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OLAV DEN HELIGE
I MEDELTIDA BILDKONST

Legendmotiv och attribut

KUNGL. VITTERHETS HISTORIE OCH ANTIKVITETS AKADEMIEN
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Abstract

This iconographical study includes all pictorial narratives from the legend of the Martyr King Saint Olav and a variety of samples of his symbolic attributes in representational images. Olav II Haraldsson was king of Norway 1015–1030. After his martyrdom at the Battle of Stiklestad on July 29th 1030 and enshrinement on August 3rd 1031 in Trondheim, the tomb shrine was translated to Nidaros Cathedral, a Nordic main centre of pilgrimage. Many churches in Scandinavia are dedicated to Saint Olav and the images are often placed as triumphal motifs at the altar of the patron saint, "the pillar of the church", at the southern part of the triumphal arch in the nave.

The catalogue and indexes contain around 500 works of medieval art in Scandinavian and other European countries, from Romanesque and Gothic to Early Renaissance, mostly from parish churches, such as murals, shrines and altarpieces with panel paintings and wooden sculptures, but also as illuminations in liturgical books and law codes or seals and stone sculptures. The pictorial narratives contain ten hagiographical events from the Vita et Miracula of Saint Olav, his conversion, baptism, voyage, arrival and coronation, vision of paradise, death at the Battle of Stiklestad and crowning as martyr, enshrinement and miracles. Both narrative and symbolic images have been compared with corresponding episodes and themes about Saint Olav in medieval texts from the period 1040–1540, liturgical poems, legends and homilies or chronicles, sagas and ballads, both in Latin and in vernacular languages.

The general comparative analyses show a close relation between art and liturgy during the Feast of Saint Olav, from the vigilis on July 28th to the actio on August 5th, in repertoires of both the Divine Office and Mass, especially the themes of voyage and battle. Modeller after biblical kings, prophets, wise teachers and apostles, fulfilling the prophecy of initiaatis Christi, the image of Saint Olav embodied his divine role as intercessor for the congregation.

Key words: Iconography, Martyr, King, Saint Olav, Shrine, Nidaros Cathedral, Liturgy, Legend, Saga, Pictorial narrative, Prayer, Baptism, Sailing, Dream vision, Battle, Coronation, Attribute, Book illumination, Mural, Altarpiece, Panel painting, Wooden sculpture.

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St. Olav in Byzantine attire with cross-sceptre and shield. At his feet a donatrix. Column painting, Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem (Palestine/Israel). c 1160. Copy 1:1 in gouache, Taddeus Rychter c 1930.
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Summary

In Norway at the end of the 11th century, the foundations were laid in Trondheim for the Nidaros Cathedral, one of the largest in Scandinavia, erected on the site of the grave of St. Olav. The church, in the English Norman style, was dedicated to the glory of Christ and it was finally completed as a Gothic cathedral in the 14th century. King Olav II Haraldsson, king of Norway from 1015–1030 had been canonised in the year following his martyrdom at the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030, and the tomb shrine containing his remains in the Nidaros Cathedral was to be the principal object of pilgrimage in Scandinavia during the Middle Ages. The cult of St. Olav was widespread and influential throughout not only Scandinavia but in many other countries in northern Europe as well, mainly in the British Isles, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland and the Baltic countries. Although the tomb shrine containing his remains has unfortunately not been preserved, the history of Olav, the saintly king, is proclaimed by many medieval sources, by traces of his cult, by objects such as chronicles, sagas and legends in Latin or the vernacular languages, and by works of art in many different forms, of which a large number have been preserved thanks to the work of antiquaries. Ever since the Middle Ages, St. Olav has served as a unifying symbol for Norway's independence, and in the rest of Scandinavia his cult has survived the Reformation in the form of popular tradition. In many countries, St. Olav has been the object of extensive scholarly study in a number of disciplines, including history, comparative literature, linguistics, theology, liturgical and ecclesiastical history, musicology and ethnology, in addition to the history of art, the field with which this study is concerned. For this reason, only a limited number of the scholarly works can be referred to in my thesis Olav den helige i medeltida bildkonst. Legendmotiv och attribut. (St. Olav in Medieval Pictorial Art. Narrative Motifs and Attributes.)

