easy to disentangle its many strands. An image of torture and sorrow among the early Christians, it became a banner of both heavenly and earthly dominion as well as a material repository of Christ's healing powers. Even tracing its lines in the air could hinder evil. In art, it found expression in iron and silver pendants and in high crosses of wood and stone, the latter particularly in the British Isles and Atlantic Scandinavia.

As the Cross spread across Scandinavia along with the new faith, it became adapted to the social and artistic norms of the region, losing much of its essence as a conscious intercessor and becoming more a simple badge of religious adherence. Its similarity to the divine implements of Scandinavian mythology may have contributed to this decline as it led to a rise in conventionalized Þórr's-hammer amulets and depictions in response. In the long run, when pitted against human intercessors, the Cross failed to inspire Scandinavians as it had the Irish and Anglo-Saxons. While pilgrims flocked to the shrine of an ax-wielding but sainted warrior-king, the Church of the Cross remained unbuilt. And while the Cross graced the banners of Óláfr and Valdemar II, they seem to have taken it as a sign of God's favor rather than as an intercessor in itself. Yet throughout this long history, the Cross served a central role, contributing in its own way to the conversion and redemption of the pagan North. The signs of its fortunes in the Viking-Age North reveal the slow process by which the region ultimately changed its faith.

EIGHT

Achieving Faith

Christian Themes and Pagan Functions