

# The death of Magnus

## From Magnus' Saga



Once Earl Magnus had been sentenced to death, Earl Hakon told Ofeig his standard-bearer to behead him, but he refused angrily. Then Hakon ordered Lifolf his cook to do it but Lifolf began to weep out loud.

“You musn’t weep,” said Magnus, “it’s not manly. A deed like this can only bring fame. Keep a steadfast mind, you can have my clothes and weapons according to the laws and customs of our ancestors. Don’t be afraid, you’re doing it against your will, and the man who gives the order sins more gravely than you.”

Then Earl Magnus took off his tunic, gave it to Lifolf and asked leave to pray. This was granted, whereupon he prostrated himself on the ground, committing his soul to God and offering himself as a sacrifice. He prayed not only for himself and his friends, but for his enemies and killers, forgiving them all with all his heart for their crimes against him. He confessed his own sins before God, praying that his own soul might be washed clean by the spilling of his own blood, then placed it in God’s hands, praying that He would send His angels to meet him and bear him to the Heavenly Paradise. As he was being led to his execution, he spoke to Lifolf.

“Stand right in front of me,” he said, “and strike me a hard blow on the head. It’s unfitting for a chieftain to be beheaded like a thief. Take heart, poor fellow, and don’t be afraid. I’ve prayed God to grant you his mercy.”

With that he crossed himself and stooped to receive the blow, and took a single stroke on the middle of his head and so his soul passed away to Heaven. The place where Earl Magnus was beheaded was rocky and overgrown with moss, but soon God revealed how worthy he was in His eyes for the spot turned into a fair meadow and he himself won the beauty and greenness of Paradise, which is called the Land of the Living. Afterwards a church was built there.

Earl Hakon would not permit Earl Magnus’s body to be brought to church.

*From Magnus’ Saga, the life of St Magnus, Earl of Orkney, translated by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards.*