In this thesis on St. Olav in medieval pictorial art, my approach is that of an art historian and the main focus is on iconographic features, which means that issues relating to the style and form of a work of art and to the workshops and the individual artists are subordinate to studies of the motifs. The threefold aim of the thesis is achieved in full. To begin with, it provides an overall description of every work of art in sculptural or pictorial form that includes motifs from the narrative of the legend and of a large number of representational images, mainly sculptures, with attributes linked to these motifs. Secondly, it presents a comparative analysis of ten principal motifs in pictures narrating the legend and relates them to corresponding themes in a large number of medieval texts dealing with Olav, mainly liturgical texts, legends or sermons, but also sagas and chronicles. The symbolic significance of the attributes is also analysed in connection with these texts. And thirdly, it discusses the function of images of St. Olav and a number of tendencies, mainly connected with the liturgical role of the altars dedicated to the saint, the placing of the images in the interiors of the churches, and their relationship to other series of images within a church and to the various patrons, agents and artists.

After the Archbishopric of Nidaros had been established in Norway in the middle of the 12th century, Archbishop Eystein Erlendsson dedicated an altar to St. Olav in a chapel in the southern transept of the Cathedral, a position that was to be imitated by many altars dedicated to the saint in other churches. At the same time, an image of St. Olav was painted on one of the pillars in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the earliest iconographic representation of St. Olav. In order to celebrate the Feast of St. Olav from July 29th to August 5th—a commemoration of the martyrdom of the saintly king at the Battle of Stiklestad on July 29th 1030 and his enshrinement on August 3rd of the following year—a St. Olav liturgy was devised at the end of 12th century using songs and legends, which was to serve as a pattern elsewhere. Pictorial representations were not to become an important aspect of the cult until the period in which the cathedral chapter underwent cultural expansion and the Gothic style was introduced into Scandinavian art. The archetypal image of the martyred king that found its final form in the ecclesiastical cult pictures produced during the 13th century was to survive, with a few exceptions, not only into the late Middle Ages but also during the

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post-Reformation period up until the present. Within works of most categories, considerably more medieval images of St. Olav have been preserved than of any other Scandinavian saint. Although I have had to make a selection of representative images of the saint, the works illustrating the legend and its attributes dealt with in this thesis can serve as typical examples of other images of St. Olav, as is also the case with the texts selected.

The iconographic description and interpretation of motifs from the legend and attributes in medieval images of St. Olav, with examples taken both from narrative pictures and representational pictures within art and types of image of varying kinds from the 12th century to the Reformation, show that in the countries studied there was a coherent medieval iconography for the saint. It has been possible to explain the individual works of art, the ten main motifs from the legend, and the relationship of the attributes to the whole and to each other by means of an overarching analysis, not only in terms of iconography, symbolism and their function within the cult, but also, to some extent, style as well. The results of this study can therefore be applied to the entire iconography of St. Olav and his cult. In this way, this thesis provides an overview of the main iconographic features linked with St. Olav. Central to this study are the St. Olav shrines, altarpieces from altars dedicated to the Saint, that have survived in various churches, of which there are about 30, often sited by the chancel arch. These are supplemented by the series of pictures with motifs from the legend that decorate the walls and vault close to St. Olav’s altar. On the basis of the iconographic coherence of the sculptures in the central panels of these shrines, the corpus, and the paintings or reliefs on their wings, supplemented by associated wall-paintings and other forms of images of the saint intended for the choirs or the naves, it is possible to form an impression of the extent of the medieval iconography of St. Olav, its significance and its function. Older preserved fragments of wings with scenes in relief allow the conclusion that the free-standing sculptures with hollowed backs of the enthroned or standing king found today once formed part of the central panel of similar types of altarpieces.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that during the Middle Ages there existed considerably more complete altarpieces with wings than today; indeed there may have been hundreds of such works, probably containing images narrating the legend on their interiors and/or depictions of the martyrdom of the outside. It is also likely that there were a larger number of representations of Olav in other forms of medieval pictorial art than today. The works that have survived are often faded, fragmentary or heavily restored, but those assembled for this thesis and the overall analysis can yield insight into the iconographic, liturgical and aesthetic principles that imbued the ones that have been lost as well. One can conclude that representations of Olav in the Scandinavian countries form one of the most widespread and significant saintly images in medieval ecclesiastical art. My own analysis of stylistic features and those of other scholars have revealed that these images of Olav have certain Scandinavian characteristics, but that, on the whole, they follow the general medieval evolution of art from the Romanesque period to the late Gothic and early Renaissance. One distinguishing feature of Scandinavian art is the use of archaic stylistic features, which at times can be difficult to explain, in various forms of artistic representation of both figures and objects, such as garments and ships.

When it came to choosing what methodology to adopt, it was clear that those applied in previous studies, based mainly on stylistic issues, historical texts and post-Reformation literature, had in many cases been unproductive. Creating links with pagan Norse concepts, medieval oral and secular traditions or with more recent folk customs has given rise to misleading interpretations. In my study, therefore, I have used additional material that is of greater relevance for the interpretation of ecclesiastical images of Olav—a comprehensive and representative selection of medieval Latin textual sources, mainly from Nidaros Cathedral’s Olav liturgy. My comparative analysis of pictorial representations on the basis of these textual sources has yielded overwhelmingly positive results. Iconographic interpretation of the representations in several stages has been applied parallel to the interpretations of the medieval texts based primarily on two levels of meaning, sensus literalis and sensus spiritualis, both where the sagas and the liturgy are concerned. Thanks to a new methodological synthesis involving interpreting both images and texts on the basis of various liturgical events during the Feast of St. Olav, from vespers for the vigil on July 28th to its octave on August 5th, it has been possible to explain several unresolved issues. This methodological synthesis has not only explained the liturgical function of the images within the churches and their interaction with other forms of art, but has also helped to clarify the chronological development of the iconography of St. Olav and its topographical dissemination. Of the iconographic material that has been preserved, profane images, such as illustrations in law-books and Olav Sagas, constitute a larger group in the west of Scandinavia than in the east, where the predominant number of representations of St. Olav are ecclesiastical and liturgical. To some extent this reflects the development of the legend in literary form, with the western areas characterised by courtly saga traditions, while in the east the Latin tradition prevailed. It must, however, be assumed that a large proportion of Norway's liturgical im-
ages of St. Olav failed to survive the Reformation and ensuing periods.

One outcome of the overall interpretation and its new methodological synthesis is that some previously proposed interpretations must be reconsidered. The images of St. Olav are not merely decorative embellishments or expressions of royal might. Nor do they merely represent indirect stylistic features influenced by Romanesque or Gothic pattern-books or originals. The images narrating the legend should not be characterised as historical illustrations intended to depict actual historical events or anecdotes about some hero from a historic kingly saga. In other words, it is pointless to seek a portrait of the historical 11th century King Olaf II Haraldsson among the Gothic sculptures of St. Olav. The belief that St. Olav should be a "Christian disguise" for a mystical successor to Thor, one of the gods in the pagan Norse pantheon, can be unambiguously rejected, as there is no scholarly basis for this romantic 'Gothic' fabrication. This means that there is no connection between Thor's hammer and the axe carried by St. Olav in Christian art. Earlier interpretations that focus on the ballads about St. Olav's nautical feats and incorrectly ascribed provenance to late medieval legends with texts including this theme have led to the belief that the pictures of sailing ships in the iconography of St. Olav were a form of light entertainment linked mainly with dance tunes and the amusing yarns of members of the Seamen's Guild.

Inadequate analysis of the reliability of the historical fabrications of Vedel, who claimed to have recorded an existing ballad in the 1590s, has meant that the brother named in the text, "Harald", has been linked erroneously with an abistorical, "pagan" caricature of King Olav's half-brother Harald (Hardrada) Sigurdsson. In fact, Harald was a Christian, according to historical sources, and as a 15-year-old he fought alongside his brother in his fateful battle at Stiklestad in 1030. In his Heimskringla, Snorre Sturlasson describes how King Harald continued his brother's ecclesiastical policies and developed the cult of St. Olav, but he also emphasises the severity of the rule of this belligerent Viking. Adam of Bremen, on the other hand, describes Harald as a "godless" ruler who showed the Pope little respect. The historical King Harald (Hardrada) Sigurdsson lacks any link, in either a positive or a negative meaning, with the iconography of sculptural or painted images of St. Olav. For instance, it is impossible to identify the prone figure in the sculptures, the small figure of a warrior that St. Olav is trampling on, with a "pagan" caricature of Harald Sigurdsson or any of King Olav's assassins at the Battle of Stiklestad.

Nor is the "sailing competition" described in late medieval legends a historical anecdote about 11th century kings, but a symbolic and moral use of the theme of "the righteous and the unrighteous brother" that derives from the Iustum deducit Bible text used in the liturgy of the Mass for St. Olav (see below). A methodological approach that focuses on historical saga traditions is inadequate for research into the iconography of St. Olav in ecclesiastical art, and Heimskringla only rarely provides an appropriate basis for interpretation. Direct links with the Olav Saga, including his encounter with the sea-ogre and his martyrdom, for instance, can be seen in only a small group of works of art, found mainly in the areas in which the saga was most widespread in the 14th century—Norway and Iceland together with Denmark. The Legendary Saga has proved to be a text that provides more relevant material for comparison than Snorre's Olav Sagas.

The texts that are closest to the ecclesiastical images of St. Olav are in Latin—biblical texts, hymns and the texts and legends from the St. Olav liturgy. Many liturgical themes in the oldest of the St. Olav liturgies in the Leaffric Collector from England around 1050 were retained in the Nidaros liturgy, Onus Nidrevisitis, which provided a model for the cult in other dioceses. Just as the ten main narrative motifs in the iconography of St. Olav follow an international selection of standard hagiographic motifs in an illustrated saintly legend, a pictorial Vita, so the liturgy for the feast of St. Olav is based on an established form for the liturgy of a feast in the Catholic church, both where the officium proprium and the missa propria are concerned. The songs and readings from the legend at the canonical hours form a frame for the high Mass on St. Olav's Day on July 29th, the high point of the feast, when all the altarpieces, including the one behind the altar dedicated to St. Olav, are opened wide to reveal their entire wealth of colours, shapes and gleaming gold. In the biblical texts and hymns for the office and the mass, David, Solomon and Christ figure as examples for St. Olav and for the congregation. The high point of the Mass for St. Olav consists of the sequence Lux ille altissim, which epitomises the life of the saint, his martyrdom and miracles in a poetic synthesis similar to that found in pictorial representations. The Biblical texts Iustum deducit and Certamen forte from the Wisdom of Solomon (Apocr. Chapt. 10) in the mass and the texts for the lessons deal with the theme of voyage and "the righteous and unrighteous brother", and are imbued with metaphors for wisdom. The reading from the legend Passio Olavi for the Office of St. Olav lacks this voyage theme, but emphasizes the symbolism of the wind. Several of the themes in the St. Olav liturgy can be found in Commune sanctorum and are used for other feasts, for the Crown of Thorns, for instance. The Nidaros diocese almost certainly exercised a powerful influence on St. Olav liturgies in other dioceses, not only on the reading from the legend that normally

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formed part of the office but also on the themes for lessons such as the voyage themes, the coronation and the parallel of the martyrdom with Christ’s passion. The texts of the late medieval legends from Ribe, Leuven and Liebeck were probably of Norwegian origin.

This study confirms my hypothesis that the iconography of St. Olav first and foremost served a sacrificial function, and is closely linked with the other series of pictures in the interiors of churches and practical liturgical concerns together with the Bible and the doctrine of the Church. A detailed analytical comparison of the images with all of the texts involved in the eight days of the Feast of St. Olav from July 28th until August 5th shows that all the individual motifs in each work of art have direct counterparts in some element of the St. Olav liturgy, both the canonical hours and the masses celebrated during the eight days of the feast and also during other feasts during the ecclesiastical year. Unlike the liturgical texts that were held only on specific occasions, the pictorial representations were visible for longer periods of time, in particular the wall-paintings which were always on view to anyone visiting the church. The function of the images of St. Olav in the interiors of churches were linked not only to his cult and feast, but can also be considered in relation to the other sequences of pictures and liturgies, the Bible and doctrinal issues. The placing of the images of St. Olav at the altar dedicated to him to complement the images of the Blessed Virgin Mary, often close to the high altar or the figure of Christ on the chancel arch, allowed liturgical interaction between the holy figures during the Feast of St. Olav.

In their formal construction, the colours, shapes and figures, both carved and painted, of the St. Olav shrines were extremely well adapted to their liturgical function in the canonical hours and the mass and for private meditation at other times. The division of the wings into pictorial scenes of various episodes accords in many details with the composition and reading of the lessons from the Office for St. Olav which involved descriptions of events from the Latin version of the legend. The illustrations also follow the themes of the texts sung during the canonical hours of the first day of the Feast, both the psalms, antiphons, responsories, hymns and sequences. The readings from the life and martyrdom of the king that formed part of the vigil foretold the Mass for St. Olav’s day, and in the following vespers the triumph of the saint and the miracle of the blood is praised. The variation in the tense used during the Office is matched in the different types of image on the St. Olav shrine. The representational pictures on the exterior emphasise the saint’s constant presence within the church as its patron saint, its “owner”. The colourful and populous scenes from the saint’s legend on the wings recreate events in the past, an Ancient Scandinavia seen through the perspective of the Old Testament. The scenes on the wings are chosen from the ten principal motifs in the iconography of St. Olav. The early motifs are his conversion, baptism, voyage, arrival and landing. After the sermon, the coronation, the lawmaking, follow the ride to Stiklestad and his dream vision of being summoned by God. The consummation is provided by the combat, his death, elevation into heaven and crowning as a martyr. Finally there are depictions of his enshrinement and the miracles after his death.

The pictorial scenes of the legend can be read from several different time perspectives and with several levels of meaning simultaneously. An archaic mixture of detail with regard to garments and objects can imply that the events are occurring in the past, while the depiction of other objects in contemporary form suggests that they are taking place in the period in which the artist is creating them, as in details of armour. Ecclesiastical objects represented in contemporary form, such as altars, prayer-stools, rosaries, or pulpits, are thus enabled to play their part in the spiritual instruction of the parishioners. The golden sculpture in the middle of the central panel is a manifestation of the future, the destined goal of the saint’s life. The gold emphasises the mysterious eternity of the heaven, aevum, in which the saint dwells. The readings from the canonical hours before and after the mass can to some extent be compared to the way in which the wings frame the central image of the altarpiece or also to an altar frontal or a book. Similarly, the stichomythic and forward-looking function of the antiphons and responses included in the office provide a possibility for varying and reciprocal readings of all the depictions on the altarpiece or altar frontal. While they can be read as a sequence, they can at the same time be read forwards towards the central representation or backwards and forwards from one scene to another on the wings.

The narrative sequences of pictures in the murals with their representation of the motif of the voyage, the coronation, the dream and the martyrdom were painted on the southern wall of the nave, in the vaulting or on the chancel arch. They are sometimes grouped around a window. A reciprocal reading can also be applied to these sequences of pictures, even though there is often no central image. The paintings in the nave are principally linked to the corresponding theme in the central message of the Mass for St. Olav. The theme of voyage was to have its greatest impact in late medieval ecclesiastical art in the areas round Lake Mälaren in central Sweden, above all in the paintings by Albertus Pictor of a nautical and symbolic “sailing race”. When a righteous man is persecuted in his journey through life by an unrighteous brother, Instum deduxit tells us that the Blessed St. Olav will come to as-
sist him in his navigation as the Pilot of Wisdom or God's Oarsman. The widespread distribution of this pictorial voyage motif in the area around Lake Mälaren and in Finland is linked with the use of the same themes in the texts of many sermons, and they also circulated widely from mouth to mouth in the vernacular language of the region.

This motif of the Christian hero can be found in more works of art than any of the other St. Olav motifs, probably because the artistic representation of the figures and objects in images of every kind could satisfy the most demanding requirements of the expressiveness, action, excitement and conflict needed if the message was to arouse interest. By virtue of their size, clarity and the stylistic simplicity of the figures, colours and draughtsmanship, the pictures cogently convey the message of the Mass for St. Olav to the congregation. The objects and figures are portrayed realistically, to create the illusion that the events are taking place in the here and now, within the interior of the church itself. The words are manifest in the pictures. The liturgical interaction of text and image can strengthen the desire of those who contemplate them to involve themselves in the pictorial narrative and identify with the protagonist in the drama. This pictorial sermon substantiates the possibility of invoking the earthly presence of the saint through prayer, and the representations of the miraculous voyage are a convincing illustration of the message of the Church and the import of the Mass for St. Olav. Despite the seamanship of his crew and excellence of his vessel's fittings, without the assistance of St. Olav no seafarer can contend with malicious attacks and dangers. In order to chart a safe course through life both society and each individual needs practical, spiritual guidance, which, it is implied, the Church will provide.

Some of St. Olav's particular attributes, such as the axe, sword, spear and bow and arrows or shield, found in narrative pictures, can in many cases be linked to the descriptions found in the sagas. However, where St. Olav's missionary combats and his martyrdom at the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030 are concerned, according to the Latin texts of the Office for St. Olav all of his weapons are described as "spiritual weapons". St. Olav's attributes in the representational pictures are mainly symbolic in character and can be explained in terms of the king's role as a Christian hero and heavenly ruler, and above all as the congregation's intercessor before God. The halo indicates that the king is a saint. His crown, sceptre, axe and orb bespeak his elevated spiritual rank. The book, the cross and chalice or rosary and pilgrim's bonnet signify his devout piety. The book and the chalice denote primarily the role that St. Olav played as the first ecclesiastical legislator in Scandinavia and the law he had promulgated at the Ting at Moser in 1024, St. Olav's Law. His weapons, armament and his helmet reveal his spiritual heroism in the struggle for the Christian faith at the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030. The prone figure being trampled beneath the feet of the king, a warrior, jester, king or dragon, is a symbolic attribute. It belongs to the same dimension of time as the sculptures in the central panels of some of the St. Olav altarpieces or the images of St. Olav in the others, which is the eternity of the blessed, avrum, and to the future, the optimistic faith in the future of the prayerful. In this way a vision is communicated of what it is to come, which the faithful can avail themselves of as either a threatening or a supportive force.

The prone figure at the feet of the king also belongs to the prophesied day of reckoning, according to the descriptions of Biblical prophets of future punishment and terrors. It represents the Antichrist in different guises, the very anticipation of the figure of the saint. The Antichrist of the Apocalypse can appear in human form as a warrior or a false prophet, a mocking godless fool and jester, and also as a hostile king in armour, an apeator. At the beginning of the 15th century, in altarpieces in Germany and Southern Scandinavia the prone figure at the feet of St. Olav becomes a hellish monster, a half-zoomorphic mixture of a reptile with the head of a man, a serpent or a dragon with the head of a king. This type of figure is combined with representations of St. Olav in a new guise, an apocalyptic knight in armour with a halberd. The dragon theme can be traced back to the oldest of the St. Olav liturgies, from 11th-century England, in which St. Olav's martyrdom is described as a triumphant victory over Leviathan, the ancient serpent or Satan, a theme taken from the Book of Psalms and Revelations. The dragon motive recurs in Isaiah, as a prophetic statement on the fall of Babel. A defeated Antichrist at the feet of the king was a confirmation of the Christian doctrine, the power of the Church and ultimate victory by means, for instance, of legal statute.

The choice of patterns for the iconography of St. Olav has been governed by a spiritual dimension of meaning, sensus spiritualis, in order to exemplify the didactic and liturgical function of the images and to influence those who saw them, of whom many were unable to read or write. In both the liturgy and pictorial representations relating to St. Olav, patterns and examples have been taken from texts and images linked to the kings in the Old Testament, David and Solomon, the harbingers of Christ, the King of Kings in the New Testament. St. Olav's role as a "new David" or "new Solomon" of the North presents him as an Old Norse counterpart to the Bible's kings and prophets, a righteous, wise and Christian ruler who defeats injustice and folly in the dark, cold, ungodly tracts of Scandinavia. A particularly important model for

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both the St. Olav liturgy and the iconography of the saint can be found in the Biblical prophet and wise teacher, Jesus ben Sirach. His is the only figure surmounted by a halo in the northern porch of the Cathedral at Chartres, where he stands with Solomon in the porch that illustrates the virtues of divine justice. In its earlier form, the cult of St. Olav incorporated not only Instinct deditis metaphors of the boat journey and the theme of “the righteous and unrighteous brother” from the texts connected with the Wisdom of Solomon and his heir Jesus ben Sirach as its liturgical model, but also symbolism concerning the wind in Parsio Olavi. This represented St. Olav as coming with the southerly wind that brings warmth to the people of Scandinavia, renders their hearts susceptible to the Christian faith and redeems them from sin.

The altar dedicated to St. Olav was normally placed on the southern side of the chancel or at the southern foot of the chancel arch, where the altar dedicated to the patron saint normally stands. The sculpture of the blessed king and martyr, enthroned or standing on the shrine therefore played a number of roles for the congregation: as the church’s patron saint, owner and guardian and, above all, as an intercessor. According to the St. Olav sermons, he was to act as an example of morality and wisdom and provide spiritual support for the congregation, rex sapienti status quartum populi et. The images of St. Olav, and of his life and miracles, functioned as corporeal confirmation of the faith and the doctrine of the Church, as improving exempla. The colourful, gilt images were an unambiguous representation of his power and his role as a heavenly ruler, and he was also endowed with heavenly powers as a co-judge, prophet and preacher. The saintly king and the prince stood at his feet therefore betoken the victory of spiritual over secular power, of order over disorder, peace over conflict and the triumph of justice over injustice.

The positioning of the representative images of St. Olav in church interiors and their association with the other images in the church provides information about the import of the images of the saint. The representative images of St. Olav in the chancel, nave and the porches epitomise the Church and the priesthood, as do the images on the liturgical vessels. The images of St. Olav in prayer books, law books, seals, pilgrim’s badges, or jewellery may, on the other hand, express individual interests of different kinds, mainly those of ecclesiastical potentates but also of the secular nobility. Representative images of St. Olav were however seen mainly to embody a heavenly power that transcended earthly rank. The aesthetic expression of the sculpture on St. Olav’s altar meant that any member of the congregation who addressed it with supplications for the blessed king’s immediate and direct aid would find confirmation of his faith that the saint was eternally present in heaven, ready to aid by interceding with God. The sculpture also expressed to the faithful the possibility that the saintly king could return to reveal himself on earth. During the period of waiting for this event, each annual Feast was celebrated as a “rehearsal” so that the congregation would be ready on the day of the martyr’s reappearance.

St. Olav the martyr is an ideal king created by the Church in order to function with optimal prophetic force within a well-managed cult, and therefore the iconography of St. Olav has evolved mainly on the Church’s initiative. Powerful figures within the Archbishopric of Nidaros and other dioceses, archbishops and bishops or members of the cathedral chapter have had a great say in the direction and the development of both liturgy and the art linked to the cult of St. Olav. Portraits of patrons that have been preserved show, however, that many different social groups were extremely interested in the cult and its images. Identifiable “portraits” depict patrons as the worshippers or assistants of the saintly king. The painting on the pillar in Bethlehem was most probably donated around 1160–70 by Kristin Sigurdssdotter, daughter of the King of Norway, and she is also portrayed in the depiction of the donatism of the painting. Most images of St. Olav are to be found in parish churches in the countryside and in the towns, with fewer preserved in the chancies and royal chapels of the cathedral cities. Secular potentates such as kings and queens, merchants and landowners have placed commissions for images of St. Olav, but they came primarily from the Church, from bishops, cathedral chapter, parish priests and entire congregations. It is possible to conclude that most images of St. Olav, both paintings and sculptures were the result of collaboration between various groups with interest in their church—parish commissions, as it were, in which the leading roles were unquestionably played by the priest and, not least, the artist and the workshop.

Yran hör till Sankt Olavs särskilda kännetecken, liksom den underliggare han trampar på. Författaren har jämfört bilderna med motsvarande teman om Olav den helige i medeltida texter såväl på latin som inhemska språk. Den ikonografiska helhetsanalysen av legendmotiv och attribut visar ett nära samband mellan konst och liturgi, i läsning, lov, sång och predikan under både tidegärd och mässa, vid kyrkans Olavsfest kring 29 juli.

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